

# INSPECTION REPORT

Albany High School  
Chorley  
LEA area: Lancashire

Unique Reference Number: 119768

Headteacher: Mrs Marian Catterall

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Reporting inspector: Mr B L Leek

Dates of inspection: 8 – 12<sup>th</sup> November 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 708484

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
Type of control:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Dr J Ashton
Date of previous inspection:	20-24 <sup>th</sup> March 1995

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Mr N Shelley, Lay Inspector	Equal Opportunities	The efficiency of the school Attendance Support, guidance and pupils' welfare Partnership with parents and the community
Mrs J Tracey Mr L Robarts	Mathematics English	Curriculum and assessment Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
Mr B Lord	Science	Staffing, accommodation and learning resources
Mrs H Marsland Mr J Clay	Design and Technology Information technology	
Mrs A Powell	Modern Foreign Languages	
Mr C Kendrick	History	
Mrs O Harrison	Geography	Attitudes, behaviour and personal development
Mr A Pearson	Physical Education	
Mr R Pitcher	Religious Education Special Educational Needs	
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## MAIN FINDINGS

### What the school does well

- Pupils' attainment is enhanced 0 levels above those that would be expected from their starting points on the school.
- The school is exceptionally well led and managed by the headteacher who provides clear direction and, in conjunction with a strong management team
- The overall quality of teaching is good; it is very good in art where the standard of work is outstanding.
- The school cares for its pupils well and creates a very positive ethos in which pupils thrive, develop mature skills and a sense of responsibility
- Pupils with special educational needs receive high class support and make good progress.
- Relationships are particularly strong and this is a significant feature in promoting good behaviour.
- The school effectively promotes personal development and prepares pupils well for employment or further education.
- The school promotes very good development of moral and social aspects and good development of intellectual and cultural aspects of the pupils' education
- Pupils' progress is regularly checked and appropriate targets are set for them; these raise their expectations and motivation.
- School improvement planning is very good, finances are well deployed and the school provides very good

### Where the school has weaknesses

- I. Standards of attainment in English, including Literature and drama, foreign languages, music and art education (for non-GCSE pupils at Key Stage 4) are not as high as they could be
- II. Progress in developing literacy skills, particularly reading, is not fast enough.
- III. Information technology is not coordinated well enough to ensure that all pupils, particularly at Key Stage 3, are making the progress of which they are capable

**The school provides a high quality education for its pupils and it has the ability to improve further. Its weaknesses are considerably outweighed by its strengths. The weaknesses will form the basis of the governors' action plan which will be sent to all parents or guardians of pupils at the school.**

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

The school has made good progress since the previous inspection. Pupils' attainment although not rising when compared to national averages is being considerably enhanced when the attainment of pupils on entry to the school is taken into account. External data, such as local authority ability tests, national Key Stage 3 tests and GCSE results, are now analysed rigorously to set appropriate and challenging targets. Pupils' expectations of what they can achieve have been raised and their motivation increased. A new marking policy has been implemented which has had a significant positive effect on pupils' attitudes; they now know what they are good at and what they have to do to improve in the subjects they study. Teachers also have a better record of pupils' progress and plan their lessons accordingly. Provision for pupils with special needs has been dramatically improved and is one of the strongest features of the school. The progress made by these pupils is good and almost all achieve GCSE accreditation. The school has substantially improved the accommodation; there are now good library facilities, a new design and technology suite, an upgraded music suite and additional rooms for computers. As yet there has been insufficient time for these improvements to impact fully on pupils' progress. The school has also made progress in developing procedures for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching. Although effective at senior management level it has not yet been fully implemented by all heads of department. Similarly the school has worked towards, but not quite met, the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship by having two year assemblies per week and spending some time on the other days reflecting on

a 'thought for the day'.

In addition to the issues raised in the previous inspection a number of new initiatives have been introduced which are having a strong positive effect on pupils' attainment, attitudes and personal development. These include peer counselling, in which trained pupils give advice or guidance to other pupils who request it, and paired reading. The whole ethos of the school, built on good relationships and a commitment to raise standards, has been improving steadily over recent years and together with an exceptionally strong management structure puts the school in a very strong position to make further improvements.

**Standards in subjects**

The following table shows standards achieved by 14 and 16 year olds in national tests and GCSE examinations in 1999:

<b>Performance in:</b>	<b>Compared with all schools</b>	<b>Compared with similar schools</b>	<b>Key</b>
Key Stage 3 Test	C	A	<i>well above average</i>
			<i>above average</i>
			<i>average</i>
GCSE Examinations	D	B	<i>below average</i>
			<i>well below average</i>

On entry to the school, pupils' attainment is well below average in English, mathematics and science. At the end of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, pupils' attainment in relation to their age has risen to below average in English and average in mathematics and science. When compared to schools of similar background they are above average in English and well above average in mathematics and science.

Standards in art rise from above average in year 9 to well above average in year 11. High quality art work permeates the whole school. Pupils who study statistics also achieve good standards.

Standards in foreign languages, music, English literature, drama and religious education for non-GCSE pupils at Key Stage 4 are below average. In all other subjects standards are average when judged against all schools but above average when considered against schools with a similar intake.

**Quality of teaching**

	<b>Overall quality</b>	<b>Most effective in:</b>	<b>Least effective in:</b>
Years 7-9	Good	Mathematics, science, art, design and technology, history, geography, information technology, physical education, and religious education	English, drama, foreign languages, music.
Years 10-11	Good	Mathematics, science, art, design and technology, history,	English, drama, information technology, foreign languages, music.



geography, physical  
education, religious  
education, business  
studies

English	Satisfactory
Mathematics	Good

Teaching is good overall at both key stages; only four lessons out of 158 observed were unsatisfactory.

It was good or better in 60 per cent of lessons and very good in slightly more than one in five lessons. The overall quality of teaching in the individual subjects varies between good and satisfactory and there is only a small difference in their effectiveness apart from art where the teaching is very good. However, the highest proportion of very good teaching occurs at Key Stage 3 in design and technology, history, geography, science, and information technology.

The very good teaching was characterised by very good relationships, teachers' subject knowledge and their ability to use this to inspire and motivate their pupils. In the satisfactory lessons the work set was not always sufficiently challenging for all the pupils and the pace could have been greater.

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

#### Other aspects of the school

Aspect	Comment
Behaviour	Good. Pupils are courteous and considerate. The school has a small number of pupils with behavioural problems that are dealt with effectively.
Attendance	Attendance and punctuality are good.
Ethos*	Pupils' attitudes to learning, their relationships with other pupils and staff and the caring nature of the school are all very good. Pupils respond well to the school's high expectations of them.
Leadership and management	First class. The headteacher has a clear vision and provides very good direction and purpose, ably supported by the senior management team, the governors and staff.
Curriculum	Good overall. It is broad and balanced and the personal and social education, careers and extra-curricular provision all make a very good contribution to pupils' development. There is a small number of over-large classes which restrict pupils' progress and a number of pupils with special needs have restricted access to some subjects by being withdrawn from the same classes every week. The current requirement that all pupils study a second language in year 9 is inappropriate. Allocation of curriculum time to non-GCSE religious education at Key Stage 4 is insufficient to meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus.
Pupils with special educational needs	Pupils make good progress overall, but at Key Stage 3 it is often better than this due to well structured support and the high quality of teaching they receive.
Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development	Very good overall, with the provision for social and moral being slightly better than that for spiritual and cultural.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	Satisfactory overall. Appropriately qualified and experienced staff set good standards. Accommodation has recently been improved for design and technology, music and physical education. The library has also been upgraded but as yet it is not fully utilised. The information technology

Value for money

facilities have also been considerably improved but some technical support is needed to gain maximum efficiency.

The basic income per pupil is average but pupils make good progress from low starting points and the school adds considerable value. Good teaching and the very good personal development of the pupils equate to very good

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

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

### **What most parents like about the school**

- IV. Good standards of work
- V. Good behaviour of the pupils
- VI. The help and guidance which pupils receive and availability of extra support
- VII. The quality and quantity of information supplied
- VIII. That parents are encouraged to be involved in school and are consulted

### **What some parents are not happy about**

- IX. The quality of school reports
- X. Some aspects of homework, such as irregular
- XI. The handling of complaints

Only a very small number of parents expressed the concerns stated in the above table. Almost all parents are happy with the quality of education provided. They state that their children enjoy coming to school. The inspectors' findings match the positive opinions of the parents except for the quality of pupils' reports. Here the inspectors agreed with the parents' view; the reports lacked consistency with some subjects devoting too much attention to what has been done rather than what the pupil has attained. The inspectors also found that although homework is set regularly its effectiveness varies between subjects. The planners are well used and keep parents informed of the work to be done at home. There is no evidence that the handling of complaints departed from the school policy.

## **KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION**

*In order to improve further the quality of educational provision and educational standards achieved, the governors, headteacher and staff should:*

Raise the level of attainment in:

- XII. English by improving the quality of management and leadership; raising the quality of teaching to that of the best in the school by more effective sharing of good practice; and by setting realistic and achievable targets for improvement; (paragraphs 8, 65, 69 and 74-75)
- XIII. drama, by ensuring that pupils acquire the essential basic drama skills by the end of Key Stage 3 and by providing regular access to an appropriate space in which to create drama; (paragraphs 8 and 80)
- XIV. foreign languages by concentrating resources on one foreign language whilst still providing opportunities for pupils to study two and by raising pupils' speaking skills; (paragraphs 6-8, 26, 129-134)
- XV. music by placing more emphasis on composing and appraising, increasing the pace of lessons and providing essential equipment, such as computer, keyboard and instrumental resources; (paragraphs 6 and 136-142)
- XVI. religious education for the non-examination pupils at Key Stage 4 by allocating more time to the subject. (paragraphs 8, 25, 27, 151 and 154)

Improve the rate of pupils' progress in acquiring literacy skills, particularly reading, at Key Stage 3

- XVII. by implementing a whole school attack on poor reading skills; developing reading routine strategies; encouraging pupils to read for pleasure, providing a wide range of books that are appealing and challenging to the full ability range and by making a more structured use of the library. (paragraphs 10-12, 61, 65, 67 and 77-79)

Enable Key Stage 4 pupils to make better progress in information technology from the standards reached at the end of Key Stage 3 by: improving coordination so that application of the full range of information technology skills is practised across the curriculum; measuring pupils' progress more accurately; and ensuring that there is appropriate technical support.

(paragraphs 8,14, 25 and 120-126)

*In addition to the key issues, the following less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the action plan:*

- \* Amend the annual pupil reports to include more details of what each pupil knows, is able to do and understands.
- \* Introduce procedures, particularly at Key Stage 3, to ensure that all teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment are reliable.
- \* As resources allow reduce the size of the largest classes.
- \* Improve the monitoring and evaluation procedures in departments in order that the best teaching practices are identified and shared.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Characteristics of the school**

1. Albany High School is a Community School catering for boys and girls of all abilities aged between 11 and 16. It has 817 pupils on roll with approximately 5% more boys than girls. Situated in the south-east of Chorley the school draws its pupils from an area that is made up of council and high density terraced housing containing pockets of social deprivation in close proximity to more recently built privately owned housing. Although the intake contains pupils of all abilities it is skewed towards the lower end of the ability range. The attainment level on entry to the school has been well below average but has improved recently to below average. Just over 21% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals which is slightly above the national average. 31 pupils are from ethnic minorities with 27 from homes where English is not the first language. Currently 21.7% of pupils are on the special needs register, although this figure has usually been higher, and 5.5% have statements of special educational need which is well above average.

2. The main aim of the school is to raise standards of achievement and improve the quality of education offered. To that end its priorities are to:

- 1) ensure a consistency in performance across core subjects in line with the highest performing department;
- 2) put in place a more effective system of identifying under-achievers and mentor them more effectively;
- 3) extend academic monitoring and mentoring to all years;
- 4) ensure that the 3 learning improvement teams effectively support pupils' learning in all years by reducing pupil disaffection, enhancing learning and by increasing staff responsibility for pupils' learning and achievements;
- 5) explore ways of broadening the curriculum at KS4;
- 6) develop strategies to raise boys' performance;
- 7) and to improve systems of monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning.



2. **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	92	73	165

2. <b>National Curriculum Test Results</b>		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	48	55	50
	Girls	54	49	35
	Total	102	104	85
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	62(46)	64(59)	52(54)
	National	63(65)	62(59)	55(56)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	28(21)	31(34)	18(27)
	National	28(35)	38(36)	23(27)

2. <b>Teacher Assessments</b>		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	40	60	37
	Girls	39	49	31
	Total	79	109	68
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	48(50)	66(63)	40(49)
	National	64(61)	64(64)	60(60)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	30(21)	33(35)	24(26)
	National	31(30)	37(37)	28(30)

**Attainment at Key Stage 4<sub>1</sub>**

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	79	68	144

<b>GCSE Results</b>		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	25	76	78
	Girls	30	62	66
	Total	55	138	98
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	37.4(40.0)	94(94)	99(100)
	National	47.8(46.1)	88.4(87.3)	93.9(94.8)

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

	Number	% Success rate
School	0	
National		

<sup>1</sup> Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

## Attendance

Percentage of half days (sessions) missed			%
through absence for the latest complete	Authorised	School	8.0
reporting year:	Absence	National comparative data	7.9
	Unauthorised	School	0.3
	Absence	National comparative data	1.1

2.

2.

2.

## Exclusions

Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school age) during		Number
the previous year:	Fixed period	47
	Permanent	5

2.

## Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is:		%
	Very good or better	20.9
	Satisfactory or better	97.5
	Less than satisfactory	2.5

## 2. PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

### 2. EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

#### 2. Attainment and progress

##### 2. *Recent test and examination results*

3. The overall results for the 1999 National Key Stage 3 tests are in line with the national average but when compared with the results from schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds are well above average. The results in mathematics and science have remained consistently close to the national averages over the last four years and in mathematics the results have been close to the teachers' own assessments of pupils' performance. In science, teacher assessment has generally been lower than the test result for pupils reaching the target level 5 but has been similar for level 6. In English, results in the three years preceding 1999 have been consistently below or well below average at both levels 5 and 6 but this year they improved significantly to match the national average. Teacher assessment of pupils' performance in English has generally been higher than the test results in previous years although it did not indicate the significant improvement in 1999. In many subjects at Key Stage 3 teacher assessments are not very secure as procedures are at an early stage of development. However, these assessments indicate that in all other subjects, attainment in 1999 is broadly similar to the national average except for history and geography which are below and design and technology, art and foreign languages which are above. There are some differences between the performance of boys and girls but these rarely exceed the national pattern and they vary from year to year as the cohort varies in the mix of boys and girls and their respective levels of prior attainment.

4. The 1999 GCSE examination results, as measured by pupils' average points scored in the examination and by the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A\*-C grades, were slightly below the national average but above average when compared to similar schools. However, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A\*-G grades and the proportion gaining at least one A\*-G grade was above the national average and well above average when compared with similar schools. Over the last four years the average total GCSE points score per pupil has been close to the national average with no trend whilst the national trend has been rising. The 1999 points score was the lowest the school has recorded over this period but it must be considered against the prior attainment on entry to the school of the pupils who took the examination. Using 'attainment on entry' information it is possible to predict GCSE results. These predictions were exceeded comfortably. Both the local authority and the governors set higher targets. These were exceeded and nearly met respectively indicating that pupils' performance had been considerably enhanced during their time at Albany. A particularly noteworthy feature is the fact that although the school has an above average proportion of pupils with special needs almost all pupils leave with some GCSE accreditation. Girls have consistently obtained a higher points score than boys but this difference is smaller than the national difference and is generally due to the differences in attainment on entry to the school.

5. GCSE results show a clear difference in performance between subjects, indicating room for improvement. Art results have been outstanding; over the last two years 45 pupils have taken the examination, 19 have obtained A\* or A grades, 18 B or C grades and the remaining 8 a D grade. A small number of pupils taking statistics have also achieved above average results as have those pupils taking physical education. The school has a policy of entering pupils early for GCSE if they are ready. A particularly noteworthy result was obtained by twelve Year 9 pupils in 1999 who gained GCSE grades C and above in mathematics. Science results have been broadly similar to the national averages over the last two years, being better in 1999 than 1998. In both years science had a high proportion of A\* and A grades. In mathematics the proportion of pupils gaining A-C grades was slightly below average in both years. Results in English language, literature and drama, all related subjects, have been well below average in both 1998 and 1999. Results in design and technology and geography are average. Below average results occur in history, foreign languages, although German in 1998 was better than French in 1999, music(1998) and business studies.

*First-hand inspection findings based on observation of pupils at work, discussion with them, analysis of their previous work, and scrutiny of teachers' assessments and records*

6. The older pupils in Key Stage 3 entered the school with mean attainment levels well below average and although the younger pupils have improved attainment levels they are still below average. Throughout the Stage pupils make good overall progress and by the end of year 9 their attainment is broadly average. Pupils make satisfactory progress in English and good progress in mathematics and science. By the end of year 9 attainment in relation to standards expected nationally is below average in



English and average in mathematics and science. The Key Stage 3 national tests and teacher assessments broadly confirm these findings. In other subjects at Key Stage 3 progress is very good and attainment above average in art; progress is good and attainment average in design and technology, information technology, history, geography, physical education and religious education; and progress is satisfactory and attainment below average in foreign languages and music.

7. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress in English at Key Stage 3 due to the very skilful teaching of reading and spelling and also due to the small teaching groups. Their progress in science is good and in mathematics satisfactory. Low attaining pupils would make better progress in French, which they have studied for two previous years, if they did not have to study another language, German, in year 9. Pupils whose first language is not English make similar progress to other pupils.

8. Pupils continue to make good overall progress in Key Stage 4 and by the time they reach the end of year 11 their attainment is broadly average which indicates considerable enhancement from when they entered the school. In English pupils make satisfactory progress and by the end of the Stage their attainment is below average. In mathematics and science pupils' progress is good and their attainment is average at the end of the Stage. Standards in English are lower than in mathematics and science due to progress being slower than the national trend. However, recent changes have brought about improvements. Standards are rising and are better than GCSE results indicate. The main weaknesses are in reading and writing. In other subjects, pupils' progress throughout the Stage is very good in art with attainment at the end of the Stage being well above average. Standards of drawing and painting are exceptionally good. In design and technology, history, geography, and physical education progress is good and attainment is average. In foreign languages progress is satisfactory but attainment is below average with speaking being the main weakness. Similarly in music, progress is satisfactory taking into account pupils' starting points but attainment is below average with composing and appraising not as good as some aspects of aural work and performing. Insufficient time is allocated to non-examination religious education in Key Stage 4 and hence overall progress is unsatisfactory although often good in individual lessons. Overall attainment is below average but better in the optional GCSE course. Progress is unsatisfactory in information technology because the course followed by most of the pupils concentrates on basic skills rather than the applications of information technology. However a significant minority extend their skills through the business studies course and by individual initiatives and, overall, attainment is average. Pupils make unsatisfactory progress in drama as they do not develop the basic skills early enough and attainment is below average.

9. Pupils with special educational needs generally make good progress in Key Stage 4. It is not quite as good as in Key Stage 3 in a number of subjects, such as English, where pupils do not receive the same high level of support. In art, however, pupils with special needs and those with low attainment in other subjects make exceptional progress. High attaining pupils make very good progress in some subjects; for example, in mathematics they are entered early for GCSE examinations with creditable success and in science, where they obtain a good proportion of A\* GCSE grades. Girls generally perform slightly better than boys but overall the difference is not significant.

#### 9. *Literacy skills*

10. Overall standards of literacy are below average, but the key weakness is pupils' poorer than expected reading skills. A large proportion of pupils enter the school with reading problems. Those with particularly low reading ability make very good improvement in Key Stage 3 because of the school's successful programme for them. However, other pupils do not receive the same degree of attention, and their reading lags behind improvements seen nationally. Good practice is emerging in geography of effective reading materials to suit poor or reluctant readers. In most subjects other than English and geography, opportunities to read aloud or read generally about the subject are limited to textbooks. The low level of reading skills generally is restricting pupils' attainment in those subjects that rely for success on pupils' deep understanding of what they read.

10. Though writing standards are below average, they are better than pupils' reading skills. Opportunities are given in English for pupils to write for many purposes. In design technology, pupils learn note-taking skills when they write for real ends, supervised by a teacher with industrial experience. Pupils do not get regular access to information technology within subjects which would enable them to improve the standards of their writing. Teachers in many subjects help pupils' spelling by giving them lists of key words and by marking spelling and punctuation. Opportunities to write at length and imaginatively are rare in subjects other than English.

11. Pupils enjoy learning through speaking. In art and information technology lessons pupils enjoy the positive promotion of language by those subjects. Listening skills are developed well in mathematics because pupils listen to each other's explanations and then discuss them. Though some opportunity is given in English for pupils to share ideas, in other subjects pupils' speaking

is mainly confined to answering teachers' questions to establish facts or correct response.

### *Numeracy*

12. Pupils' basic mathematical skills are weak on entry to the school. They make good progress particularly in developing their mental arithmetic skills but they do not always use these when appropriate, preferring to use calculators, which they generally use accurately. They use some of their mathematical skills in science, design and technology and business studies but these are not planned specifically to improve or reinforce numeracy skills. A structured whole-school approach to numeracy is planned, which will be beneficial when implemented.

13.  
*skills*

### *Information and communication technology*

13. Pupils generally have sound word processing and presentational skills but other aspects are not so well developed. Opportunities to use spreadsheets for interpreting information are often missed when working on projects although pupils extend their ability to use spreadsheets for graphs in mathematics and science. Very few pupils use computers for control or data capture. Information technology is not used consistently across the curriculum to assist pupils' learning in the various subjects. For example, pupils rarely receive opportunities to improve their writing by drafting and re-drafting their work. However, some pupils extend their presentational skills in design and technology and use computer aided design and manufacture. Others successfully retrieve information from CD ROMs in French, history, geography, art and English and a few pupils manipulate images in art.

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

14. Throughout the school pupils behave well, form very good relationships with each other and their teachers, have very positive attitudes towards learning and grow in maturity. As they near the end of Key Stage 4 they conduct themselves as responsible young adults who are prepared to speak their minds, think of other people and are prepared to contribute towards the community. Pupils are interested in learning. They come to lessons well prepared with the right equipment, settle quickly and listen carefully to what their teachers have to say. Teachers, particularly form tutors, devote much time at the beginning of Year 7 encouraging these positive attitudes and pupils respond very well to the school's high expectations of attention and performance. Pupils of all ages sustain their concentration very well and organise themselves sensibly when working together, respecting each other's contributions. Pupils show pride in their work, take care with its presentation and are prepared to persevere in order to make it even better. Pupils readily take part in discussions and are prepared to ask questions that will help to deepen their understanding. This is particularly evident in lessons in Key Stage 4, where pupils demonstrate a mature attitude towards debate and a consideration for the views of others. Pupils appreciate the school's system of rewards for good work.

15. Pupils' good behaviour in the classroom and around school helps to create an orderly environment in which high quality learning can take place. Parents commented on the good atmosphere in the school and pupils confirm that there is very little bullying. The school has introduced an innovative peer counselling scheme. This gives pupils who are troubled in any way the opportunity to discuss their problems in confidence with another pupil who has been given appropriate training. This is working well and valued by the pupils. Although the number of exclusions is higher than at the time of the previous inspection, this reflects the school's determination to implement its strict policy for expected standards of behaviour. The number of exclusions has fallen in the last three years and peer counselling is thought to have had a very positive influence. Pupils move around the corridors and on the stairs in a very sensible manner, generally showing patience and thoughtfulness for others. They treat displays of work and the building with respect.

16. Senior pupils willingly accept responsibility such as prefect duties and help pupils who have reading difficulties. Pupils of all ages take initiative, for example, in their support for charity fund raising and their enthusiastic response to the school council. Many belong to sports teams and others belong to groups such as the school community action team and the environmental forum. Pupils taking part in community service activities have helped at local Primary Schools and old people's homes. Others at Key Stage 4 commit themselves to personal challenge and community work through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. There is a successful Young Enterprise group and Year 10 pupils benefit from their work experience.

17. Attitudes, behaviour and personal development are a major strength of the school. They contribute substantially to pupils' achievements, as they did at the time of the previous inspection.

## 18. **Attendance**

18.The standard of pupils' attendance and punctuality is good and has been maintained since the previous inspection. Attendance rates are above the average for secondary schools and unauthorised absence is well below the average. The large majority of pupils arrive on time for the start of the school day and only a small minority has a record of recurring lateness. Pupils move around the school briskly so that lessons commence with only minimal delay.

19.A small but significant minority of pupils is withdrawn from school during term time for the purpose of family holidays. This has an adverse affect on the continuity of learning for the pupils concerned and teachers have to give a disproportionate amount of attention to them after their return to help them cover learning which has been missed.

## 20. **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED**

### 20. **Teaching**

20.The school has maintained the good overall teaching quality found in the previous inspection. Teaching is good overall and is good at each key stage. This is a significant factor in enabling the pupils to make good overall progress. Teaching was satisfactory or better in all but four lessons of the 158 that were observed. It was good in sixty percent of them and very good in one lesson in five. The very good teaching occurred more in Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4 and was characterised by the excellent relationships between the teacher and pupils which allowed the teachers to give their full attention to achieving the learning targets without spending much time on control and discipline. This was observed in a year 11 mixed ability personal and social education (PSE) lesson where the teacher was able to get the pupils on task quickly and arrange working groups not based on friendship but on criteria which enabled all pupils to make good progress. Another feature of this good teaching was the way teachers used their knowledge and expertise to add variety and motivate pupils. This was observed in a year 10 business studies lesson. A visit to a local supermarket coupled with a talk from the personnel manager, good input and questioning from the teacher, the opportunity for pupils to make their own decisions and to use computers stimulated them to remain on task and make good progress. Good subject knowledge, planning and appropriately high expectations were other common features of effective lessons. The four unsatisfactory lessons were due to poor organisation and preparation or in one case poor relationships.

21.Where teaching is satisfactory in contrast to good, the work set is not always appropriately challenging and the pace of the lesson could be faster. This situation is exacerbated in large classes where there is a minimal level of classroom support. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is generally good at both key stages. It is particularly good in subjects, such as English and science, where the provision is particularly well targeted to pupils' needs. A common feature of the good teaching is where the class teachers plan and work closely with the support teachers. Individual education plans and assessment procedures are used effectively to promote very good progress in Key Stage 3 and good progress in Key Stage 4 where there is not the same level of support. The teaching of pupils with specific learning difficulties (Dyslexia) is particularly effective. Appropriate support is provided for those pupils whose first language is not English.

22.Good teaching occurs in almost all subjects but the best teaching occurs in art where teachers inspire pupils with their knowledge and enthusiasm. Each pupil is assessed accurately and teachers set them clear targets for improvement in each lesson. A significantly high proportion of very good lessons was also observed in science, design and technology, history and at Key Stage 3 in geography and information technology. PSE is taught well by form tutors. Homework is set regularly but its effectiveness in improving progress varies between subjects. Its contribution is never less than satisfactory but its use is most effective in art, mathematics, geography, foreign languages and religious education.

23.Marking of pupils' work has improved considerably since the previous report and is now very effective in most subjects in identifying what pupils need to do in order to improve. Most teachers use their marking to identify pupils' strengths and weaknesses and organise their teaching accordingly. Some very good marking was evident in English, design and technology and art, where learning targets were clearly outlined. Another key issue in the previous report was to identify effective teaching practices and to use them to improve the overall teaching quality. Variable progress has been made in this area; science has

introduced effective monitoring, evaluation and dissemination procedures but not all departments have yet done so. More needs to be done if the current proportion of satisfactory teaching is to become good teaching in the future.

#### 24. **The curriculum and assessment**

24. Curricular provision is broad, balanced and relevant and generally meets statutory requirements. The main exception is in religious education where pupils in Key Stage 4 not following the examination course have insufficient time to meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus. A further minor exception is information technology where some elements of the National Curriculum programmes of study are not taught in Key Stage 4.

25. The Key Stage 3 curriculum includes all the National Curriculum subjects and religious education. Drama is taught within English lessons. Pupils are grouped by ability in most subjects which enables work to be more easily matched to pupils' level of understanding. Pupils with special educational needs are usually taught in smaller groups which results in very good progress and opportunities for them to cover a similar range of topics to other pupils. All pupils have equal access to the curriculum but occasionally those in withdrawal groups miss another subject for too prolonged a period of time. This unsatisfactory situation has been recognised by the school which is taking steps to rectify it. The allocation of time for each subject is generally well balanced but the benefits of the introduction of a second foreign language for all pupils in Year 9 are significantly outweighed by the disadvantages. In this year pupils have only one lesson per week in the first language, French, and progress slows. Some pupils lose interest and this affects the take up of French in Key Stage 4. Pupils of lower ability and those with special educational needs have difficulty coping with two foreign languages and often find them confusing.

26. In Key Stage 4, pupils study English, mathematics, science, religious and physical education, and choose four other subjects from a range of options. They also take part in a well-established and valued programme of community service. Almost without exception studies lead to external accreditation, mainly GCSE. Where feasible, the school supports pupils who can cope with greater work loads and accelerates their progress by providing additional classes after school, for instance in mathematics, textiles and statistics. The timetabling of the curriculum is effective and well planned, apart from arrangements for religious education, physical education and community service. The discontinuous nature of the provision affects progress in physical education and results in superficial coverage of some aspects of religious education.

27. In both key stages pupils engage in a well-structured programme of personal and social education (PSE) which embraces health education, citizenship, sex education and drugs awareness. Teachers have good relationships with pupils and are sensitive and sympathetic when discussing such issues. The PSE programme is complemented by a very good programme of careers education in which parents are invited to participate. Pupils are involved in self-appraisal and learn how aspects of life and a career interrelate. Careers conventions, work experience and individual interviews prepare the pupils well for the choices in Year 11 and beyond. The school has recently been granted the prestigious 'School Curriculum Award' in recognition of its high quality provision.

28. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Individual education plans are carefully prepared and subject teachers use them well to set realistic and achievable targets for individual pupils. Initiatives such as the paired reading scheme, where pupils who are good readers listen to individual pupils on a regular and voluntary basis, promote good relationships between pupils as well as the improvement of reading skills.

29. A very extensive range of extra-curricular activities enriches the curriculum. Teachers give generously of their time at lunchtimes, after school and at weekends to provide for a variety of sports, music, drama, art, clubs and other challenging activities. Outdoor pursuits are popular and make a substantial contribution to the pupils' success in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. An exceptionally large number of pupils take part in extra-curricular activities and they appreciate the provision made for them.

30. The increasing popularity of the school has resulted in variations in the sizes of different year groups with the effect that a number of teaching groups exceed 30 pupils. Teachers compensate for the wider range of ability in the larger groups by providing work of a progressive nature. Progress is sometimes slower in these groups, however, as teachers have less time to spend with individual pupils.

31.The quality of curricular planning within subjects is generally good and results in appropriate progression through the National Curriculum programmes of study for all pupils. The exception is English where planning for continuity is inconsistent and too little attention is paid to the needs of pupils of varying abilities.

32.Good use is made of nationally standardised tests to predict minimum expected levels of attainment in external examinations. Analysis of actual results compared to predicted levels clearly shows the extent to which pupils are exceeding expectations in most subjects. The whole-school assessment system is developing well. Currently it is being used in Year 11 to identify and eliminate under-achievement. It is shortly to be extended to all year groups. A weakness in some subjects at Key Stage 3, is the inaccuracy of teachers' assessment of pupils' standards in relation to National Curriculum levels. Some teachers are not always secure in the matching of criteria to each level, nor do they always set sufficiently discriminating work for pupils to demonstrate their full ability.

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

33.Albany has sustained its high standard of provision for pupils' personal development since the previous inspection. Year assemblies take place twice weekly and these are reinforced on other days in tutor time when tutors introduce a 'thought for the day'. Moslems have their own prayer room and assemblies. Whole-school assemblies are well planned and of a good quality. Pupils generally like them, particularly when they take an active part, and they provide good opportunities for pupils' spiritual development as well as public opportunities to celebrate achievement in school and elsewhere. An impressive assembly was seen during the inspection in which a group of Year 7 pupils danced and sang about using one's talents or gifts. Unfortunately, the school does not provide a daily act of corporate worship, as the worship element is not always present, but it has come very close to meeting this statutory requirement

34.During the inspection there was a very good instance of reflection on life and death: the school interrupted lessons for pupils and teachers to observe the annual two minutes' silence on November 11. There was stillness, and due reverence was shown, especially on the sports field where pupils and teachers stood quietly by, many visibly moved. This is only one instance of the rich opportunities Albany gives to its pupils' spiritual development. Good opportunities are also presented in many lessons. In history, pupils explore ideas and beliefs from earlier ages; in English and art they reflect on the spiritual impact of poetry and painting. Art makes a strong contribution to pupils' awareness of beauty and colour. Religious education lessons consider some of life's difficult areas, such as the nature of evil and the purpose of life itself. Personal and social education and religious education lessons give good opportunities for pupils to learn and explore different values, beliefs and views.

35.As part of the very good provision for pupils' moral development, pupils are taught that they will be valued and have more confidence as youngsters if they build good relationships with teachers and other pupils. A strong moral code is promoted throughout the life of the school. Teachers provide good moral examples in the way they treat pupils. The school gives clear guidance to its pupils on the difference between right and wrong. The school's drugs education programme poses moral choices and the right and wrong approach to drugs and the consequences of the decision made. In promoting honesty the school has made its mark on pupils, who report that in one assembly teachers used the theme of honesty to show how they had learned from their own mistakes. Year 11 pupils said that they appreciated teachers' humanity and humility. History lessons consider moral reactions to conflict by looking at the changing nature of warfare, propaganda, conscription and conscientious objection. Physical education puts strong emphasis on personal responsibility and behaviour, as was seen in an unsupervised netball game when pupils showed sportsmanship towards each other. The whole tone of moral development promotes positive views of human behaviour, emphasising what is favourable rather than what is negative.

36.There is very good provision for social development. Clear guidelines to staff emphasise the importance of pride, purpose and positive relationships as the basis for mutual respect and honour. Pupils develop socially based on the way the school treats them. Pupils with special educational needs are encouraged by the way they are treated to gain good self-esteem through growing self-confidence. Paired reading links older pupils with younger ones, and prefects provide good social models: not as 'police', but as upholders of the school's values. Pupils are prepared for adulthood by a very good programme of personal and social education. Community placements in Key Stage 4 are compulsory and pupils are expected to work collaboratively when out of school. An excellent aspect of the school's social development programme is the peer-counselling scheme for which pupils are trained to act confidentially with other pupils to assist them resolve personal problems. Charitable activity is strong; pupils may select a charity of their choice and organise fund-raising on its behalf. Pupils are taught consistently not to be selfish.

37. There is good provision for cultural development. Subject documents include aspects of cultural development in the planning of schemes of work and lessons. This is strong in science, art, religious education, geography and English, in which pupils get an active view of their own and other cultures. History in Key Stage 3 looks at the rise of Islam, music is encouraged through the assistance of the governors and the support of peripatetic teachers. Art is strong in provision for pupils' awareness of artistic traditions, European and elsewhere. Drama in Key Stage 4 investigates ancient Greek theatre, and English helps pupils appreciate Britain's rich literary heritage. Many activities, clubs and societies enrich the school's curriculum. An annual theatrical production combines music and drama; there are extensive sporting activities, and dance lessons often express multi-cultural elements. Art and history teachers combine to take pupils to view galleries and battlefields in northern France; an exchange visit with a French school is increasing in popularity, and the school organises ski-ing trips during holidays. Other cultures are valued, as was seen in a geography lesson when pupils studied the Amazon Basin. Pupils make meticulously detailed models of Indian settlements, and show understanding of what it might be like to live in a different culture and hold different social values. The school is not complacent about its current provision, and is planning improvements to its arrangements for further appreciation of ethnic traditions in Year 7.

38.

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

38. The school's provision for support, guidance and pupils' welfare is very good and has improved since the previous inspection. The academic guidance which pupils receive is very effective, particularly in Key Stage 4, where assessment of pupils' work is more firmly established, and used very well by teachers to counsel pupils about their strengths and weaknesses enabling them to focus on targets for improvement. Pupils in Year 9 receive good advice regarding their Key Stage 4 option choices. Tutors play an important role in monitoring and promoting pupils' performance. The marking of work contributes positively to pupils' awareness of standards achieved and the intervention of teachers helps pupils to make better progress. A mentoring system is available to those who are underachieving.

39. Pupils and parents receive appropriate information and advice about subject choices and the quality of careers education and advice is very good. Pupils' progress is very well supported by appropriate homework and the consistent use of planners. Homework club and other extra facilities, such as a history advice club, offer access to computers and the library and provide very good opportunities to those who wish to progress.

40. Pupils' personal development is positively influenced by the personal and social education programme which is comprehensive and well taught. Many opportunities are offered to develop a sense of responsibility both with regard to independent study and through, for example, form representation and the school council. A prefect system enables older pupils to adopt a supervisory role and pupils of all ages can apply to be a counsellor. Involvement in many aspects of environmental, community and voluntary service including the Duke of Edinburgh scheme enables pupils to make very good progress towards becoming responsible young citizens. Relationships between teachers, tutors and pupils are constructive, trusting, respectful and conducive to very good academic and personal development. Good behaviour is successfully promoted by the effective and consistent application of the school's policy, the high awareness by pupils of the school's expectations, recognition and by teacher intervention.

41. Senior pupils play an important and influential role in maintaining consistently good standards of behaviour outside the classroom. The peer counselling arrangements are effective and serve not only to minimise incidents of bullying but also to provide a valued social and welfare resource for all pupils. Attendance and punctuality are closely monitored and absences are successfully followed up and result in a low level of truancy. Tutors and teachers emphasise the need to be on time and latecomers are challenged and appropriate action taken to seek improvement. Child protection procedures are understood and adhered to. Pupils' health and welfare needs are appropriately served and these are augmented by external specialists who attend the school. The policy for health and safety is appropriate and procedures are in place to assess risk and safety checks are frequently undertaken. There is adequate first aid provision.

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

42. The school enjoys a good and effective partnership with its parents. Involvement in and with the nearer and wider community contributes very much to standards of achievement, the quality of learning and pupils' personal development. The good standard described in the previous inspection report not only continues but in some respects is further improved. At the

registered inspector's meeting with parents and via the questionnaires which they completed together with additional written comments, parents expressed views which were almost all positive and supportive of the school and there were very few instances of dissatisfaction.

43. Parents are generally well informed about the life and work of the school by a range of reports and newsletters. At various stages of their association with the school parents receive information about what is taught, examinations, subject choices and career routes. The school newspaper is an excellent production that enables parents and the community to be aware of the life of the school, the range of activities and pupils' achievements. The content of annual school reports lacks consistency. Some subject reports devote too much attention to what is done rather than what the pupil has attained. Progress made by the pupil is described but there is a lack of clarity about whether the pupil is achieving in line with expectations according to age and ability. There is insufficient detail as to how the pupil might improve. The interim report, issued mid-year, is a useful document which closely informs parents about pupils' progress.

44. Parents support the school in practical ways, for example with stage productions. The friends association raises substantial funds to assist the school. Parents are consulted for their views and suggestions; one of the most recent examples related to the new home/school agreement. Parents co-operate extremely well by regularly checking and signing pupils' planners. Attendance by parents at meetings is good and parents joined pupils in a practical session at a recent careers advice event. A wide range of extra curricular activities is available in school based clubs and activities including competitive sport, international visits and exchanges, music and drama productions, charity and community work. The school has a thriving Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme that involves pupils being active in the community and builds on the school's strong community involvement in Key Stage 4. Many pupils take part in environmental protection activities, a community action group and voluntary service.

45. The school enjoys very good relationships with many employers in the locality. This results in good quality work experience, support for coursework, for example in business studies, and sponsorships and donations which enhance resources. Several organisations, as well as a hospital and the National Trust, welcome pupils to their premises or sites in pursuit of their studies thus enhancing pupils' learning experiences in several subjects. Links with primary schools are excellent due to the quality of contact between corresponding members of staff, the relevance of information provided and the spirit of co-operation and range of inter school activities many of which are curricular based. The information obtained from the primary schools is used effectively to inform assessment of pupils' strengths and weaknesses, determine groupings and curricular planning. The school enjoys very good links with public services such as the police, who contribute to community education, the careers service and colleges of further education

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

### 46. **Leadership and management**

46. The school owes much of its success to the excellent leadership of the headteacher. Her clear vision for the future coupled with her high expectations for pupils' achievement and behaviour is being built on a foundation of very good relationships and an open, consultative style of management. Her vision is endorsed by the governing body who know the school intimately and are actively involved in drawing up development plans, allocating finances, setting targets and monitoring the performance of the school and individual subject departments. A very good senior management team, comprising the two deputy headteachers and assistant headteacher, has clear and appropriate responsibilities and carries them out very efficiently. Their personal and professional skills are complementary and together with the headteacher form an energetic and very effective team. With other senior staff they provide strong support for the academic and pastoral structures of the school. The clear commitment to raise standards by the senior management is carried forward by all staff who respond well to the thoughtful, humane and open manner in which initiatives are introduced. The staff shows great commitment and they work hard to meet challenging deadlines.

47. The senior management team with responsibilities for subject areas provide effective, regular reviews of departmental development plans, check targets, and monitor performance and teaching quality. Heads of department generally organise their subjects well though this varies across school. Only in science is the teaching monitored and evaluated with the good practice shared. Other departments are at various stages of implementing this whole school policy and as a result there are occasions when opportunities for effective intervention are missed. The management of subjects is particularly effective in art, history,

geography, mathematics and science but there are significant weaknesses in English and information technology. Pastoral support is well managed through an effective year system. Although form tutors play an important role in setting the tone not all use form time to the best effect.

48. The quality of development planning is good; its main thrust is on raising achievement. Action planning is precise, with clear responsibilities, time scales and costings linked to agreed targets. Appropriate success criteria also feature. The plan is a very effective management tool to provide a clear route for further improvement. All departmental plans reflect their contribution to the whole school plan and are presented in a common format with clear targets and costings. A very significant factor in enhancing pupils' attainment is the school's target setting not just for the whole school but also for individual pupils. This is based on rigorous and extensive analysis of various test scores on entry to the school and subsequent test and examination results. Pupils' performance is then checked throughout the school and targets are revised appropriately. Expectations are suitably high and the motivation of teachers and pupils is increased.

49. The school has moved much closer to meeting the requirement for a daily act of collective worship since the previous inspection but as not all year assemblies and form groups meet the worship requirement they fall short of full compliance. However, they provide good opportunities for spiritual growth. At Key Stage 4, the requirements of the National Curriculum for information technology and the Agreed Syllabus for religious education are not fully met. The management of the special needs department has improved considerably since the previous inspection. Significant changes have taken place: pupils with special needs have been fully integrated into the school's policy to enhance learning for all; the Code of Practice has been fully implemented; and individual education plans are more effective. These changes have had a very positive effect on the progress made by pupils with special needs. No pupils are disapplied from the National Curriculum and almost all pupils have equal access to it. A small number of pupils, who are withdrawn from lessons to receive extra support with their learning difficulties, miss the same lessons every week and this disadvantages them in the subjects they miss. The school is already rectifying this situation.

50. Most of the weaknesses identified in the previous report have been successfully addressed, for example the marking of books is now vastly improved. The school still has to make further improvements in its procedures for identifying and disseminating good teaching practice and making greater use of the recently upgraded library. However, a number of new initiatives have been introduced, such as the paired reading scheme which has helped raise reading standards and the peer counselling scheme which is proving popular with the pupils and helping reduce stress. The leadership is committed to raising standards; the school's positive ethos, the very good relationships that exist and its sense of purpose ensure that it is well placed for further improvement.

51.

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

51. There are sufficient teachers to deliver the curriculum. Although the pupil:teacher ratio is somewhat less favourable than at the time of the previous inspection this has not had any adverse effect on the quality of education. Nearly all lessons are taught by teachers with specialist qualifications in the appropriate subject. All the teachers are suitably qualified to teach in a secondary school and between them they possess a good range of qualifications and experience to do full justice to the requirements of the National Curriculum. An appropriate proportion of the teachers has good levels of expertise in dealing with pupils with special educational needs. Sufficient staff have up-to-date first aid qualifications, and the school is fortunate that one of the teachers is a qualified paramedic. The school has efficient systems for the employment of temporary supply teachers to cover for staff absence.

52. In addition to teachers the school has a broadly adequate complement of non-teaching staff. They make a good contribution to the smooth running of the school and the quality of education. It is still unsatisfactory, as at the time of the previous inspection, that there is no technician for information technology. This sometimes results in teaching staff spending too much time organising and servicing the increasing amounts of computer hardware and software used in the school. An efficient and flexible team of administrators ensures that the teaching staff can concentrate fully on teaching duties, secure in the knowledge that financial, administrative and communication procedures are dealt with promptly and competently. The caretaking and cleaning staff, together with the lunchtime welfare assistants, also play an important part in the smooth running of the school.



53. The school makes good arrangements for the induction of new teachers, including those starting their teaching careers at the school. Appraisal systems, which are in line with national requirements, operate smoothly, and contribute to the planning and implementation of a full range of in-service training and other professional development activities. These activities are also soundly linked to the school development plan. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection, for example in implementing plans for the great majority of staff to become computer literate.

54. The accommodation is adequate for the number of pupils in the school, and there have been significant improvements since the previous inspection. There are now good library facilities, new design and technology rooms, an updated music teaching suite and four modern computer suites. Facilities for sport and physical education, especially the sports hall, remain a considerable asset to the school. There are, however, still some unsatisfactory features. Despite the best efforts of the site supervisors and cleaning staff parts of the building look shabby and require a substantial facelift. Some of the pupils' toilets are in need of maintenance. There is no satisfactory accommodation for drama teaching, and the six science laboratories are rather small and need refurbishing. The governors are well aware of these and other minor deficiencies, and have appropriate plans to continue a programme of improvements as finance and circumstances permit.

55. The books, materials and equipment in the school are generally adequate in quantity and quality for the implementation of the planned curriculum. There have been considerable improvements since the previous inspection, especially in the library stock and the acquisition of up to date information technology equipment. In some subject areas, such as in modern foreign languages, there are too few books to support fully the courses pupils follow, and music lacks computer, keyboard and instrumental resources.

56. The school makes appropriate use of resources outside the school, such as museums, theatres, art galleries and field study centres, to support and enrich the curriculum.

#### 57. **The efficiency of the school**

57. Educational priorities are clearly outlined in the school's development plan and careful planning and budgeting ensure that these are adequately financed. These priorities are also reflected in detailed departmental planning. A prudent reserve fund coupled with successful bids for additional funding has enabled the governors to carry out major improvements to the accommodation and learning resources. These recent improvements have had a significant positive effect on the quality of education provided although some of these, such as the additional computer facilities, have not had time to fully impact on academic attainment of the oldest pupils. Expenditure is monitored carefully by the bursar and governors.

58. The income per pupil is similar to the national average but lettings and generous support from the 'Friends of Albany' supplement this. The most recent auditor's report, dated September 1998, stated that the school's financial systems provide a basis for efficient and effective management of the financial resources. It contained a small number of recommendations, which the school acted upon immediately. The funding for pupils with special educational needs is used effectively to provide first rate support and is a principal factor in promoting their very good progress. Overall, financial management and control are very good.

59. The deployment of the school's teaching and administrative staff is satisfactory. Subject specialists teach almost all lessons and, generally, managers have sufficient non-contact time to meet their responsibilities effectively. However, there are some instances of teachers being used for duties that could be done as effectively and more efficiently by less expensive support assistants, for example, in the delivery of support for pupils with special needs and in information technology.

60. The accommodation and learning resources are generally used most effectively although the recently upgraded library could be used more to develop pupils' reading skills. A computerised system of recording attendance and analysing patterns would save administration time.

61. Considering the very good attitudes, behaviour and personal development of the pupils; the good quality of education, particularly teaching, provided; the progress of the pupils, particularly those with special needs; and the fact that education standards are much higher in age-related terms when they leave school than they are on entry; the school provides very good

value for money. The school has worked hard to improve the value for money and this is better than at the time of the previous inspection when it was good

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

### 62. **ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE**

#### 62. **English**

62. Attainment on entry to the school at present is below average, but is an improvement on that in previous years. Key Stage 3 test results were similar to the national average in 1999, but were well above average when compared to schools with pupils from similar backgrounds. These results are a big improvement on the three previous years when attainment was well below the national average. This improvement was not predicted by the teachers' own assessments which in previous years had assessed the pupils at higher levels than the ones they obtained in the tests. The results in English are generally below those achieved in mathematics and science by the same pupils. At the time of the previous report, results were at the national average but fell to well below before recovering to the national average in 1999. Boys' attainment in national tests is lower than that of the girls but the difference is similar to the national picture.

63. Results for grades A\*-C in English in 1999 were below the national average, a decline since the previous report. However they were above average when compared against similar schools, and all pupils gained a GCSE grade. Results for grades A\*-C were below those achieved by the same pupils in mathematics and science. The difference between boys' and girls' achievement was lower than that recorded nationally. GCSE English Literature results over the last two years have also declined since the previous report when they were at the national average.

64. Inspection evidence indicates that standards of literacy are weak, particularly in reading, and attainment in English by the end of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 is below average. The school's own tests show that more than half of all pupils have reading difficulties in Key Stage 3, which is a significant factor in accounting for these below average standards. The low standards of literacy in Key Stage 3 reduce achievement in Key Stage 4. They account in some measure for the below national average GCSE results. Pupils until this year entered the school with attainment well below average. Their overall progress is satisfactory as by the time they reach the end of Key Stage 4 their attainment is below average. Nationally, standards in English have been rising faster over time than those at Albany, which is another factor in accounting why, attainment remains below national average. However, standards are now beginning to rise. Recent changes in staffing have brought about some lively and challenging teaching, leading to higher achievement by pupils in lessons. To consolidate these improvements, the subject requires much better organisation.

65. In Key Stage 3, pupils speak with enthusiasm when asked for their views. An example of this was heard in a Year 8 lesson on poetry. Pupils eagerly offered their ideas, and the teacher showed pupils that their contributions were valued. The intellectual content and the depth of spontaneous response were very good. However, this mode of learning is not sufficiently well developed in English. Much of pupils' speaking is confined to answering teachers' questions which requires short phrases. Attainment is not as high as it could be because many pupils are given insufficient opportunities in class to develop their ideas through speaking. They do not get a chance to put into spoken words their first feelings about what they read or hear.

66. Very weak reading skills are improved through an effective reading scheme involving specialist teachers and older pupils. A recent reading development programme for all other pupils has yet to make an impact on the low levels of reading competence in Key Stage 3. By the end of the key stage, most pupils, while able to read words and understand them, cannot read fluently and comprehend long passages. Pupils do not acquire a reading habit in Key Stage 3 as a firm base on which to build higher achievement in GCSE. There is no reading culture, and the routines, resources and organisation to put this right are not yet in place. The library is an underused resource in this regard.

67. However, pupils' writing is increasing in range and challenge. An example of this was seen in the exercise books of a high attaining class in Year 9, in which pupils had written a lengthy funeral speech, some with emotional force. Other pupils' writing is restricted in challenge, and is often in short passages that record information about books. Spelling, punctuation and grammar receive special attention, with the result that attainment in writing throughout Key Stage 3 improves satisfactorily.

68. Attainment overall in Key Stage 4 is below average. The weaknesses in reading and writing continue, but opportunities to expand ideas increase. An example of this occurred in a Year 11 lesson in which the speaking was given a clear purpose. Pupils responded with a lively commitment, learning from each other, defending their ideas without the teacher dominating the lesson. Speaking and reading attainment was higher in this lesson than in others because pupils were not told what to think. In Key Stage 4 there is more group work than in Key Stage 3, though not all of it is as focused as in the example just given. Reading is almost entirely course based, in preparation for GCSE. Pupils read about other cultures and from Britain's literary heritage. However, most pupils leave school without having acquired independence as readers, able to choose books for their own pleasure. Pupils' writing is enhanced by opportunities to reflect on reading and on personal feelings, though access is not consistent across the teaching sets. Standards of writing are improved by re-drafting written pieces, but lack of regular access to information technology in English lessons means that pupils in both key stages do not receive full assistance to improve their work. At present, in order to improve their work, most pupils have to write everything out again.

69. Progress is satisfactory overall in both key stages. Rates of progress depend heavily on teaching methods. Unsatisfactory progress is rare, but occurs when teaching lacks sound organisation and subject knowledge. Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive and assist progress. Pupils like English lessons. Generally good behaviour accompanies pupils' willingness to read, write or speak. Not all English lessons permit these positive contributions from pupils to be converted into fast rates of progress. Quickest progress occurs when the teacher expects pupils to work and think hard for themselves, without constant supervision and instruction. In both key stages quick progress is made in lessons that enable pupils to think about their responses to what they read or hear. The progress of pupils with special educational needs in Key Stage 3 is very good because they receive skilled attention; it is satisfactory at Key Stage 4 because they do not receive the same level of support. The progress of high attaining pupils is satisfactory, but is faster when they have to think for themselves. The progress of average and low attaining pupils is satisfactory, but could be improved by special attention to reading levels. This would give these pupils full access to the wide range of learning experiences offered in English and other subjects. However, evidence from pupils' recent work in Key Stage 4 indicates that progress is beginning to speed up. Writing for examination is making greater demands of the pupils' capabilities, and some of the books chosen for study offer an improved quality of challenge.

70. Teaching at both key stages is satisfactory overall with only one lesson out of the 22 observed being unsatisfactory. Teaching is slightly better in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3 due to a higher proportion of good teaching. Lessons are usually well planned and teachers have a good subject knowledge. The best lessons occurred when teachers used a variety of teaching methods and the content motivated the pupils who became involved and contributed their own ideas. A very good lesson was observed with year 11 pupils of below average attainment. Pupils had to speak, listen, read and write in response to hearing poetry read to them. The teaching expected pupils to think quickly, and they responded with enthusiasm, offering many ideas. It was very good because the reading improved pupils' speaking, which in turn assisted their writing.

71. Assessment procedures are generally satisfactory although not all teachers make consistently reliable assessments and as yet not all set individual targets. Marking is satisfactory, and the best examples provide sensible levels of encouragement with clear pinpointing of weaknesses. Pupils say that they appreciate the quality of the guidance they receive in English.

72. Improvement in English since the 1995 inspection report is not satisfactory. Though assessment in Key Stage 3 has improved in usefulness and Key Stage 3 results in national tests have improved very recently, GCSE results have declined against an improving national trend. The difference between the attainment of boys and girls remains wide at the end of Key Stage 3. Reading fluency is low.

73. A number of issues in English point to unsatisfactory management of the subject:

- \* GCSE results have been very low in recent years;
- \* there has been no regular organising and checking of the teaching so that good and very good lessons occur more frequently than at present;
- \* the units of work which teachers use in their planning do not set out clear methods appropriate to teaching pupils at different levels of prior attainment in each class to make sure that all pupils make good progress;
- \* individual teachers have been left to adapt the units for themselves, which has meant a lack of coherence in teaching across the subject;
- \* English is taught in adjoining rooms, but this arrangement has not been used to give support to pupils of differing abilities or to provide a variety of learning experiences across a whole year group;
- \* essential priorities have not been drawn up, such as an urgent plan to tackle low reading levels, or advising the school of methods to improve essential literacy skills, particularly reading;
- \* leadership has not given clear educational direction to a committed and hard-working team of English teachers.

74. There are two specific resource issues that reduce pupils' attainment. Reading resources are inadequate to support an intensive programme of reading improvement, and there is a lack of regular access to information technology in both key stages.

75. English makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development through the good moral examples that teachers set and the opportunities provided in lessons and in extra-curricular activities for pupils' social development. In English lessons, pupils examine moral dilemmas, frequent reference is made in lessons to reinforce the school's theme for the day, and pupils' reading helps them to understand human frailty as portrayed in plays and in study of the media. Against this background of good personal relations and pupils who wish to learn, recent staff changes and better co-ordination of classwork, standards are beginning to rise in English. They should rise much higher when the quality of management and organisation of the subject is improved.

#### *Key skills – literacy*

76. Overall standards of literacy are below average, but the key weakness is pupils' poorer than expected reading skills. A large proportion of pupils enters the school with reading problems. Those with particularly low reading ability make very good progress in Key Stage 3 because of the school's successful programme for them. However, other pupils do not receive the same degree of attention, and their reading lags behind improvements seen in other schools. There is no whole-school attack on poor reading skills, and a programme to develop reading in English has only recently been introduced. Though pupils read in English lessons, they do not read for personal pleasure. The school's library supports formal reading lessons in Key Stage 3, but could be used much more to provide a wider range of books for pupils to read in English. Good practice is emerging in geography of effective reading materials to suit poor or reluctant readers. In most subjects other than English and geography, opportunities to read aloud or read generally about the subject are limited to textbooks. The fundamental need is for all subjects to take some responsibility for developing pupils' reading skills, so that many more pupils leave school as independent and fluent readers. The low level of reading generally is restricting pupils' attainment in those subjects that rely for success on pupils' deep understanding of what they read.

77. Though writing standards are below average, they are better than pupils' reading skills. Many subjects assist pupils' spelling by producing lists of special words and insist on their correct use. Opportunities are given in English for pupils to write for many purposes. In design technology, they learn note-taking skills when they write for real ends, supervised by a teacher with industrial experience. Pupils do not get regular access to information technology in subjects to enable them to improve the standards of their writing. Few subjects encourage pupils to draft their writing and then produce a neat and improved copy – which information technology would help. Opportunities to write at length and imaginatively are rare in subjects other than English.

78. Pupils enjoy learning through speaking. Lively assemblies, tutor-group sessions and personal and social education lessons show that pupils have an underlying self-confidence as speakers. In art and information technology lessons pupils enjoy the positive promotion of language by those subjects. Listening skills are developed well in mathematics because pupils listen to each other's explanations and then discuss them. Though some opportunity is given in English for pupils to share ideas, in other subjects pupils' speaking is mainly confined to answering teachers' questions to establish facts or correct response.

#### *Drama*

79. Drama is part of the curriculum in English in Key Stage 3, but it is not well established. Though pupils enjoy and benefit from opportunities to perform as a character from a novel or play, and read plays, they do not receive lessons in the basic skills of making drama, such as commitment and belief in what they do. Therefore, at the beginning of Key Stage 4, they opt for drama as a GCSE subject without having acquired essential skills. This, combined with inadequate access to an appropriate space in which to create drama, makes the teaching of the subject difficult. Unsatisfactory progress is evident in Year 11 as many pupils, only weeks away from their final assessment, still display self-consciousness when acting. Because of these factors, GCSE drama results have been poor over the years, declining consistently since 1996 when they were at the national average. Drama is an unsuccessful option.

#### 80. **Mathematics**

80. On entry to the school, attainment in mathematics is well below average. In 1999, the pupils' results in the national tests for fourteen year olds were similar to the national average for all schools. They were well above average compared to similar schools. The school is maintaining a consistent standard in relation to the proportions of pupils reaching, and exceeding, the expected levels for their age. Pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, have access to GCSE examinations. Almost all gain accreditation. In 1999, the results were close to the national average and 10 percent of the entry

gained A\*/A grades. In addition, twelve pupils in Year 9 gained GCSE grades C and above. A similar number of pupils in Year 11 was successful in gaining well above average results in statistics. Pupils' results in mathematics have improved significantly since the previous inspection. This is particularly creditable bearing in mind the high proportion of pupils with special educational needs. Evidence from the inspection, including observation of lessons, scrutiny of work and discussion with pupils, confirms that, overall, attainment in mathematics is average at the end of both key stages. It should be noted however that there is a steadily increasing proportion of higher attainment within each year group, conclusively evidenced in Year 10. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls. Attainment in mathematics is similar to that in science and better than that in English.

81.The majority of pupils make good progress throughout the school. Higher-attaining pupils often make very good progress. This is due to high levels of commitment, from them and their teachers, maintained year on year. Pupils with special educational needs also make very good progress, particularly in Key Stage 3 where their concepts of number are initially very insecure.

82.Throughout the school pupils are grouped by ability. This is very effective. It allows all pupils to assimilate new knowledge and work at a pace appropriate to their level of understanding. The increasing size of the school's population is resulting in a considerable number of classes over 30. This sometimes slows progress, especially in groups where there is a wide ability range. Higher-attaining pupils deploy mathematical curiosity to good effect. They readily transfer skills and techniques and logically tackle complex questions. It is these qualities, enhanced by ambition, that have resulted in success in the early entry for GCSE. Throughout the school, investigative work is highlighted as an approach to problem solving. By the end of Key Stage 4 most pupils can prove the validity of their predictions. Higher-attaining pupils fit generalised conclusions to known algebraic expressions. Pupils collect, collate, and handle data satisfactorily. They can draw conclusions from evidence. The scheme of work is well planned to ensure progression in all topics of the National Curriculum. Minimal use is made of information technology within the context of mathematics lessons but pupils are provided with good opportunities to record, interrogate and graphically display results of scientific experiments. It is pleasing to see such a high degree of collaboration between the two departments. On entry to the school pupils' basic mathematical skills are weak. Teachers are aware of this and often include the development of mental skills in lesson plans. Nevertheless, a structured whole-school approach to numeracy would be beneficial. A more tactile and practical approach, in particular for lower-attaining pupils in Key Stage 3, would help to underpin number concepts. The textbook used in Key Stage 3 is well chosen. It stimulates pupils' interest and provides for extension work and self-testing. In Key Stage 4, some pupils in the lower ability groups do not have their own textbook. This limits opportunities for independent work out of class and results in over-reliance on work in exercise books for revision purposes.

83.The pupils' good attitudes and behaviour contribute to their progress. They respond well in lessons and are receptive to the teachers' encouragement. In oral work pupils are not afraid to reason aloud or to have their mistakes used to develop the lesson. A good example of this was a Year 11 revision lesson in which the teacher's interactive style of teaching led to pupils challenging one another and having to explain themselves succinctly. One such point of issue centred on the difference between  $-4^2$  and  $(-4)^2$ . Pupils are keen to analyse the pattern of homework and test grades. They use these purposefully to track their own progress. Pupils can often be heard talking about mathematics in their general conversation - a clear indication of the high profile of the subject within the school. Written work is generally well presented to meet teachers' expectations. Its rigour contributes to understanding, the development of logical argument, and the pupils' growing confidence in their ability to succeed.

84.Overall, teaching is good throughout the school. It was good, sometimes very good, in sixty one per cent of the lessons observed and never less than satisfactory. Particular strengths of the teaching are its adaptability to meet the needs of all pupils and the establishment of a secure learning environment in which good work ethics prevail. These features have a significant impact on pupils' attainment, as do the good planning and organisation. Over-arching all these is the very high level of commitment of teachers to making mathematics interesting, worthwhile and rewarding. Teaching is highly focused on well defined targets and teachers use a wide range of strategies. For instance, in a very good lesson with a lower ability group in Year 8, the teacher linked the sequencing of square numbers to the areas of squares of increasing side length. The visual impact of the board display, built up with pupils' involvement and through lively discussion, reinforced understanding. Consequently, when similar techniques were applied to a related task in independent work, pupils quickly illustrated the results in tabular form and successfully spotted the emerging patterns. Most lessons move at a brisk pace and challenging amounts of work are set in class and for homework. This was demonstrated in a good Year 10 lesson in which, after just two sessions on the topic, all pupils were able to use trigonometry functions to find an unknown side in a right-angled triangle. Teachers are mindful of pupils' capabilities and set work accordingly. As a result, for example, there is provision for higher-attaining pupils to work beyond the

parameters of the schemes of work. Rigorous assessment procedures complement the good teaching and are well used to involve pupils in self-evaluation. The system is identifying pupils with unexploited potential and they generally respond well to the subsequent action plan. Where teaching is satisfactory rather than good, practices are sound but more routine. The department as a whole could benefit from sharing the qualities of the best practices, particularly the interactive teaching. The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection and this is a contributory factor to the higher levels of attainment.

85. The mathematics department is well structured and highly motivated. Improvement since the previous inspection is directly related to systematic changes in all aspects of the department's work. As a consequence pupils' attitudes have changed. They now have greater expectations of themselves. Appropriate targets for the immediate future include the development of a structured approach to the teaching of numeracy skills, and the integration of information technology into the scheme of work.

## Science

86. All pupils in the school were entered for GCSE examinations in science in both 1998 and 1999. A large majority of pupils took double subject science and a few lower attaining pupils single subject science. In 1998 the proportion of passes at grade C or better was close to the national average, and all entries resulted in a G grade or better, which was better than the national average. The 1999 GCSE science results were broadly similar, but the number of low grade passes was a little higher because a larger proportion of pupils in the year group had learning difficulties. In the 1998 examinations boys, contrary to the national trend, performed significantly better than girls. In 1999, however, girls achieved better results than boys, and overall there are no substantial differences in the levels attained by boys and girls. In 1999 the proportion of pupils obtaining the highest, A\* grade, showed a noteworthy increase. Evidence from the inspection confirms that overall attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is average with a good proportion of pupils achieving the highest standards. For example, pupils were well able to cope with the design of an investigation to clarify the factors affecting the rate of growth of yeast, and they showed considerable perspicacity in performing experiments to explore the effect of catalysts on reaction rates.

87. The 1998 end of Key Stage 3 national test results indicated that the proportions of pupils reaching both level 5 and level 6 in the science National Curriculum were close to the national average. The corresponding 1999 results were not quite as good, but when the composition of the year group was taken into account the underlying trend was upwards. When averaged over time the comparative performances of boys and girls at the end of Key Stage 3 reflect the national picture, with girls doing a little better than boys. Key Stage 3 results are well above the average of those of schools with a similar intake. Inspection evidence confirmed that attainment is average at the end of the Key Stage. For example, pupils were observed gaining a good introductory grasp of the nature of elements which would lead them to an appropriate understanding of the periodic table. Other pupils showed a good understanding of human anatomy when discussing the dangers of smoking, and a secure knowledge of the pH scale when investigating the products of tobacco combustion.

88. There have been improvements in levels of attainment since the previous inspection. Levels of attainment in science are now at least as good as those in any other subject except for art, and better than most. The department has set challenging but realistic targets for further improvements over the next three years.

89. Standardised test results for pupils entering the school over recent years show that their average attainment levels have been well below average, although there have been notable improvements in the last two years. Viewed in this context the above results indicate overall good progress throughout both key stages. An examination of pupils' work, and lesson observations made during the inspection confirmed that pupils of all abilities, including both the brightest and those with learning difficulties, are making good progress in all years. A number of factors contribute to this healthy situation. The science staff form a balanced team of well qualified and industrious professionals who know their pupils thoroughly and teach in a way that challenges children at all attainment levels. A whole school scheme of work has been carefully designed to give a balanced treatment of all the material specified by the National Curriculum, and to ensure that pupils build steadily on prior learning. There are good arrangements, linked to effective assessment systems, to place pupils into one of six teaching groups in each year based on their attainment levels. This "setting" allows the most able pupils to work at a faster pace and tackle more demanding work than those of lesser ability. Pupils with special educational needs are taught in smaller groups, and receive additional support in some lessons. This is particularly effective in ensuring that the pupils make good progress as the support is often provided by a science specialist.

90. Good progress also benefits from the good attitudes of the majority of pupils. They can be trusted to behave responsibly in laboratories, and safe practical activities are ensured by their observance of rules and appropriate response to teachers' instructions. Most take a pride in their written work, and note-books contain coherent records of topics studied. Neat tables of experimental results and appropriate conversions into graphs enable pupils to identify patterns and suggest explanations. Many pupils in years 10 and 11 are keen enough to buy additional science books and revision guides. When pupils work in small groups they enjoy co-operating effectively with each other. A year 8 class, for example, was observed in which pairs of pupils were having great fun, but also gaining a deal of science understanding, by balancing the "lift" of helium filled balloons with appropriate small weights. Throughout the school pupils show considerable respect for their teachers, and a genuine appreciation of the efforts being made to enable them to achieve to their full potential. They are conscientious in completing the regular and useful homework they receive. A substantial number of volunteers provide extensive assistance to a member of the department in maintaining and improving, with the permission of the local authority, "environmental areas" in the school's vicinity.

91. The quality of teaching is generally good throughout the school, and there are frequent examples of very good teaching, particularly in Key Stage 3. Teachers are very well qualified and their secure and extensive knowledge of the subject is a significant factor in promoting high attainment. Pupils in years 10 and 11 are particularly well prepared for the practical assessments which form part of the GCSE examination. Year 10 pupils, for example, were observed being given good guidance and experience in designing and performing experiments to investigate how the energy transfer from a heat source varied with its distance from the material being heated.

92. Lessons are well prepared and the adequate range of resources organised, with the help of two capable laboratory assistants, to good effect. Year 7 pupils were observed, for example, using interesting and well designed equipment to investigate how the speed of model boats varied with the force applied to them, and also with the shape of the boat. All teachers have high expectations of pupils' work and their behaviour. As a result of these being realised lessons proceed in an orderly and purposeful manner. Learning takes place at a brisk pace and no time is wasted. There are few discipline problems, and occasional miscreants are dealt with firmly and effectively. Good standards of class control were exemplified during the inspection when a class of 30 year 10 pupils successfully investigated how their pulse rates varied when resting, walking and running, and related their results to their knowledge of the heart and respiratory systems. Written work is thoroughly marked. Pupils are clearly informed of what they need to do to improve and the targets at which they should be aiming.

93. The management and leadership of the department is of a high quality; it is a major factor in providing the pupils with a good science education. Despite the good and improving progress pupils throughout the school are making the science staff are not complacent, and are working hard to effect further improvements. All teachers evaluate the lessons they give, and discuss possible refinements at regular monthly meetings. The head of department visits lessons, checks note books and monitors the results of regular tests given to all classes. The whole department takes part in regular weekend training sessions so that they share expertise and keep up-to-date with the latest developments in science education. Increasingly good use is being made of information technology. Pupils use computers to process experimental data and to locate information from appropriate CD-ROMs and the Internet. Teachers use information technology facilities for record keeping and reporting purposes, and to store work sheets and other written resources.

94. To promote even better progress and the attainment of higher standards science teachers are aware of the need, when circumstances permit, for the adequate but less than ideal laboratories to be refurbished and updated. In addition, some essential items of equipment are nearing the end of their useful life and need to be replaced. Science teachers are also anxious to develop further the already effective target setting systems for pupils, and to explore possibilities of making even more of their lessons as effective and stimulating as the best.

#### 95. **OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES**

95.

95. **Art**

95. Standards of achievement in art are above average at the end of Key Stage 3 and well above average at the end of Key Stage 4. Teacher assessments show 80% of pupils achieving at least the standard expected for pupils of this age by the end of Key Stage 3. The proportion of pupils awarded grades A\* to C in GCSE examinations in art was 83% in 1999 and has been

consistently above 80% in the past three years. The proportion of pupils awarded grades A\* and A has risen from 30% in 1997 to 37% in 1999. The high standards reported at the previous inspection have improved further. The standards achieved by pupils in art are the best in the school.

96. Pupils make very good progress during Key Stage 3 because of very good teaching which fosters positive attitudes in pupils. The scheme of work is carefully planned to build progressively high standards of observational drawing as a central core from which other aspects of art are developed. From the beginning of Year 7 pupils are taught to understand art as a purposeful activity which deserves the highest level of concentration and care. Pupils respond by setting themselves the highest standards and by developing a range of skills and understanding to achieve them. Nearly all pupils are able to observe accurately and use pencils, pencil crayons and paint to record their observations in detail. Their ability to use these media to record accurately form, texture, colour and pattern is particularly good and is usually based on thorough experimentation. Most pupils' understanding of art and artists and their ability to discuss the work of a range of artists is good. Even in Year 7 pupils can sustain a detailed discussion of different approaches to portraiture for a whole lesson. Pupils are able to use their observational drawing as a basis for abstract composition in, for instance, a cubist style and such compositions often make vibrant use of colour. However their ability to use visual elements more directly in abstract compositions is less well developed. Pupils are able to work at both a small and large scale but most work is characterised by care and attention to detail rather than more spontaneous work. All pupils are able to use a variety of two and three dimensional media, clay, textiles, paper sculpture and printmaking, to express the forms and patterns arising from their observational drawings and achieve the same high standards as in their drawing and painting. Overall attainment by the end of the key stage is above average.

97. Pupils continue to make very good progress during Key Stage 4 because of their high level of commitment to achieving high standards and a carefully constructed scheme of work. At the beginning of the key stage pupils explore each of the formal elements individually, experimenting with a variety of media, and through this make further progress in understanding how to experiment to achieve particular effects. Pupils then acquire a very good understanding of the development of an idea through a series of pieces of work that derive from an observed source in a variety of projects. Whilst accuracy of observation and execution continue to lie at the heart of all pupils' work they are all able to extend their work into a variety of forms. There is, for example, work which uses computer graphics for repetition of images and for simulation of tapestry as well as textiles and painting of the highest standard. Pupils with special educational needs and those with low attainment in other subjects often make exceptional progress in art, gaining A grades in GCSE examinations. No pupils have been awarded less than grade D during the past two years. The progress made by these pupils in learning to discuss their work maturely is very good indeed. By the end of the key stage attainment is well above average.

98. Most pupils enjoy art because they are so well taught that they expect to succeed and this is reinforced by the quality of work displayed in the art rooms and around the school. Most pupils are highly motivated. At Key Stage 4 they are absolutely determined to succeed. The ability of most pupils to concentrate throughout the lesson with a clear sense of purpose is very good, and is exceptional in some lessons in Key Stage 4. The atmosphere in art rooms is mostly of purposeful endeavour. Pupils take care with their work and present it well. Homework is mostly conscientiously carried out and some shows evidence of a high level of commitment. Pupils mostly work well independently, particularly in Key Stage 4 where they are very good at identifying the help they need in a mature manner. Relationships between pupils are based on mutual respect and help to develop pupils' confidence.

99. The standard of teaching at both key stages is very good. The teaching in all lessons observed was at least good and the majority was very good. Both teachers believe in their pupils' ability to achieve the highest standards and convey these high expectations to the pupils unobtrusively. Lessons are always well planned within a scheme of work that is under constant review in the light of pupils' achievements. The quality of individual teaching is high, the needs of each pupil are gauged accurately and, by demonstration, encouragement and clear explanation of weakness, each pupil has an achievable target for improvement in each lesson. Marking is exceptionally thorough. Every piece of work receives a thorough analysis of its strengths and weaknesses and a target for improvement as well as a grade. Both teachers are able to inspire the pupils with their enthusiasm and their knowledge of art. The commitment of the teachers, who support pupils in a variety of extra-curricular activities is extremely high. The quality of teaching, and particularly the teachers' success in making pupils believe in themselves, is the most significant factor in the high standards achieved by pupils in art. This is an outstandingly vibrant department which has maintained and, in some areas, improved the high standard of work commented on in the previous inspection report.



## 100. Design and technology

100. In the previous inspection, most pupils' achievements in a significant minority of lessons were judged to be below those expected for their age and in relation to their capabilities. Standards at Key Stage 4 reflected pupils' ages and capabilities in only half of the lessons seen. Since that time, standards in design and technology have improved significantly both in work seen and in GCSE examination results. Currently, pupils' levels of achievement by the end of Key Stage 3 are broadly average, indicating good progress in relation to pupils' starting points. Teachers' assessments, however, are insecure with too high a proportion of pupils being judged above the national average. Trends in GCSE examination results over the past four years point to steady improvement and they are now broadly average. Over the past two years, results generally match or exceed pupils' achievement in their other subjects. Differences between the results of girls and boys are not as marked as found nationally, with the exception of 1998 when twice the percentage of girls compared with boys in the school, achieved grades A\*-C in GCSE Design and Technology. All pupils achieved grades A\*-G. Inspection evidence confirms that overall standards achieved by the end of Key Stage 4 are average

101. Pupils start from a relatively low base in the subject but their progress from age 11 to age 14 years is good. They design and make artefacts using a variety of materials, tools and equipment successfully but designing skills are not as well developed as their manufacturing skills. This is partly on account of fragmented curriculum planning at Key Stage 3. Whilst continuity and progression is planned within the various areas of technology, such as food technology and construction, insufficient account is taken of achievements of pupils in one area when they work in another. For example, skills of presentation gained in graphic lessons could be transferred to the design work in the electronics module and greater demands in research skills could be made of pupils as they move across the modules. There is potential for further improvement.

102. At Key Stage 3 strengths lie in construction and in pupils' skills in the use of hand and power tools. Year 8 pupils exhibit self-reliance in manufacturing mechanical toys to their own designs, testing and painting them and gaining a good understanding of circular cams, eccentric cams and the effects of variation in positioning of cams. This highly appealing topic resulted in imaginative, well finished outcomes of which all pupils were justifiably proud, including those with special educational needs. In Year 9 pupils go on to make garden tools demonstrating their above average skills in metal joining, brazing, forging, bending, wood turning and painting. Pupils learn about ferrous and non-ferrous metals, a topic in which note-taking skills receives particular attention. In all areas of design and technology pupils have a good grasp of the technical language of the subject, for example orthographic projections in graphics. Weakness lies in electronics, an aspect recently introduced at the school. Pupils had difficulty in soldering their components to the circuit board and a weak understanding of the principles involved.

103. In food technology pupils have a secure understanding of the production line. Pupils are introduced to systems as early as Year 7 when they work in groups and organise themselves as members of a sandwich-making production line, sharing responsibilities through the role of secretary, floor manager, quality control and production manager. Knowledge and understanding of dietary goals is strengthened as pupils move through the key stage. Accommodation and facilities for textiles are severely restricted with lessons taken in a history room. Textile technology is only available to Year 7 pupils and after that as a voluntary after-school option.

104. Pupils' skills of numeracy are adequate to support their work in design and technology and could be further extended by developing a faculty policy which contributes to that of the school. Most pupils use computers to write up questionnaires but few present findings in bar and pie charts. The use of spreadsheets and databases are not yet routinely established at Key Stage 3. Nutritional analysis is hampered by the lack of up-to-date computing facilities in the food technology rooms but this will be facilitated when the planned refurbishment of the food technology rooms takes place.

105. Progress at Key Stage 4 is good. Most pupils have a secure understanding of design processes and undertake task analysis, research and specification to an average standard overall. Design ideas are well presented in graphics and enhanced by the appropriate use of graphic software, for example in a year 10 Movies project. Information technology is used effectively to present in graph form results of questionnaires on car design preferences. In work with resistant materials, pupils learn to use computer assisted design and computer assisted manufacturing facilities. In food technology, pupils' knowledge of nutrition is good and skills of research are quite well developed, particularly amongst the higher attainers with pupils visiting doctors' surgeries, clinics, libraries and the internet for information to support their special diet projects. A group of lower attaining pupils found greater difficulty with the analysis of a special diet's product because of their weak understanding of nutrition.

Average and low attaining pupils make good progress on account of positive attitudes, interest in the subject and good teaching. Special needs pupils receive good individual support and generally make good progress. High attaining pupils need greater challenge in some areas and access to a greater range of reference materials.

106. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. Almost all teaching is satisfactory, good or very good in similar proportions. Pupils respond well to the good teaching; they are eager to make progress and they particularly enjoy the making activities. This was very evident in one Year 9 lesson where pupils were making various types of pasties with fillings of their own choice. Although pupils worked at a fast pace they helped each other and showed much enthusiasm. Relationships are good and lessons are well planned and pupils are managed appropriately. Work is marked with useful comments informing pupils of what they need to do to improve. Pupils' progress is carefully monitored with strengths in the setting of deadlines to ensure course work does not fall behind. Teaching is also monitored but greater emphasis could be placed on identifying and sharing good practice.

## **Geography**

107. The GCSE examination results have fluctuated since the previous inspection. In 1998 they were below the national average and also below average for similar schools. The results for 1999 improved with a good proportion of higher grades. All pupils achieved at least a grade G. There was no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls. Pupils' results in geography are similar to those in other subjects.

108. In Key Stage 3, in response to well planned lessons, pupils make good overall progress in relation to their attainment on entry to the school. Their attainment by the end of the key stage is slightly below the national average for their age. There is progress in mapping skills and in the effective use of an atlas to locate places studied. Pupils increase their skills in the use of evidence to answer geographical questions. In one lesson, for example, pupils came to decisions about problems in Mediterranean holiday resorts after studying source material about the effects of tourism. Throughout the key stage there is growing independence in response to good opportunities for the experience of geographical enquiry. By the end of the key stage higher attaining pupils describe and give reasons for similarities and difference between places.

109. Key Stage 4 pupils continue their good rate of progress through rigorous coverage of the examination syllabus and achieve broadly average standards when they leave the school. Field work has helped pupils of all levels of attainment to take more responsibility for their learning. They appropriately extend their skills of analysing information they have collected themselves. By the end of the key stage most pupils have a good knowledge of location.

110. Most pupils develop their range of technical language. This is helped by the key words on display in the main geography classroom and tasks aimed at improving literacy. However, low literacy skills impede the written work of pupils with learning difficulties and those with special educational needs. Pupils of all ages make progress in the skills of numeracy, especially when studying maps and transferring geographical information into graphs. Since the previous inspection resources are now well chosen to provide an appropriate level of challenge for all pupils. At both key stages, in response to well targeted support, pupils with special educational needs make good progress.

111. Pupils show positive attitudes and behave well in their lessons. They are keen to answer questions and respond readily to the challenge of the work, often co-operating with others to share their ideas. They are confident when tackling new areas of work particularly when they are faced with the challenge of enquiry. Pupils with special educational needs respond well when they receive individual support and are set work matched to their levels of attainment. There is evidence of enjoyment in geography lessons which is a reflection of the success of teachers' determination to improve the dynamism of the course in both key stages.

112. Teaching is generally good and some at Key Stage 3 is very good. Teachers know their subject and act as good role models with their enthusiasm for geography. Lessons are well planned with clear aims that are explained to the pupils. Clear instructions are given while at the same time pupils are encouraged to pursue their own ideas independently. Teachers have a good rapport with their pupils, give them plenty of encouragement and engage their interest with stimulating resources and well directed questioning. They provide accurate geographical content which helps pupils to develop a strong sense of place for both

local and distant areas. In a Year 11 lesson on the retail industry, for example, pupils took part in a discussion about the location and development of the Trafford Centre. Since the previous inspection there is now a wider range of teaching strategies to give pupils more responsibility for their own learning. In a Year 8 lesson, for example, pupils were encouraged to select appropriate resources and make decisions about the characteristics of the Amazon Rainforest. Although the main geography classroom is large and well equipped, geography is still taught in a number of other rooms. These are rather small and lacking in some basic equipment. This reduces opportunities to add variety to lessons.

113. There is still a need to give further attention to the provision of information technology in lessons. Marking is consistent and assessment has improved since the previous inspection. Individual progress is more carefully monitored and pupils are encouraged to evaluate their own work and set targets for improvement. There is a wider range of assessment techniques linked to National Curriculum levels. Examples of work at different levels are being developed but, to ensure the accuracy of the Key Stage 3 assessment, more work needs to be done to agree standards. The subject is well organised and managed.

## **History**

114. Examination results were below the national average overall in 1998 and 1999. In 1999 there was a significant improvement in girls' performance with almost a half of the pupils entered obtaining A-C grades. One in five pupils entered obtained A grades, and all pupils entered were successful in obtaining an A-G grade. Boys' results declined in 1999 but results reflected the school projections.

115. A significant number of pupils on entry to the school have deficiencies in language skills, particularly reading and comprehension. As at previous inspection overall standards are in line with the national expectation at the end of Key Stage 3 but there is less variation across the cohort. Assignments during Key Stage 3 now require extended writing in each year and all pupils are required to use a range of sources. By the end of Key Stage 4 inspection evidence confirms that overall attainment meets the national average.

116. The previous inspection reported examples of pupils who made limited progress. The department has addressed these concerns which related to planning and organisation. Given the well below average attainment on entry the progress of pupils in lower attaining sets is satisfactory. The progress of the more able pupils and those with special educational needs is good at both key stages. Pupils are helped to improve in assessing evidence and examining the historical significance of people and events and in the use of sources. Examples include work seen in year 9 on the industrial revolution and in year 11 where pupils were studying Hitler's treatment of the Jews.

117. The overall quality of teaching is good and is the most significant factor in ensuring that overall pupils make good progress throughout the school. A strong feature is the relationship between teachers and pupils which promotes good pupil behaviour and attitudes to learning. Pupils are eager to participate and enjoy the subject. This is exemplified by the significant increase in pupils pursuing the GCSE course with numbers having more than doubled since 1997. Lessons were never less than satisfactory and over two thirds were good or very good. The best lessons offer variety and challenge and enhance pupils' knowledge and understanding. In a year 11 lesson on the Nazi persecution of the Jews the subject matter was handled with great sensitivity and skill and the topic was studied using a range of contemporary sources and film material. Teachers have sound subject knowledge, prepare well and use time and resources effectively. Assessment of pupils' work is sound and used to plan future work. There is, however, a need to evaluate how well the work set matches the needs of individual pupils in year 7 given the size of some classes.

118. A broad and balanced curriculum is provided and programmes of study meet national curriculum and examination requirements. History is an effective department contributing fully to the aims and purposes of the school. There are, however, issues which should be addressed. Information technology in the subject context is insufficiently developed given the potential range of applications for the curriculum. In order to raise the attainment of some middle and lower ability pupils there is a need to improve their analytical and interpretative skills. The department should also continue to build on the good start made in using National Curriculum levels and level descriptors at Key Stage 3 in order to accurately record pupils' progress against a national scale.

## Information Technology

119. Overall standards of attainment in information technology are average at the end of both key stages. Teacher assessment at the end of Key Stage 3 shows 62% of pupils achieving the expected levels for pupils of this age in 1999. Pupils' attainment varies considerably at the end of Key Stage 4 depending on the subjects that they study. No pupils take a GCSE examination in information technology.

120. Pupils enter the school with a low level of information technology skills but they make good progress during Key Stage 3 and by the end of year 9 their overall attainment is average. This is due to the individual teaching which extends each pupil and encourages them to work at a fast pace. The scheme of work provides a framework within which different subject teachers can devise projects linking information technology skills with their specialism. This places pupils' experience of information technology in a relevant context whilst ensuring that all pupils acquire the confidence and competence to use word processing, spreadsheets and databases independently outside lessons. However, there are variations in progress and attainment between classes. In a Year 7 project based around an investigation into castles, pupils make good progress and show persistence in drawing castles with a graphics program and importing this into a title page which contained well thought out text. Also in Year 7 pupils make very good progress in a project involving a design around a caravan which leads to the production of sales literature and databases and spreadsheets used to market the design. However in some other classes the tasks do not enable pupils to extend into areas in which they have to consider the audience for their work and to select the way they undertake a task. In these classes, whilst pupils make satisfactory progress in acquiring basic skills, they do not progress beyond that level. The progress of pupils in Year 7 is better than the progress of pupils in the other two years of the key stage. Overall, the use of word-processing and graphics to produce well laid out presentations is good. There are few examples of pupils learning to use word processing as a tool for drafting text from scratch. Pupils are competent in using of spreadsheets and databases. Pupils have minimal experience of using computers for control and measurement but use computer aided manufacture in design and technology. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in acquiring basic skills and also make good use of the "Successmaker" program to enhance their literacy.

121. Overall progress of pupils during Key Stage 4 is unsatisfactory. The recently introduced NPRA units, whilst providing pupils with a Certificate of Achievement, are not pitched at a level that ensures that most pupils make progress from the standards reached at the end of Key Stage 3. This is because most of the course is focused on basic skills rather than the applications of information technology. The school sees the introduction of this course as an interim measure prior to the introduction of more advanced courses made possible by recent staff changes. Almost one third of pupils take a GCSE course in business studies and all these pupils extend their use of information technology for presenting their projects. Some pupils also extend their presentational skills in design and technology and use computer aided design and manufacture. Some pupils make satisfactory use of word-processing and retrieve information from CD ROMs in history, art and English. A few pupils manipulate images in art. Opportunities to use spreadsheets for interpreting information are often missed when presenting projects although pupils extend their ability to use spreadsheets for graphs in science and mathematics. However, information technology is not used consistently with all pupils in most subjects. Very few pupils use computers for control and measurement during this key stage and in this respect the requirements of the National Curriculum programme of study are not met. For those pupils who follow the business studies course and those who have opportunities in different subjects and at home to advance their information technology skills attainment is broadly average. However, a significant minority of pupils only maintain their level of skill from the previous key stage and their attainment level is below average. Although overall attainment is close to average by the end of Key Stage 4, progress is not as good as it should be.

122. Pupils mostly enjoy using computers and make full use of the computer rooms at lunchtimes and after school with good support from teachers. They have sufficient capability to use the computers independently at these times and in other subjects when the opportunity is provided. There is a pleasant working atmosphere in most classes, pupils generally work hard to succeed and persist with difficult tasks. The only lessons where pupils do not work hard are those in which the tasks involve repetitive typing and the teacher does not involve the pupils in their own learning.

123. Overall, teaching is satisfactory at both key stages. Half of the lessons were good or very good and there was little unsatisfactory teaching. In the best lessons the teachers took the opportunity to teach information technology skills through a relevant task which enabled pupils of all prior attainments to progress at an appropriate pace. Where the teaching was unsatisfactory the teacher did not involve the pupils in the lesson through questioning and did not match the teaching to the needs of individuals or groups of pupils. Nevertheless, individual help was invariably thorough and lessons were mostly well managed. Homework is well integrated with classwork tasks but it often comprises preparing text for presentation during the

lesson. This tends to over-emphasise the role of the computer for presentation rather than drafting.

124. The department has clear aims and the development plan is appropriate. There has been an audit of staff skills which shows a good level of capability in most staff. However the co-ordination of the subject is inadequate, resulting in a lack of consistency between the teaching of different classes during Key Stage 3. Not all classes are undertaking work at an appropriate level. Likewise the use of information technology in other subjects at both key stages is not sufficiently co-ordinated to ensure that pupils make consistent progress. The curriculum at Key Stage 4, including the specific information technology course, needs to illustrate how progression can be achieved. Assessment procedures at Key Stage 3 do not differentiate sufficiently between the attainment of different pupils. Standards in information technology at the end of Key Stage 4 should be reported to parents either separately or within subjects. Information technology has only recently been constituted as a department and the resulting opportunity for staff to meet regularly to co-ordinate their approaches and share curriculum planning will go some way to overcoming the lack of consistency. However, the need for the head of department to carry out the roles of technician and network manager as well as co-ordinate the curriculum is also a significant factor in the management weaknesses. Hence there is an urgent need to appoint a technician to maintain the hardware and software and ensure that teachers can have confidence in the functioning of the network and so that the head of department can concentrate on monitoring teaching quality, curriculum development and co-ordination.

125. Although there have been few improvements in the curriculum or standards since the previous inspection several changes have been put in place recently which are intended to raise standards. The computers, which were coming to the end of their useful life, have been replaced and the school now has an extensive up-to-date network. Teachers have been trained to use the new facilities during the past year and teachers with information technology experience appointed, specific information technology lessons have been introduced in Key Stage 4 and a department of information and communications technology has been formed. With the appointment of technical support under consideration the school is now in a good position to raise standards of achievement in information technology.

### **Modern languages**

126. Prior to 1998 when pupils followed a 100% modular course, GCSE results were above average in French and German. Since 1998 results have declined, reflecting in part the ending of 100% modular assessment and the introduction of a more rigorous examination syllabus. In 1998 the proportion of pupils achieving grades A\*-C in German fell to below national average while in 1999 results in French declined further to well below national average. In both years the A\*-G rate was 100%. Boys continue to perform less well than girls, reflecting the national trend. In both French and German the overall attainment is lower than most subjects in the school.

127. Overall progress in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. Progress is notably better in years 7 and 8 than in year 9 when time for French is reduced to one period per week. Most pupils benefit from being taught in ability sets although progress does slow for pupils when they are taught in very large middle ability sets, often containing pupils with behavioural problems. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because they are taught in smaller groups and there is often in-class support.

128. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils' attainment in French is below average. Speaking is the main weakness for pupils of all abilities mainly because they have too few opportunities to practise their speaking in class. Most pupils do not speak with confidence and responses are brief. When they engage in role-play, they rely heavily on written prompts for support. This practice often results in less accurate pronunciation and intonation. However, pupils accustomed to hearing French spoken consistently in their lessons tend to speak more spontaneously and with better pronunciation. Writing is a relative strength for pupils of all abilities. They copy writing accurately and most adapt a model to write sentences. Higher attainers write sentences from memory and show some awareness of verbs in the past tense, which enables them to progress faster towards the expected standard for their age. Pupils listen to tapes for detail with some success, provided they are repeated. Most pupils use dictionaries effectively and show understanding of short sentences in the worksheets provided, but they have few opportunities to read short texts, for example in their course books, which would help to develop their reading skills further.

129. In German which all pupils begin in year 9 most make the good progress normally expected in the early stages of learning a new language. However, it would seem more appropriate for pupils of lower ability and those with special educational needs to use this time more effectively to raise their level of attainment in French. Attainment in German is lower than in French but is satisfactory, given the limited time it is studied.

130. By the end of Key Stage 4 overall attainment in French and German is just below average. Overall progress is satisfactory. Speaking continues to be weak but writing is now a strength because it has been successfully targeted. Higher attainers in both languages make good progress in the range of structures, tenses and more complex language they are able to use when they write about and discuss topics such as past holidays and school life. High attainers in German speak more confidently and with good pronunciation because they regularly practise their speaking skills in lessons. Pupils of average and lower attainment extract factual information from tapes and printed material, most write a paragraph for their coursework assignments but few respond readily in the foreign language. Occasional immature behaviour hinders the progress of a small minority of pupils.

131. Pupils have good attitudes to work. Most settle down quickly and sustain their concentration for the duration of the lesson. They listen very attentively to tapes and are prepared to persevere. Behaviour is usually good. When the opportunity arises, younger pupils eagerly participate in lessons and enjoy language games. Pupils now have opportunities to word process their work.

132. The overall quality of teaching is sound. There are, however, some unsatisfactory as well as some good features. Relationships are very positive between teachers and pupils. Teachers speak their languages confidently though they frequently miss opportunities to develop pupils' listening and speaking skills. Some lessons observed were dominated by the teacher and pupils were insufficiently involved in their learning. The best lessons seen were lively, had good pace and clear objectives. Resources such as attractive flashcards, tapes and video were well selected to stimulate pupils' interest and allowed them to practise and develop all their language skills. Such good practice needs to be shared across the department. Teachers assess and record pupils' attainment but they need to undertake a thorough review of their assessment procedures in Key Stage 3 to ensure standards across the department are consistent. Work is needed to gain a sound understanding of the National Curriculum levels to ensure that levels assigned to pupils are accurate.

133. Under the leadership of the acting head of department teachers have worked hard as a team to raise attainment in Key Stage 4 and now that a new examination syllabus is in place, there are signs that standards are improving. The department now needs to focus its attention on the curriculum in Key Stage 3. It needs to undertake as a matter of urgency a thorough evaluation of the current provision of two languages for all pupils in year 9 and consider how this is impacting on pupils' progress in French. A new scheme of work for French recently introduced in years 7 and 8 now needs to be developed for year 9.

## **Music**

134. In 1998 GCSE results in music were below national averages. In 1999 there were no candidates in Year 11. Year 9 pupils are able to use guitars, voice and classroom percussion instruments for both performance and composition. Pupils build on their vocal skills to good effect. In Year 7 they are able to select and manipulate vocal sounds in short group compositions based on graphic scores. Compositions, however, tend to be very brief. In Year 7, singing is enthusiastic with pupils singing in two parts. In Year 9 pupils consolidate their guitar skills, though not all achieve fluency in playing basic patterns and chords. Pupils are encouraged, and have some success, in developing a musical vocabulary with which to describe and appraise the music they hear. Key Stage 3 pupils, however, have few opportunities to extend their compositions and own musical enthusiasms through the use of computer technology and by the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is just below average.

135. At Key Stage 4 standards of attainment are near average in some aspects of aural work and performing. Attainment in composing and appraising is less good. Compositions often lack developmental aspects and sometimes compare unfavourably with pupils' performing skills. Individual vocal and instrumental skills are often sound. In Year 11, pupils use their instrumental and vocal expertise to support composition. However, pupils at Key Stage 4 make only limited use of computers for composition and this restricts the range of musical styles explored. By the end of Key Stage 4 standards overall in music remain just below average and are below the standards in many other subjects.

136. Overall, pupils make satisfactory progress across both key stages in relation to their musical standards on entry to the school. Attainment and progress for the pupils with special educational needs is also satisfactory. At all stages pupils have opportunities to develop necessary musical skills.

137. Pupils' attitudes in music lessons are good. In all observed lessons pupils' response was attentive, with appropriate levels of interest, co-operation and good behaviour. Pupils work well individually and with enthusiasm in instrumental groups. At Key Stage 3 they co-operate in group composition and are often enthusiastic in performing tasks. Independent learning skills are developed at Key Stage 4; individuals work assiduously on their compositions and performance projects. The number of pupils opting for GCSE music at the end of Key Stage 3 is near average.

138. Teaching is satisfactory, with elements of good practice. Vocal skills are used to very good advantage in the classroom and in extra-curricular activities. Teaching provides a range of work and a supportive approach. Pupils have opportunities to explore their own culture, but there are too few opportunities to explore the music of other cultures. This limits pupils' knowledge of world music. Teachers routinely refer to technical terms, thus helping pupils to improve their appraising skills. The pace of lessons is sometimes slow where resources are thinly spread and insufficient consolidation and extension work provided for pupils waiting to use instruments. Slow pace in some lessons was also referred to in the previous report. The four visiting instrumental teachers make a contribution to the curriculum and their work is integrated into the work of the department. Pupils have the opportunity to take instrumental examinations.

139. Suitable administrative processes are in place. The long-term monitoring, assessing and recording of pupils' work are sound. Accommodation is very good, the main music rooms providing a spacious and agreeable environment. However, there is a lack of adequate computer, keyboard and instrumental resources and this has a detrimental effect on the standards achieved. The inadequacy of such resources was also referred to in the previous inspection report. The department is aware of the need to develop and enrich computer work at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, so that pupils can receive a full entitlement to information and communication technology in music lessons.

140. The department provides a range of extra-curricular activities such as the band and choirs. The performance and composing work of pupils is celebrated in the school and in the community, within a regular calendar of musical events. Such opportunities for pupils to perform do much to foster links with the community.

141. There have been some significant improvements since the previous inspection: the accommodation has been upgraded and it now has a positive impact on pupils' progress; standards at Key Stage 3 are better; and the quality of teaching has improved. However some deficiencies remain: the pace of work is often too slow and there are insufficient resources.

### **Physical education**

142. The statutory teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 indicated that the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard was similar to that found nationally. Since the previous inspection, an examination course in physical education has been introduced. Initial results in 1997 were below the national average. In 1998, the GCSE examination results were above the national average with a creditable 67% of pupils achieving A\*-C grades. In 1999 the proportion of pupils achieving an A\*-C grade declined to 52% but was still good in comparison with most other subjects in the school. The small numbers of girls who choose the subject have consistently achieved higher grades than boys. All pupils entered for the examination since it was introduced in 1997 have achieved A\*-G grades which is better than that found nationally.

143. Pupils of all abilities make generally good progress in Key Stage 3 because they have positive attitudes to the subject and because most of the teaching is good. In a good Year 7 netball lesson girls made rapid progress in developing basic passing and footwork skills because their interest was captured from the start with an enjoyable warm up and because the teacher's careful explanations were supported by useful demonstrations of correct technique. Higher attainers gained the confidence to make accurate comments on the quality of other pupils' performance. Pupils who have special educational needs make good progress because their teachers are alert to their needs, adapt the work accordingly and provide good individual support in lessons. By the end of Year 9 pupils' attainment is average. Knowledge of the effects of exercise on the body and an understanding of the importance of a healthy lifestyle is above average because all pupils take part in a well designed health related fitness programme.

144. Most pupils, including those who have special educational needs, continue to make good progress in compulsory physical education in Key Stage 4. Progress is better in lessons where pupils are able to take more responsibility. For example, girls in Year 10 lead others in warm up exercises and develop detailed understanding of rules and tactics which they begin to apply in simple refereeing and coaching situations. It was not possible to observe Year 11 pupils in compulsory physical education lessons during the inspection. Discussions with Year 11 pupils together with standards observed in Year 10 indicate that attainment by the end of Year 11 will be average. In optional GCSE examination classes, progress in practical work and theory lessons is good. Good teaching ensures that pupils make rapid progress through the course content and are well prepared for their practical assessment. Theory lessons capture pupils' interest with good use of demonstrations, for example of the working of arm muscles. By the end of the Key Stage, pupils' attainment in the optional examination course is above average. A good range of competitive and recreational extra-curricular activities is popular, well supported and gives boys and girls in both key stages further opportunities to improve. Some achieve high standards and both individuals and teams are successful in local and area competition.

145. Pupils' attitudes to learning are good in both key stages. Most commit themselves to practices with enjoyment and enthusiasm. Substantial numbers of pupils choose to take part in extra curricular sporting activities and there are very few non-participants in lessons. Reasonable numbers of pupils choose to follow the optional examination course in Key Stage 4. Most of these are boys although the proportion of girls is increasing. Behaviour is, for the most part, good. Relationships between pupils and teachers are good and are based on mutual respect. Pupils work well together when practising skills and planning tactics in games, and persevere even when they do not experience immediate success. Pupils in optional examination classes are well motivated and their files of work are well organised with good standards of presentation. Standards of sporting behaviour are good and pupils keep rules in games even when not directly supervised by the teacher. Pupils are happy to volunteer to set out and store equipment which they handle safely and sensibly. The subject makes a strong contribution to pupils' personal development.

146. The quality of the teaching is good overall. It is never less than satisfactory and more frequently good. Occasionally it is very good. In GCSE lessons, the teaching is consistently good. Good features include secure subject knowledge in games, the quality of relationships with pupils which generates confidence, the accurate assessment of performance which is used to help pupils improve and good recognition and support for pupils who have special educational needs. Teaching was best when pupils were given clear, challenging but attainable learning objectives which were matched to their ability levels. An introductory basketball lesson in Year 7 quickly established safe productive working practices and challenging, competitive and enjoyable activities were set, taking into account the pupils' inexperience. A Year 8 aerobics lesson with lower ability pupils was well planned to include an appropriate mix of interesting theoretical and enjoyable but demanding practical activities which gave pupils some insight into the importance of regular health promoting exercise. Homework is regularly set and marked in the examination course and marking is effective in providing guidance for improvement. Occasionally, in some otherwise satisfactory lessons, activities are not sufficiently well matched to the ability of all pupils and some time is lost in preparing for practices or in discussing performance with pupils.

147. Subject leadership is strong and has created a shared sense of purpose among teachers and a departmental culture responsive to development. Good progress has been made in designing useful procedures for assessing pupils' attainment which now require further work to improve their reliability. The few issues identified at the time of the previous inspection have been resolved.

### **Religious education.**

148. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is below average because the time allocated for teaching religious education is insufficient to meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus. By the end of Key Stage 4, the vast majority of pupils meet the expectations of the nationally accredited short courses which they follow. However, these courses do not provide a suitable level of challenge for the majority of pupils. No pupils were entered for the GCSE examination in Religious Studies in 1998. In 1997, 44.4% of pupils achieved A\*-C grades which was below the national average. In 1999 the proportion of pupils achieving A\*-C grades fell to 13.3% from a small entry which is well below average.

149. Pupils of all abilities, including those who have special educational needs, make good progress from a low starting point throughout Key Stage 3. This is due to good teaching and because the majority of pupils are interested and have positive attitudes to learning. Pupils begin Year 7 by considering that human beings have a spiritual as well as physical dimension characterised by humanity's need to find meaning and purpose in life. They are strongly encouraged to respect and be open to the variety of ways in which different faith communities have responded to this need. They steadily gain in knowledge and understanding of the key features of the major world faiths helped by some imaginative teaching strategies. By the end of the key stage, pupils' attainment in terms of the expectations set by the Agreed Syllabus is broadly average. They have a sound knowledge and understanding of Christianity and of aspects of the other faiths studied which they use to make personal responses to religious issues. For example, lower attaining pupils apply their understanding of events in the life of Guru Nanak to interpret present day situations. Higher attainers sometimes produce extended writing of impressive quality and length, for example in describing the life of Moses. Overall, pupils' capacity to make personal responses to religious issues is well developed although opinions are not always well supported by evidence.

150. Overall progress through Key Stage 4 is unsatisfactory because the units of study do not provide sufficient opportunity for most pupils to develop their skills in religious education and because insufficient time is provided for the subject to be studied. Themes which are studied, such as "Marriage: A Christian Perspective", are interesting, relevant and generate some worthwhile discussion which is enjoyed by pupils and so consequently, progress in lessons is often good. For example, pupils in Year 10



sensibly discuss and express opinions on the importance of cultural factors in marriage and respond well to the challenge to preconceptions. However, written responses lack depth and they do not have the opportunity to develop their ideas further in independent work. Pupils in the optional examination classes make good progress in developing their knowledge and understanding of Christianity and Judaism but are not as successful in applying this in support of opinions or in evaluating issues. By the end of the key stage, pupils' attainment is below average.

151. Take up for the optional examination course is increasing and greater numbers of boys are opting for the subject. Pupils in year 10 seriously consider the importance of commitment to rules in their own lives. The majority of pupils listen attentively to their teachers and apply themselves conscientiously to their written work but some lower attaining pupils find it difficult to concentrate for the whole of the sixty minute lessons. Behaviour is good. Pupils respond well to questions and offer information and ask questions for themselves. They are prepared to share their own experience in the generally supportive atmosphere which prevails in classrooms. They respond well to the subject ethos which encourages respect for beliefs and values different from their own. For, example, pupils in Year 7 lesson which began their study of Islam, listened with interest and respect to a fellow pupil reading from the Qur'an. When given the opportunity, pupils work well together on collaborative tasks or in discussion.

152. The overall quality of teaching is good and never less than satisfactory. Subject knowledge is good and is used effectively in explanations and demonstration. For example, the use of appropriate religious objects to illustrate Jewish Sabbath ritual in a Year 11 GCSE lesson, made the subject alive to pupils who were able to make good progress. Good relationships encourage a classroom ethos in which pupils feel confident to express opinions and describe experiences. Teachers ensure that there is a good balance between building a knowledge and understanding of the faith communities studied and having opportunities to make personal responses to religious issues. There was little variation in methodology in most of the nine lessons which were observed but classroom displays and other examples of pupils' work indicate that a good range of imaginative teaching methods is used. Exercise books are thoroughly marked and homework is set regularly. In a small proportion of lessons, teachers spend too much time exploring issues which, though interesting, are not relevant to achieving their lesson aims, or do not ensure that all pupils in the class retain appropriate levels of concentration.

153. Subject leadership is enthusiastic and generally effective. The subject makes a strong contribution towards pupils' spiritual and personal development. The good initial progress which has been made in devising and trialling procedures for assessing pupils' work in Key Stage 3 and in evaluating the impact of the programmes of study needs to be developed further. The time currently allocated to religious education in Key Stage 4 is insufficient to meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus and the programmes of study do not provide appropriate levels of challenge for pupils of average and above average ability. The issues which were raised at the time of the previous inspection have been resolved other than lack of opportunity for pupils to work independently which is still the case in Key Stage 4.

154. **PART C: INSPECTION DATA**

154. **SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

155. The inspection was conducted by a team of 13 inspectors who spent more than a total of 47 days in the school. The inspection covered all National Curriculum subjects and religious education at Key Stages 3 and 4. The inspection also investigated the quality of personal and social education, careers education, sex education, registration, assemblies and extra-curricular activities. Inspectors also observed a small sample of business studies lessons. 158 lessons were observed and 155 hours were spent in lessons. Many hours were also spent scrutinising samples of pupils' work, in discussions with pupils, and in other observations of the work of the school. All staff timetabled for teaching and present during the inspection were observed teaching and received verbal reports on the quality of their lessons.

156. Meetings were held with the governing body before and after the inspection. Interviews were held with the headteacher and other senior staff, all heads of department, and with other staff with posts of special responsibility. Four evening meetings were held during the inspection week and the conclusions of the report represent the corporate views of the team. Before the inspection, 199 parents completed and returned questionnaires sent to them by the school. The registered inspector and the lay inspector held a meeting attended by 15 parents. Views expressed by parents in the questionnaire, in letters and raised at the meeting were noted and taken into account by the inspectors. Letters from other agencies who have had close contact with the school were also taken into account.

**DATA AND INDICATORS**

154. **Pupil data**

	Number of pupils on roll (full-time equivalent)	Number of pupils with statements of SEN	Number of pupils on school's register of SEN	Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals
Y7 – Y11	817	45	150	167

154. **Teachers and classes**

154. **Qualified teachers (Y7 – Y11)**

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent):	47.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher:	17.2

154. **Education support staff (Y7 – Y11)**

Total number of education support staff:	6
Total aggregate hours worked each week:	161

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:	78.6
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Average teaching group size:	KS3	22
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154. **Financial data**

Financial year:	1999
	£
Total Income	1745265
Total Expenditure	1788558
Expenditure per pupil	2230
Balance brought forward from previous year	118168
Balance carried forward to next year	74875

154.

**PARENTAL SURVEY**

Number of questionnaires sent out:	817
Number of questionnaires returned:	199

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	28.1	63.3	4.6	3.5	0.5
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	41.2	52.8	2.0	3.5	0.5
The school handles complaints from parents well	23.6	49.7	19.2	6.5	1.0
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	28.1	59.8	9.1	3.0	0
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	32.6	56.3	9.1	1.0	1.0
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	34.7	57.3	6.0	2.0	0
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	29.1	59.3	10.1	1.0	0.5
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	29.2	60.8	6.5	1.5	2.0
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	32.7	53.3	9.5	2.5	2.0
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	25.6	56.8	12.6	1.5	3.5
My child(ren) like(s) school	31.7	54.8	8.0	3.0	2.5

