

# INSPECTION REPORT

**HIGHFIELDS SCHOOL**  
MATLOCK

LEA area: Derbyshire

Unique Reference Number: 112950

Inspection Number: 184330

Headteacher: Mr I Dalrymple-Alford

Reporting inspector: Dr A R Beaver  
20224

Dates of inspection: 20-24 September 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 708514

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 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Lumsdale Road Matlock Derbyshire DE4 5NA
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs S Davison
Date of previous inspection:	16 – 20 January 1995

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Brigid Quest-Ritson, Lay Inspector		Attitudes, behaviour and personal development Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development Support, guidance and pupils' welfare Partnership with parents and the community
Ivan Andrew	Religious education	The Curriculum
Malcolm Butterworth	Physical education	Accommodation
Peter Harle	Music	Learning resources
Veronica Kerr		Special educational needs Equal opportunities
Sheila Nolan	Mathematics, numeracy	Assessment
Malcolm Padmore	Design and technology Information technology	
Michael Roberts	History	Attendance
Joyce Sanderson	English, drama, literacy	
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## MAIN FINDINGS

### What the school does well

- Students achieve well above national average results in mathematics and science at age 14. At 16, the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE A\* to C grades is regularly well above the national average. At 18, students' average points score at A level is regularly well above the national average.
- Students with statements of special educational need are very well supported and do well.
- Careers education and guidance are very good.
- Teachers work very hard and provide teaching of good quality.
- Relationships between students and staff and between students themselves are very good.
- Provision for students' social development is very good.
- Pastoral care of students is good.

### Where the school has weaknesses

- I. Students' skills in information technology are insufficiently developed in most subjects. Many teachers lack knowledge, skills and hands-on experience to enable students to use computers in subject work. The school has insufficient computers to enable students to make the progress they should.
- II. The school does not plan developments, or keep within spending limits carefully enough.
- III. All levels of management do not monitor systematically enough to ensure that standards of work, including homework, are consistently good.
- IV. The headteacher and deputy headteachers do not work well enough together.
- V. There is insufficient provision for students' spiritual development.
- VI. The curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4 is not provided to best effect because on too many occasions the timetable requires different teachers to teach lessons in the same subject to the same class in different periods.
- VII. The school's accommodation is crowded and it has insufficient books and computers because of insufficient funding.

**On balance, the school has more strengths than weaknesses. The governors will set out in their action plan how weaknesses identified by the inspection will be resolved. This plan will be sent to all parents or guardians of students attending the school.**

### How the school has improved since the last inspection

The school has improved in some respects since January 1995. Students' GCSE results at the A\* to C grades, and A level results have been maintained at a level well above the national average. Six higher attaining sixth formers achieved places on degree courses at Oxford or Cambridge in 1999 because of excellent A level results. Teachers work hard in extended classroom time. The curriculum now provides well for religious education throughout the school. The appearance and condition of the lower school site are now satisfactory. However, at the time of this current inspection, essential fire alarm precautions were still not installed in the classrooms separated from the main accommodation at Starkholmes. This situation has subsequently been remedied. Students are now provided with essential skills in use of computers, but more machines are needed to enable students to use them in all subjects. Some teachers lack experience and skills in use of information technology themselves. School development planning and longer term financial planning have not improved. The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship for all students. The governors, headteacher and staff want to improve standards further, but

more monitoring to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning are of a consistently high standard is needed. Given attention to priorities, the school has the capacity to improve its standards further.

· **Standards in subjects**

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

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

*\*Similar schools' means those containing a similar proportion of students entitled to free meals. This is considered to be a valid indicator of the relative social advantage or disadvantage of students in different schools. No national comparison is available with similar schools at A level.*

Students' results in the Key Stage 3 tests in 1998 in English were at the average of all schools, but below average compared with similar schools nationally. Results in science were well above average, and in mathematics results were very high compared with similar schools. A similar result was achieved in 1999: English results improved on those of 1998, but were still well behind those achieved in mathematics, and there is some room for improvement.

At GCSE in 1998, the percentage of students achieving five or more A\* to C grades was well above the national average of all schools and of similar schools. A similar percentage achieved this standard in 1999. All subjects achieve above average results. The percentage of students achieving at the lower GCSE grades was below the average of similar schools. However, many lower attaining students in this school take qualifications other than GCSE at age 16 and generally succeed in achieving qualifications in the courses which they take.

At A level in 1998, the average points score per student was well above the national average. Results were higher in 1999. All students entered for advanced GNVQ obtained at least a pass standard, and most achieved merits and distinctions in 1999. Eight out of ten students go on to higher education, and most others to employment.

· **Quality of teaching**

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 7-9	Good	All subjects are effective.	No subject is ineffective.
Years 10-11	Good	As above	As above
Years 12-13	Good	As above	As above
English	Good		
Mathematics	Good		



Teaching was at least satisfactory in all lessons, a most impressive achievement. In 44% of lessons it was good, and very good or excellent in a further 29%.

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

· **Other aspects of the school**

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Behaviour	Co-operative and well behaved. Many students are confident and articulate.
Attendance	Good. Attendance above average. Unauthorised absence in line with the national average.
Ethos*	Governors, headteacher and staff want to raise achievement further. Students generally want to learn. Relationships are very good.
Leadership and management	Headteacher and deputy headteachers do not work together effectively enough. Improvement is required in planning developments and in monitoring and rigorous evaluation to ensure consistent standards are achieved. Financial control by governors and senior management should be tighter. Greater participation of senior heads of departments in managing the school is developing.
Curriculum	Improved at Key Stage 4 since the previous inspection. Good range of extra-curricular opportunities, but insufficient extra-curricular sport for boys. Too many classes at Key Stages 3 and 4 are timetabled with different teachers for the same subject.
Pupils with special educational needs	Very good support for students with special needs, particularly the 78 who have statements of special need.
Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development	Provision for students' spiritual development is insufficient in most subjects. There are few assemblies and none observed were acts of worship. Students' moral development is well provided for. Provision for students' social development is very good, but cultural experience does not provide enough experience of non-European cultures.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	Teaching and support staff are well qualified, but technical help is limited in some subjects. There are no foreign language assistants. There has been some improvement of accommodation on the lower school site, but accommodation at Lumsdale is fully used and some subjects lack specialist accommodation. More computers, books and other equipment to support students' progress are needed.
Value for money	Good. Students make good progress over Key Stage 3 to attain good results in national tests, particularly in mathematics. Most progress well over Key Stage 4 to attain good examination results. A level and advanced GNVQ attainment are well above average.

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

· **The parents' views of the school**

<b>What most parents like about the school</b>	<b>What some parents are not happy about</b>
VIII. It helps most students to achieve a good standard of work.	XIII. Homework is not always set and is not
IX. Parents can approach school with problems.	XIV. The school does not explain clearly
X. Their children like school.	XV. The school responds to their
XI. They are kept well informed about progress.	
XII. There is a good range of extra-curricular opportunities.	

The inspection team agrees that homework is insufficiently monitored by senior managers and heads of department to ensure consistently good standards. The school should provide more information on what it is teaching its students. Complaints and concerns usually get prompt response and are resolved through the school's pastoral system. Although there is a good range of extra-curricular activities, provision for girls' extra-curricular sport was insufficient last year but has improved. Provision for boys' extra-curricular sport is now insufficient.

· **KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION**

**In order to improve the quality of education and standards further, the school should:**

- Improve students' progress in information technology, by including specific requirements for use of computers in each subject's scheme of work. Increase the numbers of computers to match the needs of students and further develop the training of teachers in their use. (This was a key issue in the previous inspection.) (See paragraphs 44, 51, 64, 134, 161, 166, 174, 179, 186, 191, 194, 220)
- Improve the management of the school, by ensuring that headteacher and deputy headteachers work more closely together as a team. (See paragraphs 86, 93, 94)
- Make school development planning more effective. Do so by maintaining a time-scale of more than a single year and using rigorous success criteria for annual review. Closely estimate and link financial resources to priorities in planning and work within budgetary constraints by applying regular, rigorous checks on spending. (Part of this was a key issue in the previous inspection.) (See paragraphs 90, 94, 115, 124)
- Maintain and ensure consistently high standards in the quality of students' work, including homework, and teaching by regular monitoring and evaluation. (See paragraphs 45, 46, 93, 202)
- Extend provision for students' spiritual development, by requiring all subjects to contribute to this. Provide more assemblies of good quality and a daily act of collective worship. (Part of this was a key issue in the previous inspection.) (See

paragraphs 66, 70, 161)

- Improve delivery of the curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4, by providing a timetable which avoids the need for different teachers to teach the same subject to the same class on different periods. (See paragraphs 55, 120, 179)
- Provide more learning resources and better accommodation, by exploring all means of raising money. (See paragraphs 106, 108, 109, 113, 140, 142, 150, 177, 186)

## **SUBSIDIARY ISSUES**

**In addition to the key issues above, the following subsidiary issues should be considered for inclusion in the action plan:**

- Help students at Key Stages 3 and 4 to aim to improve their work, by setting specific targets for improvement in all subjects. (See paragraph 60)
- Improve the provision of extra-curricular sport for boys. (See paragraphs 33, 69, 213, 214)

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Characteristics of the school**

1. Highfields School is a comprehensive school of above average size situated in Matlock, Derbyshire. It provides education for boys and girls aged 11 to 18 years from Matlock and villages in the surrounding area. Students come mainly from 12 primary schools in the town and the rural locality, but others come from many other primary schools in the area. Many students travel to school by bus. There are 1478 students on roll. Five are from ethnic minorities. The school has approximately equal numbers of boys and girls.

2. On entry to the school, students have wide-ranging abilities across the full range of attainment. Overall, their range of ability on entry is a little above average. One student in every four is identified as having special educational needs, a proportion above the national average. Seventy-eight of these students have statements of special educational need, a percentage which is also above average and considerably higher than in 1995 when the school was previously inspected. All categories of special needs are represented, mostly learning difficulties.

3. There are 244 students in the sixth form. All follow two-year, GCE A level or advanced GNVQ courses.

4. Students come from a wide range of social backgrounds. Some come from relatively affluent homes, but others are from areas of social disadvantage. The percentage eligible for free school meals is below the national average, but one estate which the school serves is an area of some deprivation.

5. The school is based on two sites, over 1.8 miles apart. Years 7 and 8 are based at the Starkholmes site and other years are at Lumsdale.

6. The school aims for excellence in the learning and personal development of its students. It sets suitably high but achievable targets for GCSE and A level. It intends to prepare students successfully for adulthood and employment. It aims to develop moral, spiritual and community values, including tolerance and respect for others. It wants

students to recognise their responsibilities. It intends to make the most of its staff in teaching an appropriate curriculum in a caring, well-disciplined and safe environment. It wants to promote an active partnership with parents.

## Key Indicators

### Attainment at Key Stage 3<sup>1</sup>

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	123	123	246

<b>National Curriculum Test Results</b>		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or Above	Boys	81	98	82
	Girls	107	100	96
	Total	188	198	178
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	76(70)	80(80)	72(76)
	National	63(65)	62(59)	55(56)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	37(37)	53(64)	40(49)
	National	28(34)	38(36)	23(27)

<b>Teacher Assessments</b>		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	80	110	86
	Girls	109	112	111
	Total	189	222	197
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	77(78)	90(86)	80(67)
	National	64(62)	64(64)	60(62)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	44(42)	55(70)	49(35)
	National	31(31)	37(37)	28(31)

## Attainment at Key Stage 4<sup>2</sup>

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1998	113	117	230

GCSE Results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A* to G	1 or more grades A* to G
Number of pupils achieving standard specified	Boys	65	108	109
	Girls	81	103	113
	Total	146	211	222
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	63(54)	92(94)	97(97)
	National	45(43)	90(89)	93(92)

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

	Number	% Success rate
School		
National		

## Attainment in the Sixth Form<sup>3</sup>

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

Year	Male	Female	Total
1998	49	67	116

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	19.8	18.9	19.2(19.6)	3.0	N/a	3.0(3.9)
National	n/a	n/a	17.6(17.1)	n/a	n/a	2.8(2.7)

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

	Number	% Success rate
School		
National		

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

	Number	% Success Rate
School	12	100
National		80

## Attendance

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

		%
Authorised Absence	School	6.2
	National comparative data	7.9
Unauthorised	School	1.1

<sup>2</sup>

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

<sup>3</sup>

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

Absence	National comparative data	1.1
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### Exclusions

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

	Number
Fixed period	65
Permanent	1

### Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is:

	%
Very good or better	29
Satisfactory or better	100
Less than satisfactory	0

## PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

### EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

#### · Attainment and progress

*\*Please note: throughout the report, students' levels of attainment are judged at the end of Key Stage 3, at the end of Key Stage 4, and at the end of A level courses. Comparisons are drawn with all schools nationally, and with similar schools. These are those containing a similar proportion of students entitled to free meals. This is considered to be a valid indicator of the relative social advantage or disadvantage of students in different schools. No national comparison with similar schools is available for A level.*

7. Students' attainment on entry to the school at age 11 is slightly above the national average, overall. It is above the average of schools within the local authority. Cognitive ability tests for Year 7 in verbal, non-verbal and quantitative skills, and the incomplete evidence available from Key Stage 2 national tests verify students' attainment on entry as a little above average, overall. They score more highly on the quantitative measures than on verbal tests, and achieve higher scores in Key Stage 2 national tests in mathematics than in English. Students' attainment in mathematics is more above the mean than it is in English. Between 1995 and 1998, scores achieved in cognitive ability tests conducted under common test conditions indicate a small, but consistent annual decline overall in students' attainment on entry to the school. One in four students is on the school's register of special educational need, mainly with specific or moderate learning difficulties. The numbers of students with statements of special need have increased from 44 at the time of the previous inspection in 1995, to 78 at present. Although the local authority agrees more statements for students than most other local authorities, the increase is considerable and further indication of a reducing level of the average attainment per student on entry. Students' entry to the sixth form at age 16 is on the basis of their potential to study at A level or advanced GNVQ.

8. At the end of Key Stage 3, students' attainment is above the national average, overall. In the 1998 national tests, the percentage of candidates gaining both the expected national level 5 and level 6 in English was average with all schools, but below that of similar\* schools nationally (*please see note above*). In science, results were well above the average of similar schools, and in mathematics, results were very high in comparison with similar schools. Results in 1999 were like those of 1998, except that English results improved on those of 1998, but remained behind those achieved in mathematics. However, students' attainment on entry to the school in English is below that in mathematics. Students attain higher standards in mathematics than in science or English, and in the latter subject there remains some room for improvement. Boys outperformed girls in the national tests in 1998 and 1997 in mathematics and science, but girls well outperformed boys in English. However, the differences were below those which apply nationally.

9. At the end of Key Stage 4, students' attainment is above the average of all schools nationally. It is as high as can reasonably be expected, overall. In GCSE examinations in 1998, 64% of students attained five or more GCSE grades A\* to C, a proportion well above the national average. Results have been similar since 1995, except in 1997 when results, although lower, were not below the national average. The proportions of students achieving the top A\* and A grades are usually twice that achieved in all schools nationally. In 1998, 92% of students achieved five or more GCSE grades A\* to G, a proportion close to the national average. The proportion achieving one GCSE grade was above average. In



comparison with similar schools in 1998, the percentage achieving five or more GCSE A\* to C grades was well above average, but well below and below average for those achieving five or more GCSE grades A\* to G and one or more GCSE grades respectively. However, many lower attaining students take examinations at age 16 other than GCSE, and, in general, achieve worthwhile qualifications from the courses they follow. Those achievements are not recognised in the GCSE comparisons given above. Results in 1999 were very similar to those of 1998, with 60% of students achieving five GCSE grades A\* to C. The percentage of grades at A\* and A standard was again high. Both boys and girls achieve above the national average, with girls ahead of boys, but not to a greater extent than applies nationally. Future targets set by the school are realistic.

10. At age 18, students' attainment is above average, and at an appropriate level overall. The average points score achieved per student taking two or more A level subjects in 1998 was well above the national average. The points score has remained regularly above average. It remained high in 1999. The proportion of A level A and B grades achieved is regularly well above average, and was high in 1999, when six students gained places at Oxford or Cambridge Universities because of excellent A level results. In 1998, the percentage of students following the advanced GNVQ course in business was in line with the national average. Of the eight candidates in 1999, all achieved at least the pass standard and six achieved distinctions or merits.

11. In English, students' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above average. Results in Key Stage 3 national tests in English are usually below those which students achieve in science and well below those achieved in mathematics. Although attainment in English is below that in mathematics when students enter the school, there remains some room for improvement in the end of Key Stage 3 tests. For example, results improved further in 1999. In other examinations in English, results are suitably high. At the end of Key Stage 4, attainment in GCSE English and English literature is above average and students' results compare well with those achieved in their other subjects. In three A level courses, results compare well with those of all schools. Students are articulate, listen carefully and explain clearly. Most write with suitable style and a good range of sentence structures. Most students read fluently, but although lower attainers manage text, many find understanding more elusive. In drama, students' attainment is above average at the end of both key stages. In the sixth form, attainment is average. Results for A level theatre studies change in quality year-on-year because of small numbers taking the course, but results were below average in 1999.

12. In mathematics, students' attainment at the end of both key stages and the sixth form is as high as should be expected in comparison with all schools and similar schools. Results in Key Stage 3 tests are well above average, and attainment remains above average by the end of Key Stage 4, in comparison with all schools and similar schools. Results compare well with those achieved in other subjects. At A level, attainment is very high both in the single mathematics courses and in further mathematics. A very high proportion of A and B grades are achieved. Good teaching ensures good standards of attainment. Students' abilities in numeracy are improving, and higher attainers manage algebra very well at Key Stage 4.

13. In science, students' attainment at the end of both key stages is well above the national average. Students attain standards between those achieved in mathematics and English. At A level, attainment is above and often well above the national average, including the attainment of A and B grades. Overall, attainment is at an appropriate standard in science.

14. Overall, in other subjects, attainment is as high as could reasonably be expected, except in information technology used across the curriculum. There is some room for improvement in modern foreign languages, particularly in the standards achieved by boys, but standards in these subjects are not below those expected nationally.

15. Attainment in art is above national expectations at the end of Key Stage 3 and well above average at Key Stage 4, where students attain standards ahead of those they achieve in most other subjects. Attainment at A level is average for the course. Students attain good standards in a range of media. Boys especially attain good standards. In design and technology, students attain standards above the national expectation at the end of Key Stage 3, and above average at Key Stage 4 and at A level. Across all strands of design and technology, students' attainment is in line, overall, with what they achieve in other subjects in the school. In geography, students' attainment is above national expectations at the end of Key Stage 3, and above average at Key Stage 4 and at A level. Boys do well in comparison with the attainment of boys nationally. Attainment is usually in line with what students achieve in other subjects, but is occasionally below this standard at GCSE. In history, attainment is above the national expectation at the end of Key Stage 3 and above average at Key Stage 4 and at A level. Students' attainment in the subject is well in line with what they achieve in other subjects, and often ahead of this. Students manage essential skills in using and evaluating evidence very well.

16. Students' attainment in information technology is at the standard expected nationally at the end of Key Stage 3. All take a short GCSE course in the subject and most complete this with an A\* to C grade. A few take the full GCSE course and attain high grades. Attainment in information technology across the curriculum is below average, particularly in Years 7 and 8 when there is no discrete course in the subject. Attainment in use of computers in some subjects, for example mathematics, is adequate. However, successful and regular use of computers in most subjects is below average. As a result, students' attainment is below that which they achieve in their other courses and should be higher.

17. In their first modern foreign language, students' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is at the nationally expected level. At the end of Key Stage 4, their attainment is above the national average at GCSE in all three foreign languages, but students often do not attain as high standards in foreign languages as in their other subjects, particularly boys, and there is some room for improvement. Attainment is average on A level courses. In music, attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is at the nationally expected level. At Key Stage 4 and A level, attainment is above average. Attainment usually compares well with that achieved by students in their other subjects. In physical education by the end of Key Stage 3, students' attainment is above that expected nationally. At the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is well above average. Results for those who take GCSE in physical education compare very well with those attained in other subjects. In religious education, students' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with expectations of the Agreed Syllabus for religious education. At the end of Key Stage 4 in 1999, most students entered for the short course in religious education, having followed the course in only one period per week. This was the first time the subject had been taken in the school. Results were average with those achieved in other GCSE courses in the school, a significant achievement. At A level in 1998, the few students who followed the course achieved the pass standard.

18. In other A level courses, attainment is generally above average and at least in line with what students attain in other courses. Attainment at GCSE and A level in business studies is above average, but fewer A and B grades at A level are attained compared with other courses. Attainment in A level economics, sociology, psychology and geology are

above the national average, and in 1999, very high results at the A and B grades were achieved in psychology. Many students enter for A level general studies and usually average standards are achieved.

19. Attainment in the GNVQ advanced business course is well above the standard expected nationally. In 1999, all candidates reached the required standard and most attained merits or distinctions. Portfolios for Year 13 indicate similar levels of attainment. Students' action plans and planned programmes are usually very good. Most students have good research and information handling skills.

20. Overall, students progress at as good a rate at both key stages and in the sixth form as they should. They are well taught and have positive attitudes to learning, both of which support progress well. Over time, progress is good. Students' attainment on entry to the school is slightly above average, and strongest in mathematics. They progress well at Key Stages 3 and 4, to attain above average GCSE results compared with students in similar schools nationally. Although the average GCSE points score per student has not risen in line with the national rise during the last four years, it has been maintained at a level well above average. Many students enter for examinations in addition to GCSE, reducing the average points scored, and these students largely achieve success on the alternative courses which they follow. Those who proceed to A level and advanced GNVQ progress to above average standards. However, in information technology, students do not make the good progress which they should throughout the school, and the progress of boys in modern foreign languages at Key Stage 3 could be better.

21. At Key Stage 3, students with special needs make very good progress in both literacy and numeracy. As a result, they make very good progress across the curriculum at both Key Stages 3 and 4. Students' reading ages improve by an average of nearly one year during their first six months at the school. Progress in spelling is even greater. The average improvement in spelling age during students' first six months in the school is 16 months. Substantial gains in self-confidence and classroom skills also underpin success in the wider curriculum. The school has gained a Basic Skills kite-mark for work on literacy. Sustained progress leads to improved attainment at the end of Key Stage 4, which is considerably higher than that indicated by students' attainment on entry to the school. In 1999, the 12 Year 11 students with statements of special need gained an average of nearly seven GCSE grades each, and all obtained either a GCSE or Certificate of Achievement in both mathematics and English.

22. Students make good progress in English at both key stages and in the sixth form. The accuracy of their writing improves and they read and speak with increasing fluency. This enables them to progress well in all subjects. Progress is very good in mathematics at Key Stage 3. It remains good at Key Stage 4 except for average attainers whose progress is not above satisfactory to GCSE. These students spend too long on the same activity, losing concentration so that progress slows. Progress is good in the sixth form. In science, progress is good at both key stages and in the sixth form. Students of all levels of attainment enjoy their work and respond well to good teaching of science.

23. In art, progress is good at Key Stage 3 and accelerates at Key Stage 4. This results from good teaching and an effective curriculum, well adapted to a restricted budget. Progress at A level is good. Students' progress in design and technology is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 where they learn to use tools and skills in problem solving. Progress becomes good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. In geography, progress is good throughout the school. Good teaching ensures good progress, but in the sixth form, more involvement of students in evaluating their work would increase their rate of progress. Progress in history

is good at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4, where students develop skills of analysis and research very well. Progress remains good in the sixth form.

24. Progress in information technology is unsatisfactory throughout the school and should be greater. Students' progress is satisfactory in the discrete course in Year 7, where they gain initial skills in the subject. However, this course does not continue in Years 8 and 9, and the level of activity requiring use of computers across all subjects is low. There is progress in some subjects, for example mathematics, but overall progress is unsatisfactory. Progress remains unsatisfactory at Key Stage 4. Although all students follow a short GCSE course in information technology, the time available to practise skills and the unsatisfactory opportunities to use computers across other subjects result in unsatisfactory progress overall. In the sixth form, use of computers remains minimal overall.

25. In the three modern foreign languages, progress at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory, although boys progress significantly less rapidly than girls, and their progress could be greater. Progress becomes good at Key Stage 4 and remains satisfactory at A level. Effective teaching helps students to consolidate their learning, for example in good recall of essential words. In music, satisfactory progress at Key Stage 3 becomes good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Whole-class teaching is not always well suited to the needs of individuals whose resulting progress does not match that of the rest of the class. In physical education, students' progress at Key Stages 3 and 4 is good. Their skills improve across a range of sports and games to age 16, but there is no timetabled physical education to enhance skills further in the sixth form. In religious education, progress is good at both key stages where good teaching demands effective concentration from students. In the sixth form, students following the religious education section of modern studies make satisfactory progress.

26. Progress in other A levels and advanced GNVQ courses is good overall. Many students make very good progress. This is particularly so with the GNVQ course.

27. Since the previous inspection, attainment has been maintained at a standard well above that attained nationally. GCSE and A level results are consistently above average. Students' literary and numerical skills remain well above average. Standards of attainment in information technology remain below average. Progress remains good overall at both key stages and in the sixth form. However, as in the previous inspection, opportunity for students to practise skills in information technology across all subjects remains inadequate, making their rate of progress insufficient.

### **Attitudes, behaviour and personal development**

28. Students have good attitudes to their studies. They are interested in what they do and settle quickly at the start of lessons. They are keen to be involved and want to please. Students take advice and act upon it. These positive attitudes help them to concentrate and to maintain their concentration throughout lessons. Students are confident and articulate. For example, they responded well to chorus work in a Year 7 German lesson. Students also respond well when lessons proceed at a brisk pace, as for example in mathematics in Years 7 and 9. Students' interest in a Year 9 history lesson increased visibly in direct response to the enthusiasm generated by the teacher's own interest in the subject. By the time they begin GCSE courses, students are developing the ability to be responsible for and manage their own studies. They learn to use their initiative and to research topics independently. These skills are apparent in GCSE coursework in history, where students use local archives instead of a published textbook. Such initiative continues in the sixth form where students use local records on Poor Law administration at A level. Sixth form

students are generally committed to their studies and work hard to achieve good results. They are able to research and manage much of their work independently. In the advanced GNVQ course, for example, students are exceptionally well motivated and enthusiastic. These learning skills are a response to the quality of teaching received.

29. The attitudes of students with special educational needs to all aspects of school life are very good. Students and their parents accept the recognition of learning difficulties without embarrassment and welcome the help and support provided. Students are actively involved in monitoring their own progress and take evident pleasure in success. They are determined and work hard to overcome difficulties.

30. Standards of behaviour are good overall. In lessons they are frequently very good. Students know the standards expected of them and show self-discipline. They respond well to co-operative and positive class management. In physical education lessons, they behave sensibly when equipment is brought out and put into place. Behaviour as students move around the school is not of such a high standard as it is during lessons, though still good. Outside lessons, students can be noisy, particularly in the lower years. Students are generally friendly and courteous with visitors and with members of staff. They can be trusted to handle artefacts and pieces of equipment with care. They put things away. There is no internal graffiti. Some litter is dropped outside. There is little physical bullying, but sometimes there are undercurrents of bullying of the verbal and psychological kind in the middle years of the school. The level of permanent exclusions is low, and has been for some years. Fixed term exclusions appear to have risen in the last three years, and are predominantly of boys, but the rules applied by the school in administering exclusions during this time have been applied correctly, making earlier comparisons unreliable. Levels of fixed term exclusions are slightly above average for a school of this size.

31. The behaviour of special needs students observed in withdrawal groups is exemplary. In mainstream classes, when lessons are well structured and students are provided with appropriate work, their behaviour matches the good standards observed in all students. Students are very tolerant of each other's weaknesses and mainstream peers consistently show patience and understanding. These constructive relationships, which are skilfully fostered by teachers, contribute much to the high standards of behaviour evident in the school.

32. The quality of relationships in the school is very good. This applies as much to relations among the students themselves as to relations between students and members of staff. The few students from ethnic minorities are well integrated. Many examples of productive teamwork between students were seen in different subjects during the course of the inspection. Students interact well among themselves and are ready to praise each other on their work as, for example, in art lessons seen in Years 7 and 9. Students are sensitive to each other's feelings and show respect for them. Consideration for others enables students to express personal beliefs and emotions with confidence in the presence of their peers, as for example when they volunteer to read statements of their individual beliefs in religious education lessons. Students are ready to take the opportunities for responsibility offered them on the year and school councils, as members of the Peer Information and Counselling Service (PICS) and, in the sixth form, through community service. Relations between students and members of staff are characterised by good humour and respect.

33. The way in which students respond to provision for their personal development is good overall. It is at its best in the sixth form where all Year 12 students perform at least one, and often more than one, type of community service in their own time. This can be either within the school itself, by helping younger students, or in the wider community in the

town, as for example the Read On, Write Away literacy project at a nearby primary school. Students also respond well in the middle years. They develop a sense of responsibility towards their own studies. PICS members find the time to run a lunchtime coffee bar and stationery shop as part of their counselling role. At all levels of the school, students raise money for charitable causes. The substantial sums they raise are divided between national and local charities. Students respond well to the team-building activities in the induction programmes in Years 7 and 12. Appropriate numbers take part in trips, visits and musical activities. However, students consider that the extent of provision for extra-curricular activities is inadequate. This is so in sport, preventing wider experience in team games. Particular emphasis is given to the personal development of special needs students and all make significant gains in social skills, study skills and personal confidence, helpful to their independence both in mainstream lessons and adult life.

34. The last inspection commented favourably on students' behaviour and attitudes to their studies. Since then, equally good standards have been maintained.

### **Attendance**

35. Students' attendance is above the national average in comparison with similar schools. Unauthorised absence is in line with the national average. Most students come to school and to lessons on time. This enables full participation in lessons, which has a positive influence on attainment and progress. Arrangements for attendance and registration of sixth form students are satisfactory. Traditional class registers have replaced the computerised registration system, used at the time of the last inspection.

36. Since the previous inspection, good levels of attendance and punctuality have been maintained.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED**

### **Teaching**

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

37. The quality of teaching is good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form. Teaching is at least satisfactory in all lessons, a remarkable achievement of teachers well-established in the school and a significant number of new and newly-qualified teachers. In 44% of lessons, teaching is at least good, and in 29%, it is very good or excellent. The quality of teaching is similar across both Key Stages 3 and 4, but the proportion of very good teaching is most marked in the sixth form, where 86% of teaching is at least good.

38. Although no unsatisfactory teaching was observed, the range in quality of teaching is considerable, from excellent to satisfactory. For example, less successful lessons did not always fully adapt work for the full range of students' attainment. In some lessons at Key Stages 3 and 4, but not in the sixth form, teachers' use of regular, day-to-day assessment of students' work and levels of attainment, and their use of homework were not as effective as other aspects of teaching. Monitoring of standards of teaching by senior management and heads of department is needed to ensure that good practice is shared and standards further improved.

39. A major strength of teaching is that teachers have very good knowledge of their

subjects. They use this to help their students to understand and appreciate their fields of knowledge. Enthusiasm for their subjects is often infectious and stimulates students to want to learn. For example, in English, teachers' knowledge of their subject is outstandingly good. They use it to guide discussion skilfully. They choose imaginative readings from a wide range of literature which they deliver sometimes in dialect. Teachers' knowledge is very good in mathematics, enabling them to appreciate the difficulties encountered by students, so as to overcome problems. Teachers' knowledge and how it can be made most effective in supporting students' learning is shown in sixth form students' personal studies in history.

40. Teachers generally expect high standards from students of wide-ranging abilities. This applies at both key stages and particularly in the sixth form. Work usually involves a good challenge. For example, in science, a lesson on Ohm's Law for Year 12, met the needs of all individuals well. Teachers challenge students very well on most A level courses. For example, in sociology and the advanced GNVQ course, students' potential in the subject is fully exploited by much very good teaching. A ceramics lesson for Year 11 challenged lower attaining boys very well, requiring them to experiment successfully. Similarly in art, the teacher of a landscape project to Year 11 insisted on high levels of interpretation of ideas and images, raising students' attainment in a most effective manner. Music lessons often captivate students and greatly raise their levels of understanding. The use of thought-provoking questions contributes greatly to raise students' understanding of the challenge and enjoyment of learning. However, in some lessons, there is need to adapt work more for the needs of individuals.

41. Most lessons are planned successfully at both key stages and in the sixth form. For example, a Year 7 history lesson on use of evidence had very clear objectives which were effectively shared with students, enabling them to question assumptions about sources of evidence very well. However, aims of lessons are not always shared with students sufficiently, as for example, in some lessons in religious education. Drama lessons are well planned, and a Year 7 class, for example, worked through a tightly planned sequence of activities with paired work and mime, extending and reinforcing their understanding of the subject very well.

42. Teachers use a good range of methods and organise classes well at both key stages and in the sixth form. In most subjects, teachers vary their methods successfully, so that students gain a rich range of learning experiences. For example, in English, students are regularly required to work in groups of different sizes and pairs. Audio-visual presentations are regularly included. Chorus work in modern foreign languages is used well and is helpful to reinforce learning. An excellent Year 8 lesson in personal and social education on disabilities used groupwork exceptionally well to stimulate students' understanding and extend their learning. Questions which open up discussion and those which test students' understanding or prior learning are both used effectively. Answers to questions put to full classes are often very effectively exploited by teachers to extend the learning of all members of the class, as for example in an excellent Year 9 science lesson on electrical safety. Occasionally, teachers talk for too long and leave too little time for activities for students, as in some lessons in religious education.

43. Teachers manage their classes well at both key stages and in the sixth form and have good discipline. They adapt to meet the needs of different age groups well. Good working relationships between teachers and students are characteristic of most lessons. For example, in art, boys generally achieve their potential in the subject because they are well managed in lessons which generate such a positive working atmosphere. In all subjects, teamwork and co-operation are encouraged and teachers help students to work

well together. An excellent Year 9 music lesson on film music and the Lion King was managed in an outstandingly effective way, so that students were enthralled by the experience and relationships within the class strengthened.

44. Most lessons run at a brisk pace throughout the age range. For example, in a Year 7 information technology lesson introducing students to desk-top publishing, the teacher made the lesson run at a very good pace, providing much enthusiasm and giving ownership of the work to the students who responded very well. However, insufficient learning resources limit teachers' work and students' learning. Resources and accommodation restrict the range of work which can be undertaken in drama. In mathematics, accommodation restricts display of work to give a full sense of a learning environment for the subject. At Key Stage 3, more use of fieldwork in geography away from the local area would further extend students' learning. Teachers lack sufficient textbooks for each student to use individually in some subjects, as in some history and religious education lessons, reducing students' opportunity for independent work. Resources available are usually well-chosen and helpful to students. In general, teachers do not use computers enough to extend students' learning in lessons. In most subjects, use of computers is minimal. However, teachers of mathematics use computers effectively for particular topics.

45. Teachers' assessment of work is satisfactory at Key Stages 3 and 4, and good in the sixth form. There is good practice in some design and technology lessons where students are given clear indications of how to improve their standard of work. In art, students' levels of attainment are closely tracked. However, quality of assessment and marking vary too much, and monitoring to ensure consistently good standards is lacking in most subjects. Some work is not marked well enough, and lacks helpful advice to the student. Standards achieved by students are not always made fully clear to them. Various grading systems operate. In science, for example, there is undue variation in the quality of marking between the sciences, and in modern foreign languages, marking is irregular and standards are inconsistent. Marking is particularly helpful in English and history. There is some good practice of teachers enabling students to assess their own performances, as in Year 8 gymnastics, and in Year 9 religious education when students made their own presentations to their class on 'what matters to me'. Helpful comments are made on students' written work in English and history.

46. Use of homework is satisfactory at Key Stages 3 and 4 and good in the sixth form. In English, for example, homework is used effectively, regularly checked and marked. Homework in information technology builds effectively on work completed in lessons. In general, homework is regularly set, as in modern foreign languages. However, standards in use of homework are not consistently good, and senior management and heads of department need to monitor standards more closely to ensure that homework is appropriate and used well.

47. The teaching of individual students and small groups withdrawn to the special needs bases is always very good. It is characterised by tremendous enthusiasm from teachers who produce a quite remarkable response from students who work at great pace and intensity for the whole of each lesson. In-class support provided by teachers and support staff is always very good and often excellent. Teachers and support staff work together as fellow professionals to create an effective learning situation for all the students in each supported class. In mainstream classes, all teachers show sensitivity to the problems experienced by special needs students. In classes where there is a wide range of attainment, provision of suitable work for students with special needs is rarely less than satisfactory and often good. Where pupils are grouped according to attainment, careful



setting and imaginative planning enable teachers to provide well for all students present with special educational needs.

48. Much attention is given to the differing interests and needs of boys and girls through the schemes of work for subjects and the teaching methods used. All teachers and ancillary staff are very aware of equal opportunities and provide very good role models.

49. Since the previous inspection, the quality of teaching has improved. Long-serving teachers and new and newly-qualified teachers jointly contribute to achieving good standards. In 1995, six per cent of teaching was unsatisfactory. No unsatisfactory lessons were observed in this inspection. The proportion of good teaching has increased. Strengths identified in 1995 continue, but computers are still not used enough in most subjects. Use of assessment and standards of marking remain less strong aspects of teaching. Overall, standards are good, but more monitoring to identify strengths and weaknesses is needed so that the best practice may be shared and consistently high standards achieved.

### **The curriculum and assessment**

50. The governors' policy statement on the curriculum has very clear and appropriate aims and objectives. The whole school curriculum is appropriately planned to deliver the aims of the curriculum statement. Good curricular provision is made across the school. The governors' curriculum sub-committee carries out its role efficiently and effectively in acting as a 'critical friend' to the school. Its meetings are of good quality and issues are discussed thoroughly. Literacy and numeracy are listed as key areas for development across the school but no whole school policies are in existence. A good literacy action plan is in draft form. A very well planned personal and social education course extends and enriches the curriculum for all students. Sex and drugs education are included and appropriate policies are in place. The curriculum meets statutory requirements but further development of information technology is required.

51. The curriculum at Key Stage 3 and 4 is broad and balanced, including all relevant National Curriculum subjects and religious education. In addition students follow courses in personal and social education. Drama for all adds well to students' experience at Key Stage 3, and a second modern foreign language extends the curriculum for most students in Year 9. At Key Stage 4 business studies, sociology and youth award enrich the option choices. The school wisely provides extra support, in place of two subjects, for students for whom nine GCSE subjects is too heavy a load. Information technology is successfully taught as a discrete subject in Year 7. In Years 8 and 9 it is intended that information technology should be delivered by all subjects, but practice is unsatisfactory.

52. The sixth form curriculum provides a very wide range of over 20 A level courses and a very successful GNVQ advanced course in business. There are no other GNVQ courses at present, although leisure and tourism would be appropriate, given the proximity of a National Park. The curriculum is enriched and extended by a modern studies course and philosophy in Year 12, and general studies in Year 13. All students are involved in community service and make a very positive contribution.

53. Students with special needs have full access to the curriculum. With the exception of a small number who do not take a second foreign language, none are permanently withdrawn from any one part of the curriculum. At Key Stage 4, the curriculum has been carefully designed to meet special needs. The Youth Award scheme and option support, which are taken within the basic National Curriculum, provide many students with a Key Stage 4 course which is relevant, manageable and enjoyable. The care with which

individual work in the special needs department is designed to support the curriculum is a strength of the school.

54. All students have appropriate access to the curriculum. Departments have clear equal opportunity statements. Students' progress is well provided for by setting by ability in mathematics and modern foreign languages in Years 7 and 8. These subjects, with the addition of English, drama and science are set by ability in Year 9. However, no provision is made for physical education in the sixth form.

55. Planning to allow students to build on previous experiences in logical order is generally satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Subject links with primary schools are insufficient, but literacy initiatives are planned. Excellent residential experiences are provided for Year 7 and Year 12 as part of their induction. Year 9 receive suitable induction when they move to the Lumsdale site. The timetable hinders teachers' ability to plan ordered progression across some subjects in a year group at Key Stage 3. A considerable number of classes are taught by two teachers, for different lessons in the same subject. One very unsatisfactory arrangement is a Year 8 class with its two religious education lessons on the same day, taught by different staff. The same class was taught by two teachers last year.

56. Provision for extra-curricular activities is good. They extend and enrich the curriculum. A number of students indicated some dissatisfaction with provision but a wide range of activities is available on both sites, twenty-seven being on offer in the week of the inspection. Provision is also made for residential experiences, modern foreign language visits to European countries, other European visits, performances in music and drama, and theatre visits. A number of subjects provide curricular support at lunch times. Many students take part in a variety of activities including sport, chess, art, technology, drama, music, religious groups and environment groups. It is difficult to assess the response this year as clubs were only just beginning in the week of inspection. The provision for boys' extra-curricular sports' activities is inadequate. Last year, provision for girls' extra-curricular arrangements was inadequate. This has improved, although not all girls have the activities which they want. For example there is no Y10 hockey team or fixtures.

57. Careers education and guidance are very good and strengths of the school. The school policy statement and the partnership agreement with the Derbyshire Careers Service are of good quality. Careers education and guidance are well balanced, giving students skills and information from Year 9. The guidance given is unbiased and relationships with local colleges are very good. Work experience is well provided for all students in Year 10 with extra experience or work shadowing in Year 12.

58. Since the previous inspection, improvements in the curriculum have been satisfactory. Religious education fully complies with requirements across Key Stages 3 and 4 and the sixth form. This was a key issue at the last inspection. The provision for information technology has improved but further developments are needed as there are no discrete lessons in Years 8 and 9 and many subjects do not include information technology in schemes of work. This was a key issue at the last inspection. The school day has been increased and the structure changed to six fifty minute periods. This has solved a number of issues raised at the last inspection but has caused other concerns, especially over timetabling and the sharing of classes between two teachers.

59. Whole school procedures for assessing students' attainment are satisfactory. These are expressed in a comprehensive assessment policy statement which provides clear guidance for departments on assessment, marking and recording. Although these

guidelines assist departments in formulating their own policies, they are insufficiently prescriptive to ensure consistency in assessment and marking within all curriculum areas. Whole school assessment systems are under review and a new policy is scheduled for implementation in the coming academic year.

60. There are efficient systems in place to collect Key Stage 2 data about students' attainment on entry to the school. However, this information is not always fully available, as in 1998. The baseline data available is efficiently used to identify students' potential in Year 7. However it is not yet fully used as a basis for the tracking of progress and for target-setting for all students as they proceed through Key Stage 3. Use of assessment information does not yet fully guide teachers' planning, and help them to support students who are working to attain realistic targets at the end of Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4, mentoring selected students to raise their attainment successfully complements Key Stage 4 assessments. In the sixth form, a vigorous programme of monitoring, target-setting and interviews is supporting students' progress to A level well.

61. Departmental systems for assessing students' attainment are inconsistent in quality and accuracy. Not all departments have yet developed portfolios of work to exemplify standards at Key Stage 3. This is unhelpful to ensure consistent standards, because the practice of teachers within departments differs too much.

62. Identification of students with special educational needs is thorough. Before entry to the school, close co-operation with primary schools ensures passage of information based on reliable test data is available to the special needs department. Diagnostic tests in Year 7 provide further necessary evidence to ensure that support is well directed. A well-understood referral system further clarifies needs when students have transferred to the school.

63. The special needs department constructs very thorough individual education plans for students who require these. The plans detail both strengths and weaknesses and provide expert guidance on the strategies that will enable teachers to meet the needs of individual students. The department also sets targets based on the individual education plans, which are negotiated with each individual student and used to monitor progress throughout the curriculum. These targets, which are not yet specific to individual subjects - but should be - are becoming a powerful influence both in motivating students and focusing teachers' attention on students' problems. All learning within the special needs department is automatically assessed within lesson plans. More formal testing is done every few weeks, and the results used to evaluate progress and modify teaching where required.

64. Since the last inspection, the school has made satisfactory progress in developing assessment policy. However there has been only limited progress in changing practice. There is no whole school grading system. Strategies for improving the consistency of marking and recording within and across departments are still to be implemented. However the school now has the potential to use assessment data consistently to monitor students' progress at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 to support target-setting for individuals, but systems to do so are not yet in place.

### **Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

65. The most recent statement of the school's aims includes provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students. These aims, however, are different from those published in the prospectus, which refer only to moral and social aims.

66. Provision for students' spiritual development is unsatisfactory overall. Each year group has one assembly a week. Although these assemblies have appropriate moral and social content, almost no spiritual provision was seen during the inspection. Students were not allowed time in assemblies to reflect on what they had heard. Neither assemblies nor registrations included an act of collective worship. This criticism was also made during the last inspection. The provision made in subjects for students' spiritual provision - in the broader sense of developing students' self-knowledge and a sense of spiritual awareness - is insufficient both in extent and quality. There is provision of good quality in English, drama and music, especially extra-curricular music. There is further provision in history, through studies of the feelings of local people in times of stress. In religious education, the quality of provision is now very good with an awareness of the importance of personal beliefs and feelings. However, this broader experience of a spiritual dimension in people's lives rarely features in other subjects, either in schemes of work or in actual lessons.

67. The provision made for students' moral development is good. This provision is a stated aim of the school and carried into subjects of the curriculum. The pre-vocational programme makes an important contribution here. This is apparent in the way lessons are planned, as well as in the way they are taught. There is a good emphasis, in all subjects, on teaching right from wrong, for example through discussing the rules of the school, the rules of society in general, and the extent to which economic and environmental decisions are affected by moral considerations. The school gives its anti-bullying strategies a high profile. Members of staff set good examples for students to follow.

68. Provision for students' social development is very good. This starts when students arrive in the school with the induction programme. In addition to familiarisation visits, students are taken on a residential trip early in their first term. This expedition, by which students walk the five miles to the residential centre, combines team-building with fun. Year 12 repeat the residential induction - though without the walk! Other residential visits are provided, some of them abroad. Teachers encourage students' social development by giving them opportunities to work together in lessons. The pre-vocational programme at Key Stage 4 and sixth form modern studies course emphasise students' need for social skills. These courses also promote a sense of personal responsibility and consideration for others.

69. Cultural provision is satisfactory overall. There is good provision for students to learn about their cultural heritage. This is strongest in art, English and drama through the texts chosen for study and performance. It is strong in music through the folk music festival and associated workshops. Local history provides a significant cultural focus on the local area. The modern foreign languages department provides exchange visits to France, Germany and Spain. Provision for students' multi-cultural development is less strong. Apart from what is specified in the National Curriculum, students are given very few opportunities to study and experience non-European cultures. The range of extra-curricular opportunities provided for students is generally good, though there are insufficient sporting opportunities for boys this year. The involvement of special needs students in extra-curricular activities is unusually high with many students able to enjoy taking part and accepting responsibility.

70. There has been some improvement since the last inspection. There is now enough time for the teaching of religious education throughout the school, a key issue of the previous inspection. However, the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship, also a key issue, has not been met. Provision for moral and social development continues to be good.

### **Support, guidance and pupils' welfare**

71. The quality of academic support provided by the school is satisfactory. There is an effective monitoring programme for sixth form students. This helps students academically, and contributes to the standards they attain. Such individual monitoring is still at an experimental stage in the rest of the school. It is co-ordinated by heads of year and confined to those students at Key Stage 4 who are not doing as well as they should in a range of subjects. The monitoring of other students is undertaken by departments, sometimes very thoroughly. General progress is currently checked only through the annual record of achievement and an additional screening of all students' performance.

72. The school provides good personal support and guidance for the students in its care. Where possible, tutors move with their tutor groups until the sixth form, and come to know their students well. They use this knowledge to help and guide students effectively. Tutors and other members of staff take great care to minimise the problems for students caused by them having to teach at two different sites. The pre-vocational programme at Key Stage 4 and the modern studies course in the sixth form provide good general guidance for students on personal issues. Guidance on careers is especially good. It is given throughout the school, in ways suited to students' development, and not just at times of transition. Valuable external support is added by the careers service. The timetabled personal and social education programme deals with a wide range of concerns, and the quality of teaching and work observed during the inspection were of good quality.

73. The school's procedures to promote good behaviour and enforce discipline are good. There is an emphasis on praise and encouragement, but members of staff make clear to their students the standards of behaviour that they expect. The four-step referral system is used consistently across the school. Overall, students' behaviour and personal development are monitored satisfactorily. A thoughtful pilot assessment project in Year 9 is in place to study the links between academic and personal progress.

74. The school provides effective support for students when bullying is identified. It makes every effort to encourage students to share their concerns about bullying with other students through peer counselling, and with teachers.

75. There are good procedures to record and monitor attendance. Day-to-day routines are efficient and monitored effectively by heads of year and their assistants. Registers in lessons and checks on lunch passes help guard against internal truancy. Child protection procedures are good. The head of lower school is the designated teacher for child protection and has received training. She holds training and refresher courses for all members of staff. Measures to ensure students' welfare in the school and on visits outside are generally satisfactory. During this inspection, there were no fire alarms in the temporary classrooms at Starkholmes, a concern reported at the time of the previous inspection. However, this situation has now been remedied.

76. Students with special educational needs are fully and successfully integrated into the normal pastoral system of tutor groups and years. Heads of year and special needs staff work very closely together to provide the additional support which is very often needed by students with behavioural difficulties. Medical and therapeutic support is effectively provided according to need. Specialist careers expertise is very effective, particularly in finding work experience placements and long-term career strategies for special needs students. The special needs bases are always staffed and are a haven for students who may be experiencing problems of any sort at any time.

77. The last inspection report raised concerns about dust extraction and safety signs in

technology. These have been resolved. Lavatories are also better. The absence of fire alarms in the temporary classrooms at Starkholmes was a key issue arising from the last inspection, and is still unresolved. Pastoral care is still good.

### **Partnership with parents and the community**

78. The range of information which the school provides about itself for parents is satisfactory. This applies to both the amount produced and the quality of the information. Initial details are given in the prospectus which, though it gives parents much useful information about the school, is marred by the inclusion of outdated aims. Booklets give more specific information, for example, about the sixth form, and the Lea Green induction visits. No year-by-year curricular information is given out at the start of each year, though details of the content of the curriculum are included on students' records of achievement. Open evenings for parents also provide information on topics such as GCSE choices and drugs awareness. Parents receive information about their children's progress through one full report a year, the record of achievement. This tells parents what their children have studied, and the way in which they approach their studies, but gives inadequate information about what they actually know and the standards of their attainment. The school should provide more information on what it is teaching its students. There is also one evening for parents to consult teachers about their children's progress each year. Parents consider these particularly useful because students also attend and participate in the discussion. The results of the annual screenings of progress are not routinely sent to parents, but parents are contacted when students are praised for good work or thought not to be doing as well as they should.

79. The level of parents' involvement with their children's work is satisfactory, though not extensive. Some use the homework planners to contact tutors and sign them regularly, but many do not. Many parents come to consultation evenings and to special evenings, for example to discuss option choices and sixth form entry. The school has consulted parents about the content of the home-school contract, and unfortunately this has delayed the introduction of the contract, now statutory, beyond the required date. The small but dedicated committee which runs the Highfields School Association raises money to buy such items as lockers for students. Parents are generally supportive of the school. They feel that their children like being there and do well. Some parents express concern about the way homework is set and think that the school does not explain the curriculum clearly enough. Inspectors agree with these concerns. Other parents have concerns about the way the school handles complaints. However, inspectors consider that complaints are acted on promptly by the school, usually, and appropriately, through the pastoral system.

80. The reporting system to parents meets statutory requirements. Annual records of achievement provide information on overall levels and grades from Year 8. However, the information for parents is slight as there is little clarification of what students attain in relation to National Curriculum requirements within subjects.

81. Parents of all students on the register of special educational needs are informed and involved through the normal system of the record of achievement, and parents' consultative evenings. In addition, there are extra parents' evenings devoted to special needs, frequent contact by telephone and home visits. Annual reviews of statements of special need are comprehensive, fully involve parents, carers and other agencies, and where appropriate are held at the student's home. The successful Read On, Write Away project, in addition to other worthwhile initiatives, involves sixth form students helping primary school pupils with reading. This does much to foster good relations with the local community.

82. The school's links with the community are satisfactory overall. All students in Year 10 have a period of work experience. Placements are chosen from the school's own database. The necessary health and safety checks are undertaken by the local Training and Enterprise Council. Work experience is efficiently run. There is more work experience or work shadowing for students in Year 12. At this stage students are expected to find their own placements, preferably with connections to their course of study or career aspirations. Students in Years 8 and 9 are taught how to look after visitors. Other general industrial links are provided by an industry day for Year 10, and by Young Enterprise and the opportunity to attend an Understanding Industry course in Year 12. The school industry partnership provides a twice-yearly forum for an exchange of views. Local firms provided sponsorship for an exhibition of students' design and technology work last year. This was very successful. However, there are few other direct departmental links with industry and commerce. Students themselves, especially those in the sixth form, make a good contribution to community life. As part of the community service which they agree to perform responsibly in their own time, not as part of lessons, Year 12 students help in Highfields, in local primary schools with literacy and other projects, and in local hospitals. A recent award from Barclays Bank will fund further community initiatives. This voluntary work within the community contributes much to students' personal development. Overall, community links enable students to gain in maturity and confidence. They exercise responsibility for themselves and others very well in many different situations.

83. The present position is broadly similar to that reported in the last inspection. Sixth form community service is now a strong feature.

## **THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL**

### **Leadership and management**

84. Governors contribute well to the leadership of the school. They have a good range of experience and professional skills which are freely given to benefit the school. Governors willingly accept responsibility and give their time generously, for example to attend and chair sub-committees. They have good insight into the needs of students and very strong commitment to the school. They intend that standards should be high. They come into the school regularly to meet staff and have active links with departments to inform themselves at first hand of the work of the school. Their four sub-committees enable them to develop particular insights into important aspects of the school's activities. Governors scrutinise developments closely and reach considered judgements on what is in the best interest of students. They are prepared to criticise the plans and initiatives of management so as to ensure that developments are properly in the interest of students. For example, governors rejected the budget proposed for 1999-2000 when it failed to make explicit provision for the development of information technology. However, communication between sub-committees and all governors does not fully ensure that decisions are taken only in light of essential evidence. For example, appointments to desirable, but additional pastoral posts were made without adequate awareness of the impending budget deficit for the 1998-9 financial year. Governors are rightly concerned at the extremely low income - by national comparison - received by the school. The governing body is closely involved in the formulation and management of special needs policy both through reports and through the nominated governor who works closely with the department. Parents are fully informed about special needs policy, practice and effectiveness through the school prospectus and the governors' annual report.

85. The headteacher is very hard working and with the support of governors has

implemented some necessary changes since his appointment in 1996. For example, a system to enable senior heads of department to share directly in the management of the school has been developed. Significant improvements to the curriculum, prompted by the previous inspection of the school, with an extension of the school's working day have taken place. Parents express approval of the new school day. In general, the headteacher has the confidence of staff who are experiencing an era of change since his appointment, but he should ensure that older students know him better. He spends too much time on matters which others should manage, and his considerable efforts do not focus well enough on leading the school on the major issues which are central to its future success.

86. Governors and headteacher have plans to restructure the responsibilities of senior managers, reducing the number of posts with appropriate transfer of some solely administrative responsibilities to other staff. Headteacher and deputies' meetings are suitably minuted and intended action is recorded. However, headteacher and deputies do not work well enough together as a team to be fully effective in taking the school forward, or to control spending within severe budgetary constraints. For example, headteacher and deputies took a decision to recommend to governors the appointment to an additional teaching post and to new posts of assistant heads of year - which were not part of school planning for 1998-9 - without sufficient reference to the budget difficulties that they, as a team, should have been aware of. Tasks are retained within one person's brief which would be better done by a team approach. For example, the illness of the deputy with sole responsibility for the construction of the timetable in the summer term delayed its completion. The headteacher tried to complete the task, reducing his availability and effectiveness to deal with other matters. More public support for each other in the school, as for example in assemblies, is needed. Areas which require improvement, such as whole-school planning and systematic monitoring, need effective teamwork from these most senior staff if improvement is to be successful. Analysis of examination results is thorough. However, although deputy headteachers are assigned links to subject departments, regular and systematic monitoring to inform senior management of standards of teaching and students' work so as to ensure that these are of a consistently high quality is lacking. Senior management sets very high standards in the way problems experienced by students and staff are handled. All matters are dealt with in a way that emphasises individuality and rigorously avoids stereotyping.

87. The management by heads of department and those with pastoral responsibilities is generally good. In general, subjects' schemes of work are thoroughly set out and help to co-ordinate work within departments. Relationships among staff within departments are usually good and teamwork is apparent. Teachers and other staff work very hard. They have a strong commitment to their students and want them to succeed. However, little monitoring of the quality of teaching takes place, and although no unsatisfactory teaching was observed during the inspection, there is considerable variation in its quality, across the range of excellent to satisfactory, and improvement is possible. Equally, little formal monitoring of standards of students' work or homework across each subject results in significant variations in quality of work and quality of marking, for example. New job descriptions for heads of departments require them to monitor standards, but the process has not yet begun. Pastoral managers are effective, know their students and manage their welfare well.

88. The day-to-day administration and organisation of the school are efficiently managed.

89. The school has an equal opportunities policy, which translates desired outcomes into practical everyday behaviour for both teacher and student. The school meets legal



requirements for equal opportunities and aims to respond to the needs of all its students. The management and organisation of provision for special needs students are a significant strength of the school. Special needs are seen as a responsibility of the whole school and all staff accept their responsibilities and contribute to this provision. Targets in students' statements and individual education plans are clearly set out and regularly reviewed with parents. Support staff are used well.

90. Planning to identify and achieve major targets for school development is weak. The school development plan does not relate directly to the stated aims of the school, against which success might be evaluated. A new statement of aims was agreed in 1997, and these aims are clearly stated in the staff handbook. However, the former aims are published in the current school prospectus for the information of new parents, although active partnership with parents is a current aim of the school. The result is uncertainty among all partners as to what the basic aims of the institution are. In 1996, a four-year plan spanning the years 1996 to 2000 was drafted. However, this has not been regularly updated and planning is largely limited to an insufficient time scale of a single year. Estimates of costs are not worked out in detail. Apart from targets to be aimed for in examinations, the success criteria given to evaluate the school's relative success in achieving other targets are imprecise, making accurate review of progress largely guesswork. Insufficient monitoring of standards of teaching and students' work cannot inform senior management what the priorities for development should be. The low income per student received by the school has led to frustration among governors and senior management in implementing much-needed changes, as for example in funding for new computers. However, identifying priorities in planning is acutely necessary, given insufficient funds. Departments have their own planned priorities, in most cases, but the pastoral system of heads of school, heads of year and assistant heads of year does not determine and publicise its own planned priorities. The whole school plan does not include any explicit pastoral contribution.

91. The school has a very positive ethos. Governors, headteacher and all staff are strongly committed to achieving high standards. The learning environment at the Starkholmes building has been much improved since the previous inspection and relationships are good between staff and students and between students themselves.

92. Governors largely fulfil their statutory requirements. All obligations with regard to equal opportunities are met. There is omission of a daily act of collective worship, a key issue of the previous inspection. During the inspection, assemblies were not held daily and none observed were acts of collective worship. No acts of worship were observed in form groups. The recently required home-school contract is currently still in draft form, and appraisal of staff is not operative.

93. Given attention to priorities, the school, already successful in many respects, has the capacity to improve further. The priority in use of income to ensure a suitable range of teaching staff is appropriate. The standard of teaching is good, but management needs to inform itself fully of the quality of work by systematic monitoring. Overall, there is determination among governors, headteacher and all levels of management and staff to take the school forward successfully. However, greater co-operation and effective teamwork between headteacher and deputy headteachers are needed so that they can lead the school towards achieving priorities.

94. Since the previous inspection, the school continues to have a clear statement of aims, but all parties to the school need to share this common set of purposes. Governors remain strongly committed to the school. Their health and safety policy is now in place. The

new headteacher is strongly committed to the success of the school, but effective teamwork and partnership between head and deputy headteachers is lacking. There has not been improvement in response to the key issue of the previous inspection of longer-term planning the use of finance. Developments have undoubtedly been limited by a very low income. However, the need for planning remains essential. The school needs to be very clear on its priorities in order to use what little funding is available most effectively. Day-to-day administration remains well managed.

### **Staffing, accommodation and learning resources**

95. There are sufficient teachers to meet overall curricular needs. With recent changes in teaching staff due largely to promotion, and with the appointment of newly-qualified teachers, there is now a good balance of experience and youth. Suitably qualified staff are available to teach all National Curriculum subjects, religious education and a good range of other courses, many of which are in the sixth form. Teaching is predominately undertaken by specialists and this helps to ensure the good quality of teaching. There is a fairly even gender balance within the teaching staff, with women well represented at middle but not senior management level. The careers education co-ordinator is suitably experienced and administers a very effective careers and work experience programme. The co-ordinator for special educational needs is appropriately trained and co-ordinates a valuable support system. The librarian is trained and experienced.

96. Support and administrative staff provision is low, given the size and divided accommodation of the school. These staff contribute greatly to the success of the school, support management well and provide good support for the curricular needs of teachers. The quality of technical support is generally good in science, art, information technology and design and technology. However, the level of provision is inadequate in art and information technology, requiring teachers to undertake support tasks, taking time from preparing lessons, and other teaching tasks. There are no language assistants in French, German or Spanish, restricting students' opportunity for oral practice in the foreign languages. Caretaking and cleaning standards are satisfactory.

97. An adequate number of well-qualified, specialist teachers who are very experienced and skilled work with students who have special educational needs. All other teachers accept responsibility for the education of such students, and many are very skilled in meeting their needs. All support staff for special needs have relevant experience, and many are well qualified. Since appointment, all have received relevant in-service training. Support staff contribute very well to all aspects of work, including in-class support, individual work with withdrawn students, preparation of teaching materials, assessment, administration and individual counselling.

98. A well-planned and effective programme operates for newly-qualified teachers. It is comprehensive and includes a familiarisation programme on whole school issues during the first term. There are regular meetings with the induction co-ordinator and subject mentor and opportunities to observe good practice at the school and at a partnership school within the local authority. Newly-qualified teachers receive full evaluation of lessons observed and planned professional development, as necessary, to meet individual needs. All have a suitably reduced teaching commitment. The system is thorough and much appreciated by newly-qualified staff. Newly appointed experienced teachers are closely supported within the subject, but there is no formal mentoring or monitoring of their experience within the school.

99. There is a good system of support for Initial Teacher Training students through a

working partnership with Sheffield University in science and modern foreign languages. There is a non-partnership arrangement with Sheffield Hallam University in mathematics. In the partnership arrangements, students' professional training is well co-ordinated and monitored, but there is no formal evaluation.

100. Procedures for staff appraisal have been reviewed and refined since the last inspection. The local authority appraisal scheme was considered too expensive and insufficiently effective and was discontinued when local authority funding ceased after the completion of the first cycle in July 1998. Appraisal is currently in abeyance. The school is replacing the previous arrangement with its own, which emphasises the professional development of staff and is to be launched in January 2000. The revised scheme seems to be appropriate. It is intended to include lesson observations and be directly linked with departmental teaching and learning aims. The process should identify the professional development needs of staff. However, close monitoring and evaluation of the process by senior management will be essential to ensure aims are met.

101. Currently teachers have no signed job descriptions. Those on file are largely generic in form. Up-to-date job descriptions have been drafted and will be available for teaching staff shortly. These are more comprehensive and detailed in form. Those for heads of department appropriately require monitoring of teaching and standards of work. The school has a satisfactory staff development policy which is well implemented by a professional review group led by a deputy headteacher. Teachers' needs are identified, but funds are insufficient to meet all whole-school needs identified. Key priorities identified by the school, for example developing teachers' skills in use of computers, have not been fully delivered. Training provided in departments is usually thorough and enhances professional development. A programme of training days operates for all staff, with current issues including health and safety training, key skills in personal and social education and child protection. Most staff participate in appropriate developments. There is some central monitoring of the staff development programme, but it is not sufficiently rigorous and there is no evaluation of the effect of the staff development programme on teaching and learning within the school.

102. Support and administrative staff are included in appropriate training activities with other staff. However, not all support staff have detailed job specifications.

103. Since the previous inspection, concerns have generally been satisfactorily addressed. However, there is still an inadequate amount of technician time for information technology and art and only now is emphasis being given to the development of skills in information technology as part of the school's development plan.

104. Although the school's accommodation has some good features, some areas are unsatisfactory to ensure effective delivery of the curriculum at the upper school site. The school has two sites situated 1.8 miles apart. Most staff work on both sites. Starkholmes, the lower school site, is in clean and functional condition and the interior is generally suitably maintained for teaching and curricular needs. Outside maintenance is unsatisfactory, with much peeling paintwork. Much effort has been made to improve the interiors of classrooms to make them more conducive to effective teaching and learning. For example, many rooms have been carpeted, such as the drama studio, and some rooms have blinds to block the effects of bright sunshine. In contrast, the three laboratories and preparation area on this site are in poor condition and with minimal services. Although clean, their general appearance is unattractive and they present a poor learning environment for younger students. Accommodation for different subjects is mainly appropriately grouped in suites to assist departmental co-ordination. However,

requirements involve most teachers in regular commuting between sites, reducing opportunities for departmental communication.

105. Lumsdale, the building housing Years 9 to 13, is impressive and attractive. Much of the accommodation has interesting and stimulating features. Although large numbers of students and some narrow corridors create congestion within, the surrounding open site and playing fields allow students plenty of space to meet and play at lunchtimes and breaks. Display cabinets on the main corridors at Lumsdale are used to display good quality art- work. Display in the art department is of outstandingly high quality. Pressure on accommodation for subjects involves some teaching which cannot be accommodated in specialist rooms. For example, in music some lessons are conducted in non-specialist rooms, as are some modern foreign language lessons. This sometimes results in the need to move teaching materials and equipment over considerable distances. Although laboratories at Lumsdale are well designed, some rooms are simply too small or on the wrong floor to increase their effective use within the present timetable arrangements and some science lessons, about eight per cent, are taught out of laboratories.

106. There is very little spare accommodation for occasions when the curriculum would be better taught in an alternative room to the one timetabled. During some periods, there is no spare teaching accommodation at all. For example, no classroom is currently available at suitable times for some GCSE physical education lessons. Physical education lacks sufficient indoor facilities for sports and games. Use is made of the Wheeldon Hall, but this is required for other essential activities too. Physical education is inevitably adversely affected when its major indoor facilities are taken over for examinations. Changing facilities are often overcrowded. Accommodation for drama at Lumsdale is poor because the drama room has to be used as a normal classroom. The Wheeldon Hall is not available to drama classes, and examination groups need to use it at weekends to prepare assessed performances. Some rooms are cramped for large classes, as in some geography lessons. There is inadequate storage space for books and equipment for most subjects.

107. The Starkholmes building is unsuitable for people in wheelchairs. Lumsdale is only accessible with assistance. For example, there are some narrow corridors and fire doors are very difficult to open by people in wheelchairs. However, accommodation for use exclusively by the special educational needs department on both sites is very good, with plenty of classroom space, adequate office space, storage and attractively decorated with good display of students' work.

108. Since the previous inspection there have been improvements to the accommodation. Students' toilets in both buildings are now clean, well maintained, functional and without graffiti. Dust extraction in technology rooms is now adequate. The general state of the learning environment is cleaner and more suitable for teaching and learning. Cleaning in both buildings is effective. These formed a key issue of the previous inspection. However, a further part of that key issue was the concern that external classrooms at Starkholmes were not connected to the fire alarm system. This was still the case at the time of this inspection, but has subsequently been remedied. Deficiencies in accommodation for the provision of drama at Lumsdale and indoor facilities for physical education continue. Some teaching across the curriculum is conducted without the advantage of specialist accommodation.

109. Provision of learning resources is poor. Resources are adequate for the needs of students in English, modern foreign languages, design and technology and history. They are barely adequate in mathematics and science. Resources reduce the range of curricular activities possible in art, music, physical education and religious education. Numbers and

quality of computers and accompanying equipment across the curriculum are insufficient for students' needs across the curriculum, although there has been some improvement recently. Most existing resources are of good quality, and well deployed. Their range reflects the range of teaching styles in use as much as student ability or need.

110. Provision of computers and other resources for use in the special needs department is good and supports students' individual learning and progress well.

111. The two libraries, one on each site, are adequately resourced within the school's restricted budget. The development plan designed to establish the libraries as learning resource centres is slowly beginning to come to fruition – with more access to computers and the Internet. The school's subscription to the local authority's resource service gives access to a wider range of resources than the school itself can provide, and supports the curriculum well. The libraries are staffed by a full time qualified librarian, with some additional support and four parent volunteers. However, staffing does not permit the libraries to be open at all times. The Starkholmes library is open for eight periods and two lunchtimes, and the Lumsdale library is open for 23 periods and three lunchtimes. The effect is to restrict students' access to resources, making their personal organisation and planning of work more difficult.

112. Good use is made of resources external to the school. For example, the county record office's collection of historical documents is used well in history.

113. At the previous inspection, textbook limitations were identified in history, but the situation has improved. Insufficient book stock in geography and religious education persists. Equipment levels were low in drama, and this is still the case, but they have improved in mathematics, science and design and technology. A start has been made in improving computer resources, but these remain inadequate for the needs of students.

### **The efficiency of the school**

114. The income that the school receives for each student is very low by comparison with the income of schools nationally. Financial planning is, therefore, constrained by these circumstances, but also by uncertainty caused by the local authority's occasional, unexpected release of small amounts of additional money for specified purposes. The need for longer-term financial planning was a key issue arising from the previous inspection. The only school development plan to make reference to a time scale longer than a single year makes little reference to cost implications. The single year plans show few cost implications. The school has avoided a budget deficit since the previous inspection until the last financial year, when a deficit of £71,000 resulted. This is a relatively small amount given the size of total income, but it will substantially affect spending anticipated in the short term, for example on maintenance of premises and equipment. The school has not negotiated a loan from the local authority, and expects to eliminate the deficit in the current financial year.

115. However, planning, control and management of the budget are of concern. The governors' finance and premises sub-committee was advised in October 1998 of a likely overspend resulting from salary costs of temporary teachers, to cover absences of regular staff. Although the chair of that sub-committee and the senior manager responsible for managing and monitoring the financial situation were in communication, no further meeting of the sub-committee occurred until March 1999, when a significant, but inaccurate deficit amount was reported. During the intervening period, the governors' personnel sub-committee and a full governors' meeting had agreed the appointment of an additional

teaching post and the internal appointments of assistant heads of year, although the sub-committee for finance and senior management anticipated a budget deficit. More communication between governors and regular advice from senior management are needed. Further controls have been implemented by the headteacher to ensure that spending is only permitted within the specified amounts allocated to budget headings. Governors and headteacher are right to be planning a restructuring of management posts, to ensure that greater efficiency is achieved, for example by transferring administrative responsibilities from senior management to administrative staff.

116. Financial procedures are generally efficient. Records and passage of financial information to and from the local authority are well administered by clerical staff. However, not all recommendations of the last audit of 1998 have yet been carried out. For example, the register of pecuniary interests does not include staff with responsibilities for cost centres. Although the recommendation that expenditure on staffing must always be approved by governors is in place, governors still made appointments to posts without sufficient advice concerning an impending deficit.

117. Allocations of money to departments is managed by a committee of staff who judge applications and needs. The system is fairly managed, but spending on learning resources is low.

118. There has been a significant increase in the numbers of students with special educational needs and the severity of those needs in recent years. The special needs department works effectively in meeting those needs. It has developed a very efficient system of individual education plans, and successfully developed the professional role of support staff. It uses accommodation and resources well.

119. Money allocated for staff development and training is used well, and teachers benefit from training opportunities in their subjects. Whole-school in-service training is well managed. However, whole-school development planning should more explicitly identify and cost training needs against the targets which are set.

120. Most of the school's expenditure is on its teachers and their deployment to teach subjects in which they are qualified is good. Time for lessons has increased to be above that recommended for Key Stage 3, and it is in line with recommendations for Key Stage 4. Teachers work hard, and on average teach more than is the case nationally. Their classes contain, on average, a few more students than is usual across the country. Size of sixth form classes is efficiently managed. However, the school's timetable contains many occasions which require more than one teacher to teach the same subject to the same class on different periods at Key Stages 3 and 4. Although this situation has improved a little in the current year, it increases the difficulty for teachers to co-ordinate work successfully. Students have a more fragmented learning experience from two teachers rather than one. For example, in one Year 8 class, religious education is delivered by two teachers in two different lessons on the same day each week. This problem of divided classes and that of teachers and other staff timetabled to work on two sites a considerable distance apart leaves teachers little time to reflect or prepare work, and leads to fatigue.

121. The location of the school on two sites has further implications for efficient use. Form tutors do not usually see their forms at afternoon registration which takes place in teaching groups in the first period after lunch because of commitments across the two sites. Consequently, pastoral contacts between students and teachers are reduced. There is unavoidable duplication of some resources on the two sites, for example libraries, departmental equipment and computers. However, accommodation requirements make the

two sites essential. The school has reviewed alternative deployment of students on each, but has decided that the present use of Starkholmes for Years 7 and 8 is effective. This is an appropriate decision. It ensures that transition from primary school for students at age 11 is helpful to them and gives them confidence to manage the secondary school, without too many older students being present. Transition of students in Year 9 to Lumsdale is also managed very effectively. Despite its size, use of accommodation is effective in supporting social development by providing areas in which students of similar age can meet and eat. The two dining areas at Lumsdale accommodate many students who want a school meal and facilities are used well to give identity to Years 9 and 10 and to Years 11 and the sixth form.

122. In spite of marked shortages, the learning resources available are used as well as possible, and teachers show initiative in adapting the subject curriculum so as to enable students to achieve high standards, as for example in art.

123. The school gives good value for money. It achieves good results despite its very low income. Teaching is of good quality. Students behave well and want to learn. There are some weaknesses in management and efficiency, but overall outcomes are good.

124. Since the previous inspection, medium and longer-term financial planning has not improved. The school's freedom of action is restricted by very low income. Review of the use of the split site has taken place, and current use is appropriate, but the classes with lessons split between two teachers are unhelpful to teachers and students' learning. The cleaning contract criticised in the previous inspection has been changed, and the standard of cleaning is satisfactory. Controls need to be tightened to avoid the consequences of a deficit. Overall, the school continues to give good value for money.

## **PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS**

### **ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE**

#### **English**

125. The percentage of students reaching level 5 and above in the end of Key Stage 3 national tests is above the average of all schools, but when compared to similar schools, it is below average. However, there was improvement in 1998 and 1999, although these students had lower verbal ability scores on entry to Year 7, indicating good progress. However, both boys and girls reach higher standards in mathematics and science, and there is some room for improvement.

126. In GCSE examinations, the percentage of students achieving A\* to C grades in English was well above average in 1998 and has improved further in 1999. Almost every student obtains an A\* to G grade. The percentage of A\* and A grades has fluctuated, but for the last three years has been above or close to average. There is a greater difference between the achievement of girls and boys in 1998 and 1999 than is the case nationally. In English literature, the percentage of A\* to C grades was very high in 1998, and rose again in 1999, though with a reduced entry. Almost every student obtains a grade. The percentage of A\* and A grades was high in 1998, and was maintained in 1999. There is less difference between the performance of boys and girls than in GCSE English. In both subjects, students' attainment is similar to their achievement in their other subjects.

127. At A level, the percentage of both grades A and B and A to E in the three English syllabuses was above or close to the national average in 1998. Students have achieved more A and B grades in English language and English courses than in English literature, though the percentage of these grades in the latter course increased in 1999.

128. At the end of Key Stage 3, students' attainment in lessons is above average. By Year 9, students speak confidently and explain themselves well. Students of lower attainment answer clearly and coherently, but more briefly. All students listen purposefully when working in groups. Class literature is challenging, and students respond with understanding to the characters and their predicaments. Lower attainers understand plot and characters though they may only indicate this in questioning. Written work of many students often reaches high standards. Students adopt an appropriate style and use a variety of sentence structures with accurate spelling and punctuation. Most students are developing tighter organisation when they write extensively, and spelling and punctuation are generally correct. Students with special educational needs or weak literacy skills do write at length, showing an understanding of the topic, but sometimes fail to paragraph and punctuate. Almost all students present their work with care.

129. Attainment in lessons at the end of Key Stage 4 is above average. Higher attaining students consider and respond in class discussion. They have a wide vocabulary and are confident and fluent in speech. Lower attainers are more hesitant but have sound oral understanding. The reading of able students is wide and includes classical novels and poetry which they analyse successfully. Students of average ability have a sound understanding of plot, character, theme and style. Less able students find detailed understanding more difficult. In their own writing, most students express themselves clearly and in the best work there is a sense of style. Lower attainers write simple, straightforward accounts.

130. Students' attainment at A level is above average. Year 13 students are articulate



and mature in discussion. In both language and literature, they have a solid basis of knowledge. Essay writing skills are above average, well organised, clearly expressed and supported in detail.

131. Students of all abilities at both key stages and in the sixth form make good progress. As students' skills develop, they study texts of increasing complexity and their own writing becomes more detailed and more effective. Accuracy of spelling and punctuation improves and vocabulary in both spoken and written work is more extensive. For example, in Year 9, students with special educational needs read *Ghostly Lessons*, a relatively simple story. However, a class of similar ability in Year 11 read aloud, enjoyed and understood *Our Day Out*, a play for both teenagers and adults. Those with special educational needs and other lower attainers progress well in classes set by ability in Years 8 and 9 and at Key Stage 4. Learning support staff play an active and effective part in lessons. To ensure continuity with the literacy hour now current in primary schools, a literacy scheme of work is being tested in Year 7 classes to improve basic English skills. At Key Stage 3, drama lessons make an important contribution to students' progress in English skills by encouraging the value of listening and the opportunity to speak in various roles.

132. Students' attitudes and their response in lessons are good. In all years, students are highly motivated, interested in lessons, and co-operate fully with their teacher and other students. In many classes there is an atmosphere of mutual trust and working to a common purpose. By the end of Year 11, students have good independent learning skills. They discuss, make notes, find information, and use specialist words accurately. The perseverance of many students with special educational needs is an important factor in their progress.

133. The quality of teaching is almost all good and some at all key stages is very good. Teaching at Key Stage 4 is particularly strong. The outstanding feature is the strength of subject knowledge, which is used effectively in many ways. In some lessons, teachers guide the discussion to significant points. In others, they read a poem or passages to enhance and clarify the meaning, and they choose imaginative materials which interest the class. Lessons are planned carefully and language and literature elements are integrated well. Activities are varied. Groupwork or paired work, together with video and audio tapes, are routinely used. Teachers manage students well, encouraging co-operation. Lessons begin promptly and the pace is brisk. Homework is regularly set and marking is good with detailed helpful comments. Though there was good teaching seen during the last inspection, the proportion has increased substantially. Teachers follow a broad and balanced curriculum with detailed schemes of work well matched to the wide range of students' ability. Problems of continuity which arise from two teachers teaching the same class are overcome by the competence of the staff and the use of some in-service training time to co-ordinate lessons.

134. Since the last inspection, standards of attainment throughout the school have remained high and those of lower attaining students have risen. The lack of information technology criticised in the previous report remains a weakness which cannot be remedied until access to computers is improved. Although marking is frequent and helpful, individual National Curriculum levels are not yet recorded in sufficient detail to monitor progress. The department intends to do this. Classrooms on the lower site have been refurbished to an acceptable standard and there are adequate textbooks, but insufficient access to computers. There has been substantial improvement since the last inspection in teaching, which has maintained and improved standards at GCSE. The warm relationships between staff and students continue to pervade lessons, contributing to the commitment to high

achievement.

- *Literacy across the curriculum*

135. Students are attentive listeners and this supports their work in many subjects. In geography, for example, instructions rarely need to be repeated. In religious education, students are able to pick out the relevant parts of a teacher's exposition. In English, students often listen to an audio tape whilst following the text, thus further strengthening listening and reading skills. In question and answer sessions, students at both key stages are willing to participate, and they explain themselves well. For example, in mathematics, students at Key Stage 3 are encouraged to explain by use of technical language. Both boys and girls are very articulate in most subjects by the end of Year 11. Most sixth form students are articulate and many express themselves with mature confidence.

136. Throughout the school, reading and comprehension skills are good, enabling students to tackle challenging tasks. GCSE history coursework requires reading and understanding of original documents and census records, as well as textbooks. Though opportunities for reading aloud differ from subject to subject, most students do so with fluency and expression. If necessary, reading aloud is used to support understanding as, for example, in Year 9 lower attaining classes in science.

137. Written work in the form of reports, accounts, short answers, letters is extensive in many subjects, although spelling and punctuation are not always accurate. Lower school students produce some imaginative work in their science units. By Key Stage 4, students are able to analyse and apply their knowledge effectively in art. Use of correct technical terms is good in all subjects. Throughout the school, careful presentation of work is encouraged and is usually of good quality. Lower school students often illustrate their work. GCSE coursework is tidy, well organised and often word-processed. Standards of literacy are above average in all aspects.

- Drama

138. In 1998, the percentage of GCSE A\* to C grades was well above average, and the results in 1999 were comparable. For the past three years, all students have been awarded a grade. In 1997 and 1998, the number of A\* and A grades was very high, but declined in 1999 because of the varying potential of candidates taking the subject. In A level theatre studies, the percentage of A and B grades was close to the national average in 1998 and even higher in 1999. However, the percentage of A to E passes fluctuates, and in 1999, was below what the school usually achieves.

139. At the end of Key Stage 3, students' attainment is above average. Most achieve satisfactory levels of control, concentration and understanding of dramatic conventions, such as mime and mirror poses. Groups of lower attainment can present simple roles or events. By the end of Year 11, students' attainment remains above average overall. They are able to translate their ideas into a performance for a specific audience. For example, they present their ideas in sketches with an anti-bullying theme for the lower school. The study, performance and design of plays indicate average standards at the end of Year 13.

140. Progress in lessons is good at Key Stages 3 and 4, and satisfactory in the sixth form. All students enjoy drama lessons and work with imagination and sometimes impressive concentration. Students with special educational needs progress very well. Progress is restricted and time lost in lessons because tables and chairs have to be moved at the start of many periods because the drama room at Lumsdale is used for lessons other

than drama. The drama studio at Starkholmes is a suitable, though restricted space. There are problems with acoustics with the large classes who use the room. Progress is further restricted by funding which can only provide A level textbooks. All other books and photocopying are provided through the English department. Equipment is minimal and does not include a CD player.

141. The quality of teaching is never unsatisfactory, mostly good, and much is very good. Teachers structure and sequence their lessons well so that skills are built up progressively. Material is well chosen and appeals to the imagination, for example, in the story of the werewolf used in Year 8. Teachers evaluate work in every lesson and encourage students to do so effectively. In most lessons, there are points for reflection on a wide range of issues. Teachers' commitment to the subject shows when they teach the performance part of A level theatre studies after school, because the upper school hall, the only space really suitable for such lessons, is unavailable during the school day. Co-operation and teamwork in lessons and extra-curricular activities are excellent, but there is no defined role for the head of department, who has no time to monitor lessons or undertake curriculum development.

142. Since the last inspection, standards have been maintained but accommodation and resource problems are unresolved because funds are not available.

## **Mathematics**

143. Attainment in mathematics is high and well above average at the end of Key Stage 3 and at A level. It is almost as high at GCSE. In the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3, attainment has been consistently well above the national average for several years with approximately 80% of students attaining level 5 and above. In 1999, results at level 6 and above are similarly high. When compared to similar schools, Key Stage 3 results in mathematics are very high and also high when compared to English and science. There is little difference in the attainment of boys and girls at this key stage.

144. At the end of Key Stage 4, attainment in mathematics is also above the national average. In 1998, 70% of students gained a GCSE grade of A\* to C in mathematics. In 1999, results show a drop to 58%. These results are pending review by the examination board. GCSE results are above average when compared to similar schools. Boys' and girls' results are again similar and attainment in mathematics compares favourably with that in other subjects.

145. Attainment in mathematics at A level is also above average when compared with results nationally. Not only is there a very high percentage of A and B grades in mathematics at A level, but there is a consistently excellent pass rate. Again when compared to other subjects, mathematics results are good.

146. Attainment as observed in lessons and work seen is generally appropriate to the ability of the class and confirms the high results obtained in the end of key stage tests and examinations. For example, able Year 13 students confidently grapple with the behaviour of hyperbolic functions as a result of the teacher's careful sequencing of the concepts involved. At Key Stage 4, high attaining students show very good algebraic skills, while students preparing for the graduated assessment programme are competent in dealing with percentages. Across all groups at Key Stage 3 attainment in numeracy is improving and students are confident in their use of data handling skills, coordinates and ratio.

147. Students of all levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs,

make very good progress at Key Stage 3. On entry to the school, students' attainment in mathematics is broadly just above average as measured by Key Stage 2 data and other nationally recognised tests. The percentage of students gaining the expected level 5 and above in end of key stage national tests, 81% in 1999, is higher than the percentage of students that entered the school with level 4 and above (74%). Value is added at this key stage for all students. The department's focus on building confidence in, and enthusiasm for, mathematics in Year 7 positively contributes to students' success. Students develop competence with mental calculations. Progress is satisfactory at Key Stage 4. The highest attaining students do sustain their good progress, aided by teachers' very good subject knowledge and understanding of students' likely misconceptions and mistakes. Lower attaining students and those with special educational needs also sustain progress through examinations suitably chosen for their level of attainment and through teachers' sympathetic management of their programmes of study and of their behaviour. For students of average attainment, progress is less secure, with a number making slow progress in their GCSE course. From lessons seen, this is related to the loose structure of some lessons where students spend long periods on the same activity and thus lose concentration and momentum. Progress in the sixth form is very good, shown by very good examination results and also by students' increasing ability to reflect on areas of mathematics, articulate concepts and recognise links and patterns between topics. This is a direct result of the skilled planning and co-ordinated approach of A level teaching. Teamwork in the department and teachers' willingness to give students extra individual attention impact very positively on students' progress.

148. At each key stage, students' attitudes to learning are always at least satisfactory, mostly good and often very good. Behaviour in mathematics lessons is very good at all times. Students work co-operatively with their teachers in all lessons. For example, in a Year 9 lesson for students with special educational needs, students followed the good example of their teachers' teamwork and managed their individualised work programmes well. Higher attaining students at Key Stage 4 sustain concentration for long periods. Students listen courteously to each other and make response, as in a Year 10 lesson on polygons. Take-up rates for A level mathematics remain very high, with students showing real enthusiasm and confidence in their future success in the subject.

149. Teaching in mathematics is never less than satisfactory and was good or very good in well over half the lessons seen. All specialist mathematics teachers are very well qualified and show secure subject knowledge. Several have a very clear understanding of students' misunderstandings in learning mathematics, enabling them to avoid common pitfalls, as in a Year 7 lesson on co-ordinates, and in a sixth form lesson on resolving forces. Content and conceptual understanding are well planned in most lessons. However, many lessons lack a variety of learning and assessment activities to allow for students' different modes of learning. Teachers make satisfactory use of information technology when they can. Logo is included in the scheme of work, and at Key Stage 3, students gain experience of data bases through the Junior Pin Point Project. Students' work is regularly marked, but the quality of marking and feedback to students is not consistently good across the department, and does not always promote students' progress as well as it should. Further monitoring of standards of marking is needed. Teachers manage students' behaviour well and take great care over their social and moral development. Provision for their spiritual and cultural development is incidental rather than planned. However, one very good example of genuine awe and wonder in mathematics arose in a pure mathematics A level lesson, when students spontaneously realised the coherence of some mathematical systems. Well-managed discussion around Osborne's rule generated an awareness of earlier gender struggles for women mathematicians.

150. At the time of the last inspection, results of GCSE examinations showed 55% of students gaining A\* to C grades. Since then, the department has made good progress with results at Key Stage 4 improving year-on-year, as have results at Key Stage 3. Good results at A level have been well sustained. Teaching remains predominantly good, although more practical work is still required, as is greater access to information technology. Accommodation for the department remains inadequate and negatively affects display and teaching style. Further monitoring of standards of marking is needed. The department is now in a strong position to improve its results further at Key Stage 4, by focusing more closely on the progress of students displaying average attainment at the end of Key Stage 3.

· *Numeracy across the curriculum*

151. Students make some use of numeracy in a few subjects apart from mathematics. For example, science provides an exciting context for students to apply their graphical skills for distance, speed and time problems. Their science is further enhanced by their competent use of ratio, functions and angles. It also provides a practical context for students of all abilities to reinforce their number skills successfully. Students achieve accuracy of measurement through their projects in design and technology. In art, students demonstrate a good understanding of concepts of proportion. They show particular strengths in working from three-dimensional shapes to realise their two-dimensional equivalents. The calculation of heart-rates in health-related exercises in physical education enables students to use their number skills effectively in an everyday context.

152. Students use data handling skills well in history, particularly at A level in students' personal studies. For example, they interpret tables of employment figures well, and use pictorial representation to illustrate the analysis of their own research. Geography provides limited opportunities for students at Key Stage 3 to produce graphs, but at Key Stage 4, they make good use of their statistical skills in project work. Year 7 students are able to calculate distances and interpret scale.

153. The mathematics department has a variety of initiatives in hand to enhance numerical skills within the subject. There is a policy for numeracy within mathematics. However, there has been no audit of the numeracy skills in use in all areas of the curriculum, nor is there a policy for numeracy across the whole curriculum. The good screening of students' skills on entry to the school is not yet used for tracking their progress in numeracy throughout the school. There is still insufficient support for numeracy from many subjects where students do not practise numerical skills enough. A key skills project is in its infancy in Year 10 but has not yet made an impact on the curriculum.

## **Science**

154. Attainment at the end of both key stages is above average. In the sixth form, it is well above average. In national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1998, the percentage of students reaching levels 5 and 6 and achieving more highly was well above the national average, and has been so for the previous four years. Achievement in 1999 was of like quality. In comparison with similar schools attainment is well above average.

155. At the end of Key Stage 4, the percentage of students achieving GCSE grades A\* to C in double award science is consistently well above the national average. Attainment of students gaining GCSE single science grades A\* to C is also above the national average. In comparison with other subjects, science sits between mathematics and English, and this high level of attainment has been stable for some years.

156. At A level, the proportions of students attaining grades A and B in chemistry and biology separately in 1999 are above the national average. In physics, the proportion attaining grades A and B has steadily increased over the past few years from being above to well above the national average. A level geology is an option of the sixth form curriculum in science and the recent move from advanced supplementary level has been successful, with the proportion of students gaining grades A to B at advanced level well above the national average. Other than minor variation between years, there is no overall significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls.

1. In lessons at both key stages and in the sixth form, students attain equally good standards to those achieved in examinations. They use previous learning well, as for example, in Year 10 work on organ systems, or Year 9 students' ability to recall and use the periodic table. Students' practical work is good, and they manage equipment well in the laboratory at both key stages and in the sixth form. For example, already in Year 7, students make appropriate predictions on loadings and extensions of spring balances. Lower attainers, including students with special educational needs in Year 10, research knowledge

successfully on the donation of organs and consider some implications of this. Higher attainers manage graphs, and numerical work in general, very well.

158. Progress in lessons is good at both key stages and in the sixth form. Students of all levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs progress well. Where progress is especially good, students are challenged and confident and show clear gains in knowledge, understanding and skills. This is demonstrated well in Year 9 where a group of students of low ability made good progress in their work on electrical safety in an introduction to static electricity. Students in Year 11 progress well with their work on energetics - with chemical reactions which take in or give out energy. They show considerable gains in knowledge by the way in which they present their work with confidence and speak and listen well. Progress in the sixth form is very good. This was evident in a practical physics lesson on Ohm's Law in Year 12 and in a Year 13 lesson on addition and reduction reactions in organic chemistry.

159. Students are well behaved and relationships are good. Many take pride in their work and books are generally well looked after. They are keen, willing and attentive and approach work with enthusiasm and a sense of enjoyment. Their keen engagement with new knowledge, skills and processes is high. This was illustrated well during a Year 10 lesson on organ systems, and with younger students in Year 9 who discussed the best methods of drawing a graph to display the results of the progressive extension of a spring. Students enjoy practical work in science. They concentrate and work well together. They make the most of good opportunities for open-ended problem-solving, for making and testing hypotheses and for developing the skills of planning an investigation and evaluating results.

160. The quality of teaching is never less than satisfactory and usually good. There are examples of very good practice across both key stages, and particularly in the sixth form. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding, particularly within their own science specialism, enabling students to learn from teachers' experience. They organise and prepare individual lessons conscientiously, although detailed plans and lesson notes were not always seen. Teachers' expectations are high for many students. Usually, intended outcomes of lessons are clearly given to students. This contributes well to their

understanding and the overall success of the lesson. Whole-class questioning is used effectively, and the pace of lessons is generally good. A good range of teaching and learning strategies is used and where homework is given, it generally is well thought out, relevant and clearly extends learning. Students' books and other work are regularly marked, often with praise and supportive and informative comment, although common practice between subjects in science still has to be achieved. However, the departmental handbook is a helpful resource. Following a recent study of marking practice in science, and with a view to greater consistency, a new marking schedule is presently on limited trial by teachers in the department. Assessment is properly organised and effective, especially in lessons where the teacher can give immediate feedback, such as in the homework test on chemical symbols with students in Year 9. Teachers regularly use opportunities for assessment, such as end of unit tests and the outcome of practical investigations. Test scores and levels are often used by teachers to help to define individual learning targets to aid students' progress. Teachers provide appropriate extra-curricular activities, including a range of field trips in biology and geology, visits to local industry, the conservation club and visiting local speakers. Students' work is well displayed throughout the department. Teachers make the most of the team of three well-qualified and experienced technicians providing high quality administrative and technical support to lessons.

161. Since the last inspection, high standards of attainment have been maintained. Information from assessment has increasing influence on the next stage of curricular planning. The department has improved the monitoring of progress and the quality of information to students and parents. Throughout each key stage, information from assessment is used to generate or modify specific learning targets for each student. Documentation is good, major policies and procedures are in place and the department has produced a range of resources adapted to support a wide range of attainment, especially for the single science certificate course at Key Stage 4. Teachers and technicians are familiar with safe working practices and daily routines reflect this. However, there is insufficient access to computers in science and a shortfall in the contribution the department makes to the overall spiritual development of students. Students enjoy science as a popular and successful subject, and its image is positive and exciting. The department makes a significant and valued contribution to the development and well-being of all students.

## **OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES**

### **Art**

162. In both two and three-dimensional GCSE work, attainment has been above the national average. The trend of grades A\* to C results has risen, and results in 1998, at 73%, were well above the national average of 59%. They were better still in 1999. Results in art compare favourably with other subjects in the school, with an unusually high proportion of students, almost half of each year group, taking art at Key Stage 4. A high proportion attained GCSE A\* grades in 1999. A level results have been mixed recently. Fewer students than average attained A and B grades in 1998. The proportion was much higher in 1999. Results in art compare well with other subjects in the school.

163. By the end of Key Stage 3, students' attainment in art is at the nationally expected level. They enter the school with an adequate range of skills and understanding in art. By the time they move to the upper school at the end of Year 8, many are already attaining standards expected by the end of Year 9. This applies especially to two-dimensional work, in particular to painting, where standards are well above the national expectation. Students manipulate paint well and use tone successfully to communicate distance and form. By the

end of Key Stage 3, students have more experience of three-dimensional work, and their attainment across the range of media is above expectation. In ceramics, they use clay to produce vessels and small sculptures which, given the age of the students, show an above average range of skills and competence. Two-dimensional work remains very strong. More students are above average than below in their understanding of theory, both of artists' work and of concepts, such as colour theory. By the end of Year 9, all students, including those with special educational needs, have a very secure basis from which to start GCSE work. Attainment in lessons at Key Stage 4 reflects the high GCSE results. At both key stages, boys attain unusually high standards compared with boys nationally. The opportunity offered through the three-dimensional option at Key Stage 4 contributes significantly to the relatively high standards achieved by lower attainers, especially boys. Attainment in the sixth form shows an average range.

164. Progress is good at Key Stage 3 and accelerates further at Key Stage 4. Progress remains good at A level. Good teaching and a well-constructed curriculum lead to very good progress in both skills and understanding for students of all abilities. Funding reduces the range of media which students experience, but they make very good progress in acquiring and using all key skills, particularly drawing and painting at Key Stage 3. They then use these most effectively to generate high standards at Key Stage 4. Higher attainers add to this base of knowledge and skills. They develop a high level of personal response in their work, incorporating their research of art history into their visual studies. The department's well-considered advice about examination options is carefully matched to students' strengths, and represents another factor in their very good progress through Key Stage 4. As they move through the school from Key Stage 3 to the sixth form, progress gets better as students gain confidence in their ability to manipulate media and techniques successfully. Students' very positive attitudes towards art, their good behaviour in lessons and willingness to experiment creatively contribute towards their extremely good progress. Students with special educational needs make exceptionally good progress in art.

165. All art teaching is at least satisfactory. Most is good or very good. Teachers' wide knowledge and variety of experience form the basis of good planning of students' curriculum. This is carefully designed to provide individuals with the maximum opportunities to succeed, and to overcome difficulties such as single 50-minute lessons, limited resources and lack of technical assistance. Lessons mostly run at a brisk pace, include a good variety of activity where possible, and are interesting and lively. Class management is very effective, generating a purposeful working atmosphere which promotes good learning. Continuous assessment tracks students' progress well, providing teachers with useful information where they have to share a class. Very effective emphasis on skills, such as good teamwork and communication, sometimes lead to better progress than would otherwise be achieved. In most classes, students of all abilities are challenged to attain highly. In the few where higher attainers' needs are not met, it is because of teachers' inexperience, and the department has in place very effective methods to overcome these early difficulties.

166. The previous inspection was very positive. Where the department itself has control over issues, improvements have occurred. No unexplained under-achievement now happens and lessons are now consistently challenging and move at a good pace. However, class numbers are still high. Computers are still not used enough and technical support is still insufficient.

### **Design and technology**

167. At A level in 1999, standards were higher than the average results which students



achieved in 1998. In the GCSE examinations in 1998, students achieved results which were above the national average in all four courses in the respective materials areas. Results in 1999 were of a similar standard. Standards compare well other subjects, particularly at Key Stage 4.

168. In the workshop and workroom, standards at Key Stage 3 are in line with national expectations. Key Stage 3 students are aware of issues concerning safety and hygiene. They learn a range of techniques, for example they successfully use templates to ensure precision in their making. They handle tools safely, working with increasing precision and attention to finish. They use knowledge gained by investigation and research, including taking things apart, to draw up sound specifications for the products they make so effectively. In some lessons, they learn quality control methods successfully. They use good drawing and sketching skills to communicate their designs. They evaluate their work well as it progresses.

169. At Key Stage 4 standards are above average. Students of textiles have a good knowledge and understanding of the elements that make up the bags they typically own, and they use these to develop their own designs. Graphics students demonstrate good drawing and rendering skills as they design point-of-sale displays. Their folders reflect a good general understanding of the design process. Electronics students have a good knowledge of components and apply good problem-solving skills to redesign circuits. Students exploit use of the Internet to research their projects in the GCSE control systems course. They analyse their research well and produce specifications for their products, drawing effectively on the knowledge and understanding they have gained. In food technology, students manage market research competently when they visit local supermarkets to conduct a survey of food products. They gain information for their studies by interviewing managers about promotional strategies and other marketing techniques. Food technologists are also competent researchers from the Internet, using a local cyber-café.

170. Standards in the sixth form are above the national average. Sixth form students work closely with tutors to select the focus for their individual projects. Their research is often very good. Their analysis includes aesthetics, environmental matters, the properties of materials and shows a high level of understanding. As with students at Key Stage 4, their presentation of ideas is usually good.

171. Progress at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, it is good. Key Stage 3 students make sound progress learning to handle tools and equipment safely and hygienically, for example Year 7 students learn to use a pillar drill in a mini-beast project. In Year 7, they develop their understanding of the place of testing materials and components when they time the use of various pieces of equipment in food technology. They make sound progress in developing their presentational skills and in gaining knowledge from research techniques - such as in taking things apart. They develop their design and problem-solving skills well when they attempt to design electronic circuits. Similarly, Year 10 students make good progress in using sketching to develop their design ideas, although in some classes time is lost and progress slows when students colour in borders or repeat motifs or logos on several pages. Good progress is made in aspects of technical drawing, including perspective and rendering. However, insufficient use is made of information technology to cut time wasted in repetitive tasks. Students develop their skills in product analysis in graphics by working on a project about craft knives. They successfully develop their knowledge and understanding of systems and control with electronic systems applied in projects that are often very challenging and involve the use of a variety of components, including solar cells and sensors. Year 12 students gain in understanding of

risk assessment procedures derived from industrial practice. Their technical drawing skills also improve as they tackle challenging tasks. Students with special educational needs progress at the same rate as other students.

172. Attitudes to learning are good. Students show high levels of interest in the work they do. They sustain good levels of concentration in lessons. They develop good research skills and demonstrate a high level of personal responsibility for their work. They collaborate well with each other and have formed good, productive relationships with their teachers. The good take-up rate for A level design and technology is evidence of students' commitment to the subject. The consistently high standard of presentation evident in folders and the pains students take over the finish of their work are proof of pride in what they do. They respect the fabric of the department, including the work on display. They behave most sensibly in all areas.

173. Teaching is good, overall. Teachers exhibit a high degree of subject knowledge especially in sixth form teaching. Their introductions to lessons are always clear and serve to direct students' efforts well, as for example, in a teacher's presentation to Year 9 on sauces in food technology, in which the presentation challenged students by requiring the closest observation of what was done. Teachers are good at supporting individuals, including those with special educational needs. The best teaching features good levels of enthusiasm and commitment. For example, the personal interventions and guidance of the teacher in a Year 12 lesson on graphically exploded views enthused and motivated the students. There is good planning and preparation of projects and good feedback to students that helps them to progress to the next stages of their tasks, particularly at Key Stage 4. For example, the good planning of the teacher of a Year 11 lesson on a display unit to promote a product, enabled students to share objectives, and evaluate what was achieved. Teachers' high standards of discipline and care ensure good practice in the working areas. They assess progress well, and the best teaching features marking practices that give students a full and clear indication of how they can improve their work.

174. Since the last inspection, there has been improvement in a number of areas. The level of challenge in all Key Stage 4 courses is now at least satisfactory. Schemes of work now give appropriate weight to the processes of investigation and evaluation and risk assessment is now a part of normal practice. All staff work well as a team. The joint heads of department have a clear vision for the improvement of aspects of the department, including the raising of standards at Key Stage 3 through the review and rewriting of schemes of work. The use of information technology in the department is not yet well advanced and needs a thorough review.

## **Geography**

175. Most students attain levels above the national expectation by the end of Key Stage 3. By the end of Key Stage 4 their attainment is above average. In 1998, GCSE results at grades A\* to C were above average. The 1999 results were broadly similar. Boys perform especially well compared with boys nationally. When compared with other subjects within the school, geography results are close to average. In recent years, A level results overall and for grades A and B have been close to the national average.

176. By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment in lessons is above average. Students have a good grounding in geographical skills and vocabulary and have a sound understanding of global problems. They have good knowledge of place but are weak in the plotting of statistical data. By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment continues to be above average. Students can explain a range of physical and human processes and apply a wide range of

skills very well to their coursework. Useful knowledge and understanding are gained of social and cultural issues through studies of Kenya and Japan. In the sixth form, students organise themselves well and develop a good grasp of geographical concepts in a variety of contexts. Students with special educational needs work well when specialist support is provided. Their standard of work is above that normally expected.

177. Most students make good progress at Key Stage 3. This results from good, well-organised teaching, the support given to students by caring staff and students' positive attitudes to learning. Most students show good progress at Key Stage 4 where more opportunity exists for investigatory project work. There is good teaching by specialists in the subject who have high expectations of students. Unusually receptive students intent on producing a good standard of work further ensure that progress is good. Overall, good progress is made in the sixth form, but a few students do not do so and need closer monitoring. Students' performance is always carefully assessed, but they need to be more fully involved in evaluating their own work and setting targets to sustain progress. There are shortages in resources which limit progress, for example a textbook for each sixth form student and an adequate supply of textbooks for all students at Key Stage 4 to allow for homework are lacking. There is no standing world display map or specific fieldwork budget.

178. Students' attitudes to learning are generally very positive and constructive at all key stages. They work conscientiously and their behaviour is not less than good, and often very good. They are attentive in class and work quietly, often with real interest and enjoyment. Students develop good relationships with their teachers, and there is real rapport at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. They relate very well to each other when working in groups. Students' response to questions is good individually, but teachers need to develop this further as a class activity.

179. Teaching is good. It is always at least satisfactory with more than seven out of every ten lessons of good or very good quality. Teaching is good at all key stages with much very good teaching at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Teachers are very committed and supportive, relate positively to students and manage them well. Most teaching includes clear aims shared with students, detailed planning and stimulating presentation delivered in a structured way. Lessons run at a good pace and students are well challenged by use of a range of teaching methods targeted towards students' differing abilities. However, teaching would benefit from the use of more visual materials, including reference to a standing world map. Consolidation and re-enforcement of main aims of the lesson with students' contributions on the board or overhead projector are sometimes lacking. More manageable tasks are sometimes required for lower attainers so that they can complete their assignments in the time allocated. Fieldwork greatly enriches learning and the best work is of very good quality. However, more is needed at Key Stage 3, particularly the opportunity for students to experience at first hand an environment outside the local area. Although progress has been made in developing the use of information technology, there is need for a coherent skills programme for use of computers linked directly to curricular themes. Teachers do not have the benefit of regular monitoring of teaching and learning, or of evaluation of the work of the department. The practice of splitting classes between two teachers in each year at Key Stage 3 is most unsatisfactory because of the problems of continuity and co-ordination created. Teachers mark students' work regularly, but there is insufficient developmental comment on written work at Key Stage 3 and grades at Key Stage 4 need to be more closely related to GCSE grades. There is good teamwork within the department ensuring teachers work co-operatively and successfully. On the Lumsdale site, specialist rooms do not provide sufficient space for investigatory resource based learning.

180. Since the previous inspection the quality of learning has improved, helped by the increased allocation of curricular time to the subject at Key Stage 3. Comments on records of achievement at the end of Key Stage 3 do now provide an indication of levels of attainment. The departmental scheme of work largely meets the requirements of the revised National Curriculum. There has been some, but insufficient, development of information technology. There is regular provision of fieldwork in Year 9. Appropriate use is now made of paired and group activities when undertaking enquiry work.

## **History**

181. In 1998, the proportion of students gaining GCSE grades A\* to C and A\* to G was significantly above the national average. Standards were maintained in 1999. In both years the proportion of students achieving grades A\* to C was well above the average of other subjects in the school. In 1998, all A level candidates achieved passes at grades A to E, well above the national average for all schools. Similar standards were maintained in 1999. More students gained grades A and B in 1999 than in 1998. Attainment at A level was strong in comparison with other subjects in the school.

182. At the end of Key Stage 3, attainment of most students is above national expectations and well above these for a substantial minority. Students develop competence in analysing evidence, training in which starts effectively using a detective mystery. They link the notion of continuity and change with chronology well, by setting changes in castle architecture against a time-line. Students also reflect successfully on the reactions of people to change by studying extracts from diaries which help develop an understanding of events and of how people might have felt at the time. This is extended by the writing of letters as if, for example, they were Harold Godwinson, or someone living through the Black Death.

183. At the end of Key Stage 4, standards are above the national average. Students distinguish successfully between background and immediate causes of the Irish Question and how these issues conditioned the attitudes of the protagonists in Northern Ireland and influenced governments' policies. Higher attaining students handle the inter-relationship of those causes competently. Students improve their research skills to a high standard in their coursework on the Lumsdale Valley.

184. In the sixth form, attainment is above the national average. Students make perceptive comments on political issues and how they were shaped by the interaction of events and personalities. They understand the inter-relationship of national and international events in analysing the motives behind the legislation of Lord Liverpool's government and its change of direction after 1820. The implications of differing causes are well interpreted in identifying the dilemma for Poor Law administrators striving to reconcile their responsibilities with their Christian beliefs. Students' ability to tease out implicit evidence is an additional skill of a high order, strengthened by wide interpretative reading of higher attainers. It complements their well-developed research skills, which they use very competently in their personal studies.

185. Progress for most students at Key Stage 3 is good. Students come quickly to terms with chronology, analysis of evidence and enquiry work. Many higher attainers make very good progress. Students with special educational needs mostly make good progress and very good progress in those classes where additional adult support is provided. Progress over Key Stage 4 is very good, with students continuing to develop their analytical and research skills. Those with special educational needs are helped considerably by specially produced resources, which enable them to make good progress. Progress in the sixth form

is good and for many it is very good. Students respond positively to the seminar-style of teaching, and progress arises from the extensive critical reading and essay planning that are required. Teachers manage their classes very well, creating an appropriately disciplined environment in which students can make good progress. They combine enthusiasm with humour to establish an attitude that is positive to learning. The quality of students' progress is an outcome of their generally very good behaviour and positive attitudes. Most students, including those with special needs, sustain concentration and respond to interactive work confidently.

186. At Key Stage 3, teaching is good. In almost half the lessons it is very good. At Key Stage 4 the quality of teaching is very good. In the sixth form, teaching in three-quarters of lessons is very good. Lessons have clearly defined objectives with a variety of well thought out activities that keep a good balance between enquiry and the imparting of knowledge by teachers directly. Their organisation includes a close link with special needs support, producing good teamwork. A thorough knowledge of history enables teachers to give effective guidance, for example, in supporting the wide range of topics chosen by sixth formers for their personal studies. Teachers have enthusiasm for history, which is well communicated to students and stimulates their interest and performance. Work is challenging and expectations are high. Targets are realistic and based on sound assessment procedures, although at Key Stage 3 teachers do not yet keep examples of assessed work for reference. Independent learning skills are encouraged strongly and developed in all year groups. The outcome is some very good individual work for GCSE and A level. However, resources for teaching and learning at Key Stage 3 are not adequate. Students have to share textbooks on occasions, and there are few support texts. There are few opportunities for students to develop and apply their computer skills in history.

187. Since the last inspection, teaching time at Key Stage 3 has been suitably increased. Teaching has improved so that the structure and balance of all lessons are sound with the result that at Key Stage 3 there is no evidence of underachievement and progress is good. Display is used effectively to celebrate and stimulate learning.

### **Information technology**

188. In short course GCSE information technology in 1999, taken for the first time in the school with an entry of over 90% of the year group, half attained grades A to C. No one attained grade A\*. All but a very few obtained a grade. The four students who entered for the full GCSE course in information technology attained grade A\*. Results compare suitably with other short GCSE courses in the school.

189. Students' attainment in information technology by the end of both key stages reaches standards expected nationally. At Key Stage 3, students attain nationally expected standards from a course equipping them with a basic grounding in the knowledge and skills required by the National Curriculum. Across Years 7 to 9, they improve their skills in communicating information and successfully use desktop-publishing software to combine text and graphics. They apply their skills effectively to create databases, for example when they enter details of a range of animals. They order and retrieve information competently, using simple lines of inquiry. Many access information from CD-ROMs and the Internet confidently, although most students use computers which they have at home for the latter. In lessons, they show understanding of the uses of spreadsheets to model information. For example, they apply this skill successfully to record cricket scores or record financial details for a disco. They use a simple programming language skilfully to control the movement of a pointer around the computer screen. Many can use this facility to draw complex geometrical

shapes.

190. At Key Stage 4, students successfully learn the range of skills and areas of knowledge and understanding required by the National Curriculum. Though the emphasis of the course is the communication and handling of information, students understand control and measurement of events and modelling of information. The standards they achieve are satisfactory in relation to the standards set out in the National Curriculum orders. Students develop their capability in information technology using a range of software applications. They use graphics and desktop publishing software competently to develop a range of business stationery. They successfully compare the characteristics of the different computer hardware and software they use. They have informed views about the impact of information technology on the world about them. On the course, they develop their skills well in the use of databases and spreadsheets. Provision in the sixth form enables students to continue to practise skills to a limited extent.

191. Students' progress in the subject at both key stages and in the sixth form is unsatisfactory because cross-curricular information technology has not been adequately developed in the school. A few departments have taken some responsibility for the teaching of aspects of the National Curriculum during Key Stage 3, such as the mathematics department who teach Logo in Year 8, but the level of activity in most departments is very low. As a consequence, the skills students acquire in Year 7 in the lessons dedicated to information technology are not sufficiently developed in Years 8 and 9. The progress students make during this key stage is unsatisfactory because they do not make the progress of which they are capable. This is also the case at Key Stage 4. Though all students follow the GCSE information technology short course, the time they are allotted for this is too short to provide sufficient opportunity to develop their skills to a satisfactory level to match their potential for the subject, and there are too few cross-curricular opportunities to do so.

192. Students have good attitudes to learning. They show good levels of interest in their lessons and conscientiously complete the homework they are set. They concentrate well in lessons. They are open and inquisitive, and they listen carefully to instructions and act on the advice they are given. Students are pleasant and polite to teachers and visitors.

193. Teaching in lessons specifically for information technology is good. Teachers of information technology have good subject knowledge and pass this effectively on to their students with much energy. For example, a teacher's effective introduction of a Year 7 class to desktop publishing conveyed subject knowledge at a good pace. Teachers have developed a comprehensive course for Year 7 and actively review and improve the effective schemes of work taught to Key Stage 4 students. Their enthusiasm for the subject is well conveyed to their classes. For example, in the Logo project with Year 10, students are helped to understand the practical application of information technology successfully, and learn to use it in context. Discipline and management in these classes are always good, and no time is wasted in lessons which are regularly well paced. Homework is appropriate and prepares for and effectively builds on what goes on in lessons. Assessment by teachers of information technology is manageable and secure. Although there is a suitable system of assessment in place that aims to show the performance of students across the curriculum, this is not working well in practice, and consequently the school is not able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of its delivery of information technology accurately enough.

194. Since the last inspection there has been some improvement in the provision of information technology in the school, particularly in the teaching of a basic level of skills to

all students. Although the school has plans to upgrade the quality and accessibility of computer equipment in the school, these have not been fully implemented due to financial constraints. The enhanced provision indicated in planning is a necessary minimum to help raise standards in information technology across the school. There is a continuing need for targeted training of teachers in aspects of information technology which are relevant to their own subjects.

### **Modern languages**

195. Results in A level examinations at grades A to E in 1998 were above the national average in French, but below in German and Spanish. Students securing grades A and B were close to the national average in French and Spanish, but were well below in German. In 1999, German results improved both overall and at grades A and B. French results were less marked at grades A and B, but all but one candidate passed. Spanish results were weakest of the three subjects. Results in the GCSE examinations at grades A\* to C in 1998 were above the national average in German and well above the national average in French and Spanish. Grades A\*-G were above the national average in all languages. The performance of girls in all three languages was above that of girls nationally. The performance of boys in French and Spanish was above that of boys nationally, but in German it was below. In school, girls outperformed boys in all three languages. However, students did not perform as well in modern languages as in other subjects, particularly boys. In 1999, French at grades A\* to C were well ahead of those in Spanish and German.

196. Students' attainment in their first foreign language by the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with the nationally expected standard. Students have a sound knowledge of their basic topic vocabulary. Their listening skills are good. They understand the foreign language used extensively by teachers. Listening exercises in almost every lesson help in the practice of topic vocabulary and in testing students' understanding. Speaking skills are developing, to improve pronunciation and to consolidate past work or new vocabulary, particularly through chorus work. Beginners in all three languages in Year 7 can participate in short conversations with partners. Writing skills are satisfactory. In some cases, spelling is approximate, and there is room for greater accuracy, particularly with accents.

197. Students' attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 in all three languages is above the national average. Listening skills are good. Students understand the foreign language used by the teachers in class and they are able to extract a range of information from conversations on cassette-tape and note the answers. Students have a good knowledge of topic vocabulary. Year 11 students in German performed a campsite role-play from memory. Students read aloud in Spanish and French lessons satisfactorily. Students demonstrate a good knowledge of topic vocabulary in their coursework.

198. Students' attainment in the sixth form is well in line with the national average in French and Spanish, and broadly in line in German. They are able to follow lessons conducted entirely in the foreign language, read the texts aloud with satisfactory pronunciation and elicit the main points from a range of topics. Students' oral competence is better in Spanish than in the other languages. Writing skills are developed in essays on various topics, assisted by regular grammatical exercises. Progress is satisfactory. Good progress from Key Stage 4 is consolidated and extended. Students acquire the necessary vocabulary to understand the texts and they gain new words and phrases in most lessons.

199. Students' progress at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory, but boys progress less rapidly than girls. The department has plans to introduce single gender classes to try to improve the situation. Students recall prior work and learn and consolidate new vocabulary in every

lesson. Recall of vocabulary learned for homework is now effectively challenged in weekly vocabulary tests. Higher attaining students in Year 8 French extend their sentences orally during lessons, using new phrases well. Rapid oral revision of numbers in a Year 9 Spanish lesson enabled students to cope with the 24-hour timetable in a reading and listening test. Progress at Key Stage 4 is good. Students learn and practise new words from the topics studied well. These are tested in listening exercises and used in writing practice for coursework, ensuring good progress. A Year 11 French class showed good recall of opinions about jobs, producing a list of ten, which was then successfully consolidated by a dice game in pairs. The teacher's use of a worksheet, well adapted for a wide range of attainment, helped students in Year 10 Spanish to write short sentences about their school. Similar good teaching in a Year 11 Spanish lesson, using an overhead projector with cassette text, helped students to a better understanding of a telephone message. Sixth form students make satisfactory progress. Year 13 students received instant feedback for their oral presentations in Spanish supporting progress well. Year 12 students in a French class made very good progress in writing about electronic music with the help of a well-prepared worksheet.

200. Students with special educational needs make at least satisfactory progress at both key stages. Generally they make better progress in oral and listening work than in writing, although one boy in a Year 8 German class scored a high mark in his vocabulary test. Only one boy made little progress in lessons through lack of concentration, despite receiving help from his teacher. Year 12 students give good support to teachers in some lessons with special needs students.

201. Students' attitudes to learning at all ages are never less than satisfactory, and in most lessons they are good. In the sixth form, their attitudes are often very good. Students are attentive and well behaved. They respond well in chorus work, but individual response to teachers' questions is often limited. They are very attentive in listening exercises and complete the vocabulary tests quickly. They work well together in pairs and carry out the tasks sensibly. They enjoy games and competitions. Concentration is well maintained. Scrutiny of last year's written work at Key Stage 3 shows that not all students take a pride in their presentation, particularly some boys. This is an area requiring further development, together with completion of corrections.

202. The quality of teaching is never less than satisfactory and in just under half of the lessons observed it is good or very good. All teachers are qualified linguists in two languages and they make very good use of the foreign language in the vast majority of lessons. Planning of lessons is sound, often with a good variety of tasks and language skills. The overhead projector is well used to provide a good visual element, either to consolidate work or to introduce new vocabulary. Chorus work and paired work are effectively used in many lessons, but some lessons would benefit from more challenge for individual students. Reading aloud is encouraged and helpful to learning. New vocabulary tests are being used consistently and effectively. Classroom management is sound. The scrutiny of last year's books at Key Stage 3 showed that marking was irregular and inconsistent. This aspect requires closer monitoring. Teachers have good relationships with their students. Homework is set regularly. The department makes a substantial contribution to students' social and cultural development with organised visits and exchanges to France, Germany and Spain. Teachers work very well together as a team and are committed to high achievement.

203. Improvement since the last inspection is good. A clear action plan has recently been produced, setting out the department's priorities. A reading scheme has been implemented, but there is a shortage of texts for reading practice. Coursework has been introduced for all



languages at Key Stage 4, pioneered this year by French, and resulting in much improved marks for the written component. A foreign language for all has been introduced. Lower attaining students take the certificate of achievement. Recently introduced vocabulary tests for all are effective in supporting learning. Single gender classes are to be trialled in one language next term in Year 7 in an effort to raise boys' attainment.

## **Music**

204. Attainment in GCSE was well above the national average in 1998, when all students attained grades A\* to C. Results were similar in 1999. These results are better than those attained by the same students in most of their other subjects. There are only a small number of sixth formers taking music as an A level subject, and they attain very good standards. At A level, results are usually above average. In 1999, four out of five students passed, two with grades A and B.

205. Students' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is at the nationally expected level. Their composition work is not strong, with their performance usually limited to keyboard work in lessons. Their listening skills and appraising skills are good, both for gathering information and enjoyment of music. At the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is above the national average. Most students are competent musicians and many have a very high level of commitment to the subject. For example, in one Year 11 lesson, students identified instruments accurately by ear, in a complex piece, and also successfully linked the music heard with the criteria of the National Curriculum. The performance of extra-curricular music is a real strength of the school, and high standards are maintained. The senior choir were heard singing in up to four parts with good intonation, very good tuning and excellent open tone. The large numbers of older students taking part in the various performing groups show very high standards of attainment.

206. Students' progress over Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, it is good. However, the whole class teaching style which is largely used does not always support progress for those with special educational needs well. However, in some lessons, teachers do support these students well individually and, overall, they progress equally with other students. The best progress is made when students become fully involved in the music which they hear. In one Year 9 class, this was effectively shown by their high quality oral contributions. In some Year 10 and Year 11 classes, review and consolidation are so well done that they make the process vital and exciting, with consequent impact on students' progress.

207. Students' response is never less than satisfactory, and is good and sometimes very good. Behaviour is very good. Students are purposeful and strongly mutually supportive. They listen and concentrate well as music is played in lessons. Adequate numbers choose to study music for GCSE and A level.

208. Teaching at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory and occasionally good. At Key Stage 4, it is good, and sometimes very good or excellent. In the sixth form, it is very good. Teachers have good musical knowledge and a good range of skills, with the result that students trust their judgement. Students are challenged appropriately. Planning is good, with flexibility built in so that work can be adapted to needs which emerge during lessons. However, teachers do not give students enough opportunity to work together and to use initiative. Excellent relationships ensure that teachers' management of classes and discipline are good. Humour is used well. The most exciting lesson seen was at Key Stage 4 on a composition on *Variation Form*, where the teacher shared a passion and enthusiasm for music in such a way as to stretch the imagination and awareness of students through

tightly focused activity and listening which required and received a high level of response. The atmosphere was electric and enjoyed by all.

209. Since the last inspection, little action is apparent concerning the broadening of teaching styles to include group-work. The current curriculum is at an early stage of development, and although the requirements of the National Curriculum are met, content and balance between requirements have not been fully achieved. Composition is a weakness, and the multi-cultural content is not adequate. About 10% of students have instrumental lessons, and 16% of students are involved in strong extra-curricular provision. Resources are poor, particularly in tuned percussion, and this inhibits full access to the curriculum.

### **Physical education**

210. Attainment of GCSE grades A\* to C is well above average compared to other subjects in the school and to national standards. Standards have been maintained over time. At the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is at least average and usually good. At the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is above average. For example in gymnastics, girls show increased control and improved performance and are able to analyse and improve their work. Students' written work is thorough and reflects good knowledge and understanding. Girls in particular use technical language confidently. In practical work, attainment is never less than satisfactory and often very good. Most pupils have good hand and eye co-ordination and the more able show very high levels of skill. For example, in badminton they sustain long rallies, performing the range of forehand and backhand strokes confidently and consistently. In volleyball, students play to a competitive standard. At both key stages, all students including those with special educational needs attain well. Physical education is not part of the curriculum in the sixth form.

211. Progress over Key Stage 3 is good. Good progress occurs in gymnastics where construction of sequences is clear. In hockey, badminton and rugby there are clear increases in students' skills. Progress over Key Stage 4 is good, with pupils of all abilities improving. There are some particularly good performances in badminton at this level. Those with special educational needs are well integrated into lessons and show good improvement in hand and eye co-ordination and racket skills. However, lack of classroom space for GCSE lessons is unhelpful to an even progression in the theoretical elements of the curriculum. Insufficient indoor accommodation at Lumsdale reduces the range of activities which can be followed, and, therefore, the range of students' knowledge and experience.

212. Students' attitudes and behaviour are consistently at least good and usually very good. Non-participation in the activities in lessons is very low at Key Stage 3 and low at Key Stage 4. Students are enthusiastic and interested. They behave courteously and responsibly and work well together. Working relationships between students and teachers are very good and lessons proceed with purpose, application and enjoyment. Students sustain concentration well. At Key Stage 4, they referee games in basketball and netball responsibly. They accept refereeing decisions from teachers and fellow pupils without dispute. Students are dressed appropriately for the subject at all times.

213. Teaching is never less than satisfactory, mostly good and occasionally very good. Where it is very good, methods are suitably varied and provide for students of all abilities, enabling them to progress rapidly and plan their work. This occurs particularly in gymnastics lessons with girls at Key Stage 3 and in games at both key stages. For example, an effective warm-up for a Year 7 lesson in gymnastics led to infectious

confidence encouraging the class to achieve well in the activities which followed. The teacher's emphasis on quality of movement in a Year 8 gymnastics lesson immediately led to an improved quality of work. Lessons are well prepared, have clear aims and objectives and proceed with good pace. Much teaching of games shows teachers exhibiting sound subject knowledge, which increases students' confidence. For example, the teacher of a Year 11 lesson on badminton linked theory to practice very effectively, including good anatomical connections, to help students' understanding. Attainment and progress are enhanced because expectations of students are usually high. There is a need, however, to extend the extra-curricular programme, particularly for boys at both key stages and in the sixth form. Approximately one in five students participate in extra-curricular sporting activities. For a school of this size, only a small number of teachers contribute, mainly members of the physical education department, although not all physical education staff do so.

214. Since the previous inspection, a number of positive changes have occurred. Participation is now good at Key Stage 4 with very little evidence that students are reluctant to participate. There is improvement in teaching at Key Stage 4, where tasks for able students and those with special educational needs are now appropriate. Assessment is very thorough and meets all requirements of the National Curriculum. The extra-curricular sports programme for girls is adequate in the current term, although enthusiastic girls in Year 10 have no opportunity to play competitive school hockey outside lessons. Extra-curricular opportunities for boys are insufficient.

#### 157. **Religious education**

215. The very small number of students entered for A level in 1998 achieved passes at the lower grades. There were no A level candidates in 1999. In the full course GCSE examination in 1998, with very small entry numbers, results at the A\* to C grades were well below the national average. In 1999, the result was similar to that achieved in the school in 1998. Results were low in comparison with other subjects in the school. An appeal has been lodged against the 1999 results. However, the short course GCSE examination was taken for the first time in 1999, with 59% A\* to C grades and 95% obtaining A\* to G grades. Comparable national figures are not yet available, but this is a very good result, because most students in the year group took the examination, an extremely large number, and the time available in school, one period of 50 minutes per week, is below recommended time, which would amount to 75 minutes per week.

216. By the end of Key Stage 3, students' attainment is in line with the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus for religious education. Knowledge and understanding develop during Key Stage 3, enabling students to use religious terminology accurately and grasp the importance of religious beliefs for many people. By the end of Key Stage 4, students' attainment is above average, and reflects the standards achieved in the GCSE short course results. Higher attaining students discuss issues and write extended answers in abstract terms, using religious ideas and beliefs well. Average attaining students have a very good knowledge of religious issues giving reasonably detailed factual answers. Lower attaining students answer straight-forward factual questions correctly, but lack reasoning skills. The attainment of students in the religious education section of modern studies in the sixth form is in line with expectations.

217. All students make good progress. Participation in lessons is expected, demanding concentration in readiness to answer questions so that knowledge is consolidated and understanding increases. Students use initiative in researching information on religious topics. Class presentations and written answers indicate a growing understanding of

religion. High attaining students take opportunities to accelerate progress by accepting the challenge to explore a topic in great depth. Average attaining students respond to comments on how to improve, learn from each other in discussions and begin to answer questions in more detail. Low attaining students answer oral questions accurately and concentrate on writing in short sentences. Students with special educational needs receive effective support which allows them to make good progress through use of careful questions, specially designed worksheets and teacher help. The targets in individual education plans give a clear focus to enable the teacher to base judgements of progress. Progress in a small number of lessons slows towards the end, when a few students lose concentration.

218. Students demonstrate very positive attitudes. Excitement, enjoyment and fun are features of many lessons leading to high participation, good progress and raised attainment. Twenty students are willing to do extra work one lunch time weekly in order to enter the full course GCSE examination. Over thirty students attend a religious based lunch-time club. High expectations for work and behaviour are set by staff and appreciated by students. On the one occasion poor behaviour was observed, it was dealt with quickly and effectively. Classroom conditions allow students to share beliefs and values in an atmosphere that breathes care and respect for each individual. Many comments are moving, and students learn much about each other and themselves, contributing highly to spiritual and personal development. Students develop skills of co-operation and work well together in small groups which prove very challenging, especially for boys in the lower school.

219. The quality of teaching at Key Stage 3 was very good in over half the lessons observed, good in over a third and satisfactory in the remainder. All the lessons observed at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form were good. Non-specialist religious education staff add a dimension which benefits the department. Excellent subject knowledge allows teachers to give very clear explanations and make topics and issues relevant to students. Questions are well structured to match different levels of attainment. Homework extends and enriches class-work. It provides good opportunities for students to use initiative in presenting work in imaginative ways. In the week of inspection, students brought in baptism certificates, which they had designed to a very high standard, many using skills of information technology. Information technology is not part of the scheme of work for all students. Teachers' planning of lessons is very thorough with clear aims and objectives, but is not often shared with students. Limited resources are very well used. A lesson in which choosing religious artefacts, describing the item chosen and working out which religion it came from, was extremely effective in capturing the attention of students. Marking includes appropriate comments helping students improve future work, but the departmental assessment procedures are inadequate. In some lower school lessons teachers talk for too long, leaving insufficient time for students' activity. The newly qualified teacher and the non-specialist staff get good support from the head of department. Better planning is required for one Year 8 group, which has both its lessons on the same day, taught by different teachers.

220. Very good progress has been made on the issues raised by the last inspection. The short GCSE course provides religious education for all students at Key Stage 4 and the first results are very encouraging. Religious education is provided in the sixth form, through philosophy in Year 12 and general studies in Year 13. The school now fully meets requirements. This was a key issue at the last inspection. Textbooks were barely satisfactory at the last inspection, now they are unsatisfactory. At the last inspection, some skilful teaching was observed, now the quality of teaching is good overall and often very good. Information technology is not yet part of the scheme of work for all students and is

insufficiently used in lessons.

## **PART C: INSPECTION DATA**

### **SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

221. The inspection team consisted of fourteen inspectors who spent 176 hours observing 246 lessons. Registrations, assemblies and extra-curricular activities were also observed. Thirty-four planned discussions were held with teaching and support staff and also with governors. Inspectors studied, in depth, the work of a representative sample of six students of higher, middle and lower attainment from each year group, and a sample of the work of a range of students with special educational needs. Planned discussions were held with all these students. Discussions, both formal and informal, were held with many more. The considerable amount of documentation provided by the school before and during the inspection was analysed. The registered inspector and a team inspector held a meeting with parents before the inspection, and the team considered the responses to a questionnaire, some with accompanying written comment, from 172 parents.

## DATA AND INDICATORS

### Pupil data

	Number of pupils on roll (full-time equivalent)	Number of pupils with statements of SEN	Number of pupils on school's register of SEN	Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals
Y7 – Y13	1478	78	373	81

### Teachers and classes

#### Qualified teachers (Y7 – Y13)

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent)	84.34
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.5

#### Education support staff (Y7 – Y13)

Total number of education support staff	16
Total aggregate hours worked each week	501.5

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:	79.4
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Average teaching group size:	KS3	23
	KS4	21

### Financial data

Financial year: 

1998-9
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	£
Total Income	3016787
Total Expenditure	3087817
Expenditure per pupil	2059
Balance brought forward from previous year	1728
Balance carried forward to next year	-71030

## PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out:	1478
Number of questionnaires returned:	172

### 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	8.7	63.4	18.6	8.1	1.2
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	29.7	61.6	4.7	3.5	0.6
The school handles complaints from parents well	14.4	50.3	23.4	10.2	1.8
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	11.7	53.2	22.8	11.7	0.6
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	24.4	56.4	11.6	7.0	0.6
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	22.7	68.6	5.8	2.9	0
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	24.0	56.7	13.5	5.3	0.6
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	11.7	63.2	11.1	12.9	1.2
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	15.3	61.2	17.6	4.7	1.2
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	14.7	56.5	22.9	5.9	0
My child(ren) like(s) school	34.7	57.1	4.1	4.1	0

### Other issues raised by parents

The main concerns of minorities of parents, raised in written form accompanying questionnaire returns and in the parents' meeting, were those indicated in the summary of returns above, namely the quality of homework, insufficient information to parents and how their complaints are handled. A few parents expressed concern about standards since the headteacher's appointment, and whether senior management is ensuring consistently high standards of work and teaching in all subjects. Many parents are concerned that the school's income is so low, with the result that learning resources are inadequate. Some parents expressed forthright views that provision for girls' extra-curricular sport was inadequate.

In general, parents express strong support for the school, consider that their children like attending it, and believe its ethos is very positive. The inspection team examined issues raised by parents, and the findings are given in the report.

The team found the views of parents very helpful and informative in assisting the inspection process.