

INSPECTION REPORT

The Grange Comprehensive School
Runcorn

LEA area: Halton

Unique Reference Number: 111401

Inspection Number: 184555

Headteacher: Mr D Stanley

Reporting inspector: Mr T W M Comer
15109

Dates of inspection: 29 November – 3 December 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 708054

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
Type of control:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of Chair of Governors:	Councillor Patrick Tyrrell
Date of previous inspection:	February 1995

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Ms C Murray-Watson Lay Inspector		Leadership and management Attendance Support, guidance and pupils' welfare Partnership with parents and the community Efficiency of the school
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Dr D Tracey	Science	Staffing, accommodation and resources for learning
Dr P Thompson Dr C Orr	Design and technology Modern foreign languages	The curriculum and assessment Attitudes, behaviour and personal development
Mr H Moreton	History	
Mr V Gormally Ms A Cawthera Ms J Boulton Mr R Wilkins Ms G Lawson	Geography Art Music Physical education Religious education Special educational needs	
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MAIN FINDINGS

What the school does well

- Pupils make good progress.
- Pupils have very good attitudes and behave very well.
- The teaching is good.
- The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is very good.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils' achievement. Discipline and relationships are very good and pupils respond well to the high quality of education they receive.
- The school is very well managed.
- The monitoring of pupils' progress, behaviour and personal development is very good.
- The school has strong links with its community.
- The provision for extracurricular activities is excellent.
- The school is efficient and gives good value for money.

Where the school has weaknesses

- I. When pupils enter the school in Year 7, their literacy skills are weak. These weaknesses persist throughout the school and adversely affect overall standards.
- II. Teachers do too much for the pupils in lessons so that their ability to learn independently is underdeveloped.
- III. Attendance is unsatisfactory. Poor attendance adversely affects the progress of a significant number of pupils.

This is a good school which serves its community very well. The school's strengths outweigh its weaknesses. The governors' action plan will set out how the weaknesses identified during the inspection are to be tackled. The plan will be sent to all parents or guardians of pupils at the school.

How the school has improved since the last inspection

The GCSE examination results have improved at a faster rate than the national trend though the sixth form results have not improved in a similar way.

The school has made good overall progress with the key issues which were raised at the time of the previous inspection. In particular, pupils' motivation to learn has greatly improved and their attitudes to work are now very good. The school worked successfully to achieve above average attendance though it has again fallen below average, owing to outbreaks of serious illness. Information technology skills have greatly improved. Though pupils regularly experience acts of collective worship in assemblies, the school's policy for a spiritual 'thought for the week' in morning form-time is not implemented by all form teachers. The provision for religious education in the sixth form is still unsatisfactory and not enough time is given for some pupils in Key Stage 4 to cover the syllabus.

Overall the school has improved well since the previous inspection and the senior management has the necessary strategies in place and the capability and energy to make further, sustained improvement.

Standards in subjects

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

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

Key Stage 3 The 1999 Key Stage 3 test results were below the average for all maintained secondary schools though well above the average for schools with similar intakes of pupils. Results in English improved substantially over the previous year and were broadly average in comparison with all schools and well above average in comparison with similar schools. This is a significant achievement in view of pupils' poor literacy skills when they begin Year 7. The mathematics and science results also improved, though they were well below the national average in mathematics and below average in science. The mathematics results were better, though the science results were no different from those of similar schools.

Key Stage 4 Over a period of four years, the GCSE results improved at a faster rate than the national trend. Though they were well below the national average in 1999, they were above average for similar schools and were much better than would have been predicted from the pupils' test scores on entry to Year 7. The strongest subjects in Key Stage 4 are art, physical education and technology subjects. The weakest subjects are those which make most demands on literacy skills.

Sixth form A level results are well below the national average but they reflect the pupils' modest performance at GCSE. Results in vocational courses are a little below average.

Quality of teaching

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 7-9	Good	Art, English, special educational needs.	-
Years 10-11	Good	Art, information technology, design and technology.	-
Sixth form	Good	Effective in all subjects.	-
English	Good		
Mathematics	Good		

Teaching is at least satisfactory in more than 98 per cent of all lessons and unsatisfactory in nearly two per cent. It is good in 47 per cent of lessons and very good in a further 23 per cent. Teaching is effective in all subjects because it is well monitored by the senior managers. It is most effective in English and in special

educational needs in Key Stage 3, and in practical subjects such as art and technology. The strengths of the teaching lie in the teachers' good command of the subjects they teach, and their good management of the pupils. The teaching has two main weaknesses. The school's strategy for literacy is not implemented in all subjects as effectively as it is in English, and teachers do too much for the pupils and do not give them enough opportunities to learn for themselves.

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

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• **Other aspects of the school**

Aspect	Comment
Behaviour	Behaviour is very good. Pupils have very good attitudes, are well motivated and enjoy school.
Attendance	Attendance is unsatisfactory. Attendance fell over the past year owing to outbreaks of serious illness. The school is working hard to restore attendance to its previous good level.
Ethos*	The governors and senior staff have established an excellent 'climate for learning'. Expectations for pupils' effort and achievement are high and pupils strive to meet them. This is a happy school in which relationships are very good.
Leadership and management	The school is very well managed. The governors, Headteacher and senior staff provide strong and purposeful leadership, concentrating successfully on raising standards and pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence.
Curriculum	The curriculum is good overall though legal requirements are not fully met in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Some pupils who do not take GCSE in religious education do not make satisfactory progress because insufficient time is given to cover the programme of studies of the agreed syllabus. The provision for extracurricular activities is excellent. A high proportion of pupils regularly participate in organised team games after school.
Pupils with special educational needs	Very good. The teaching is very good and pupils make good progress towards the targets set for them in their individual plans.
Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Pupils' moral and social development is very good and their cultural development is good. Pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory overall though legal requirements for daily collective worship are not fully met.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	The teachers and other staff are well qualified. The pupil-to-teacher ratio is average. Resources for learning are good, especially the library and computers. The accommodation is satisfactory though crowded, especially for music. It is very clean and in good repair.
Value for money	Taking all relevant factors into account, inspectors find that the school gives good value for money. The school adds considerable 'value'.

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

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

What most parents like about the school

- IV. The school's expectations and values.
- V. The school is open and welcoming and the staff are approachable. The pastoral system is 'first rate'.
- VI. Parents have a clear understanding of what is taught and appreciate the newsletter *In Touch*.
- VII. They are well informed about their children's progress.
- VIII. Their children achieve good standards.

What some parents are not happy about

- XIII. Their children should have lockers. At

- IX. The very good teaching of pupils with special educational needs.
- X. The teachers' work in providing a wide range of extracurricular activities.
- XI. Their children have regular homework.
- XII. Their children behave well and enjoy school.

The inspectors agree with the parents' favourable opinions of the work of the school. Inspectors also agree, and the Headteacher agrees, that it would be desirable for children to have lockers in which to keep their books and other kit. However, the school has no space to house lockers without adding to the present congestion.

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

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

- XIV. implement the school's plans for improving literacy in all subjects in the same way as has been done in English (paragraphs 10, 12, 14, 17, 36, 37, 99, 100);
- XV. continue to take measures to improve the pupils' attendance, especially in Years 9-11 (paragraphs 10, 12, 21, 25, 61, 80);
- XVI. improve the pupils' capability to learn independently by expecting them to do more for themselves (paragraphs 10, 12, 36, 38).

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

- XVII. the time given for religious education is insufficient for many pupils not taking GCSE in the subject to cover the local agreed syllabus in Key Stage 4. The statutory requirement to provide religious education for sixth form students is not met. The requirement for daily collective worship for all pupils is also not fully met (paragraphs 12, 53, 187);
- XVIII. some pupils do not take a design and technology subject in Key Stage 4 though those who do not do take the art (textiles) course (paragraphs 44, 72, 173);
- XIX. overcrowding in the music rooms affects pupils' progress in the GCSE course (paragraphs 12, 85, 171).

INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the school

1.The Grange Comprehensive School is an above average size community comprehensive school educating 1,081 boys and girls in the 11-18 age range. The school roll has significantly more boys (576) than girls (505). The school is popular and over-subscribed.

2.The previous inspection reported that the school served a disadvantaged area designated as a family stress ward of the Cheshire LEA (local education authority). Since the time of the previous inspection, reorganisation of local government has placed the school in the newly formed Halton LEA.

3.The school continues to serve areas of high family stress with high local indicators of poverty, social exclusion and deprivation. Many pupils have low self-esteem and for some pupils the school offers the structure and boundaries they need to feel secure. The proportion of pupils, 36 per cent, who are entitled to a free school meal is above the national average.

4.Only two pupils, a very small proportion, come from homes where English is not the first language. The school's register of pupils with special educational needs comprises 212 pupils, including 58 with formal statements, both groups form well above average proportions of the school's population. A special unit designated for the education of 14 pupils with emotional or behavioural difficulties is attached to the school. As reported at the previous inspection, the school is also a designated centre for the education of pupils with physical disabilities.

5.The attainment of the annual intake of pupils is consistently well below average. Standardised tests reveal that only 17 per cent of Year 7 pupils score above 100 – a third of what would be expected on average. In particular, the pupils' literacy skills are low at the start of secondary school and many pupils have a reading age substantially below their chronological age.

6.The school's motto is *Aim High in All Things*. The Headteacher says that the school is improving its examination results against a background of falling prior attainment. Some of the school's main priorities for improvement, as set out in its plans, are:

- to improve literacy and thinking skills, in particular through science education;
- to improve the pupils' capacity to take responsibility for their own learning;
- to get back on track with good attendance;
- assessment and target-setting.

· **Key indicators**

Attainment at Key Stage 3¹

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	98	91	189

¹ Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

National Curriculum test results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	63	51	47
	Girls	65	35	28
	Total	128	86	75
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	68 (56)	46 (40)	40 (36)
	National	63 (65)	62 (59)	55 (56)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	14 (8)	24 (19)	9 (15)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teacher assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	50	63	52
	Girls	67	48	43
	Total	117	111	95
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	62 (59)	59 (51)	50 (55)
	National	64 (62)	64 (63)	60 (62)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	21 (28)	30 (29)	18 (21)
	National	31 (30)	37 (37)	28 (30)

Attainment at Key Stage 4²

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	100	81	181

GCSE Results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A* to G	1 or more grades A* to G
Number of pupils achieving standard specified	Boys	27	78	97
	Girls	28	69	79
	Total	55	147	176
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	30 (25)	81 (76)	97 (98)
	National	48 (46)	88 (88)	94 (93)

Attainment in the sixth form³

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 who were entered for GCE A/AS examination in the latest reporting year:	Year	Male	Female	Total
	1999	12	24	36

Average A/AS points score

For candidates entered for 2 or more A levels or equivalent

For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A levels or equivalent

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

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

per candidate

	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	5.0	9.4	8.4 (11.3)	1.1	1.5	1.3 (0.9)
National			- (17.6)			- (2.8)

Number in final year of approved vocational qualifications and percentage of <i>such students</i> who achieved these qualifications:		Number	% success rate
	School	30	67
	National		

Attendance

Percentage of half-days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year:			%
	Authorised absence	School	10.2
		National comparative data	7.9
	Unauthorised absence	School	1.6
		National comparative data	1.1

Exclusions

Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school age) during the previous year:		Number
	Fixed period	21
	Permanent	1

Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is:		%
	Very good or better	23
	Satisfactory or better	98
	Less than satisfactory	2

PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

Attainment and progress

Test and examination results

1.The 1999 Key Stage 3 test results were below average overall in comparison with those of all maintained secondary schools nationally, though they were well above the average for schools with similar intakes of pupils. The English results were in line with the national average and very high in comparison with those of similar schools. The mathematics results were well below average though above average for similar schools. The science results were also below the national average but no different from those of similar schools. These test results represent a considerable improvement over those of the previous year, especially in English. Over a period of four years to 1999, the results have improved significantly in terms of proportions of pupils reaching the expected standard for their age. In each of the three subjects, however, the proportions of pupils reaching high levels are small. The girls outperform the boys in a similar way to that found nationally.

2.The 1999 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) results were well below the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C in five or more subjects, 30 per cent, was well below average but represented a substantial improvement over that of the previous year. When compared with those of similar schools, the results were better than average. Over a four-year period, the school's GCSE results have improved at a faster rate than the national trend. The girls outperformed the boys in a similar way to the national picture. Based on provisional national figures, the 1999 GCSE results were below average in mathematics and well below average in English and science. In comparison with those of similar schools, however, the results were well above average in mathematics, above average in English, and average in science. Nearly all pupils, 99 per cent, achieve a GCSE in English, and 91 per cent do so in mathematics, so that the great majority of pupils leave school with qualifications in these subjects. GCSE results were very high in art, above average in information technology, and below average in drama, history, French, music and physical education, and well below average in geography and religious education. The results were average in design and technology overall. They were a little above average in design and technology (resistant materials), average in design and technology (food), and below average in design and technology (graphics). The pupils do best in practical subjects such as art and technology and less well in subjects which make the greatest demands on the pupils' written work.

3.Over a period of time, the A level results have been consistently below average but they fell sharply in 1999 when they were well below average. The girls did much better than the boys. The groups are very small for some subjects, so that the results for these subjects are not statistically meaningful. However, a reasonable number of candidates took the A level examinations in English and general studies. In 1999, the best results were in art; they were in line with the national average and two of the five candidates achieved a grade B. English and English literature have attracted a good number of students in recent years but the results are below average in both subjects and few candidates achieve the higher grades A or B. In mathematics, numbers of A level students were too small for valid comparisons with national data. There were few A level candidates in science subjects but results taken over a period of time are below the national average. Again, the numbers of students taking A level French are very low. Over the past three years, two of the three candidates passed the examination. These results were broadly in line with the same students' achievements in other subjects. A relatively high proportion of the school's sixth form students study for vocational qualifications such as General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ). In 1999, 67 per cent of the students achieved qualifications in all of their courses. No national figures are available with which to compare the GNVQ results.

First hand evidence of the inspection

4.When pupils enter Year 7, their overall attainment is well below average and this is particularly evident in pupils' literacy skills. This factor has considerable bearing on what pupils can achieve in most subjects. Weak learning skills and poor attendance are also significant factors affecting the progress of some pupils of all abilities. Despite these factors, pupils generally make good progress through the school though overall attainment is below average.

5. By the end of Year 9, when all subjects are taken into account, the pupils' attainment is below average. From their low starting point at the beginning of Year 7, however, the pupils make good progress over the key stage and make considerable gains by the end of Year 9. This is because of the high quality of teaching they receive. In three-fifths of the lessons observed throughout the key stage, boys and girls of different abilities were making good or very good progress. Progress is very good in art because the teaching concentrates on a systematic development of the pupils' essential skills in the subject throughout the key stage and prepares them well for study at GCSE level later on. Pupils make good progress in most other subjects. By the end of the stage, standards are below average in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. They are above average in art and information technology, average in design and technology, physical education, religious education and music, and below average in all other subjects.

6. Pupils begin Key Stage 4 with below average overall attainment. By the end of Year 11, their attainment is again below average. Pupils make good overall progress, both over the key stage and in lessons. Their achievement by the end of the key stage is better than what would be predicted from their test scores when they enter the school. However, progress is hindered by weak literacy and learning skills and poor attendance. In lessons, pupils make very good progress in art, and good progress in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, history, information technology, modern languages and physical education. Progress is satisfactory in geography. Crowded accommodation affects the progress of pupils taking GCSE in music. About half of these pupils who do not take an examination in religious education make unsatisfactory progress because the time given for them to study the subject is insufficient to cover the syllabus in the detail required. In all subjects, teachers work hard to ensure that examination results are as high as they can be, for example by running evening sessions in school, especially when the examination approaches. By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is well above average in art, above average in information technology and physical education, average in design and technology, and below average in all other subjects including English, mathematics and science.

7. Sixth form students make at least satisfactory progress though overall attainment is below average by the end of Year 13. Many students begin A level courses with a foundation of very modest GCSE grades; it is not surprising, therefore, that examination grades are below average overall and that few students achieve the higher A and B grades. A reasonable number of students are currently taking A level courses in English, mathematics, physics, biology, design and technology, geography, art, business studies and information technology. Students make good progress in mathematics, science, design and technology, history, modern languages and physical education, and satisfactory progress in English, art, geography and music. Psychology is a popular option and students are making good progress in both Years 12 and 13 in this subject though it is a relatively new subject and no students have yet taken the final examination. A considerable number of students are taking GNVQ Intermediate courses in leisure and tourism, health and social care, and information technology, and they are making at least satisfactory progress. Other students take pre-vocational courses through links with the local college of further education.

8. Pupils make good progress in English over Key Stage 3, in relation to their low starting point. Although reading and writing improve they are consistently below average. Many pupils, especially the younger and lower attaining pupils, have difficulty with continuous writing and spelling but writing skills develop so that most of them can produce extended pieces of writing by the end of the stage and can discuss and write at a satisfactory level about the books and other texts they are studying. However, weaker pupils still need to work hard to write grammatically correct and punctuated sentences. By the end of Year 9, pupils' attainment in English is below average despite the more favourable indications of the national test results. Nevertheless, the pupils have made considerable gains over the key stage, at least in part because of the successful implementation by the English teachers of the school's strategy for literacy. Pupils continue to make good progress over Key Stage 4, though attainment by the end of the key stage is below average, as reflected in the GCSE results. In the majority of lessons in Years 10 and 11, pupils make clear gains in new knowledge and effectively consolidate skills. Higher attaining pupils make good progress and this shows in their portfolios, which contain a diverse range of written work of good quality. Speaking and listening skills are sometimes good, as in discussions in literature lessons. By the end of Key Stage 4, although some pupils still have difficulties with grammar and spelling, an increasing number are able to write at greater length and make useful notes. Sixth form students make satisfactory progress and most students pass the A level examination, though Year 12 students, in particular, are slow to take the initiative. By the end of the A level course, overall standards are below average.

9. Pupils begin Key Stage 3 with attainment in mathematics which is well below average. They make good

progress, both over the key stage, and in lessons. By the end of Year 9, pupils' attainment is below average but significant gains have been made. The teaching is effectively matched to pupils' needs and this is the principal factor in ensuring that pupils progress as well as can be expected. The most able pupils achieve standards above those expected for their age, for example, in trigonometry; yet lower attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, still find difficulty with mental arithmetic and calculation. Similarly, in Key Stage 4, pupils continue their good progress in relation to their earlier attainment. By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is again below average overall though some pupils reach high standards. Algebra is a weakness amongst average and below average attaining pupils. Lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress and reach satisfactory standards in arithmetic because this aspect of the subject is particularly well taught by teachers and reinforced by the learning support assistants. In the sixth form, students are making good progress in lessons and the Year 13 students are achieving average standards. In particular, Year 12 students show a good understanding of calculus and Year 13 students' ability to solve problems is well developed.

10. Pupils with special educational needs generally make good progress, both in lessons and over time towards the targets set for them in their individual education plans. Pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties make very good progress and these pupils develop their self-confidence and know that they can achieve. Pupils with formal statements make good progress with targeted support in lessons. They also make good progress in withdrawal sessions when they receive effective help to reinforce basic skills; for example, pupils with moderate learning difficulties make good gains in skills of literacy and numeracy. These pupils follow examination syllabuses in Key Stage 4 and succeed in passing them.

Key skills - literacy

11. Poor literacy skills impede pupils' overall progress. A large proportion of pupils have reading ages significantly below their chronological ages, which means that they find difficulty in reading instructions. Spelling, punctuation and grammar are generally weak areas and some pupils do not write in cursive script. In English, especially, the teachers work hard to enable most pupils to produce extended pieces of writing by the end of Year 9. Though pupils listen attentively to instructions, many are reluctant to speak in class and give only brief answers to questions, even in the sixth form, and this factor impedes progress. The school's programme to tackle literacy is established in English lessons but is not yet supported well enough in other subjects. Teachers are eager to tackle the problem; for example, summer schools for primary school leavers are regarded as having been very successful.

Key skills - numeracy

12. Although pupils entering the school have poor skills of numeracy, they develop these skills satisfactorily in most subjects of the curriculum. Pupils' numerical skills support their work effectively in all subjects except science in which pupils find difficulty with calculations involving mental arithmetic. Pupils measure accurately and use computers to display numerical information and they use calculators confidently. They interpret information presented numerically and graphically; for example, in science, graphs of experiments involving chemical reactions are well executed. Pupils handle statistical information effectively.

Key skills - information technology across the curriculum

13. Throughout the school, pupils make increasingly effective use of computers in their work. They develop their confidence and competence to use computer software and to research information. Pupils use computers effectively to present attractive written work.

19.

19. Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

14. Behaviour has improved since the previous inspection. Pupils are now very well behaved in all subjects and around the school. Attitudes have shown a similar improvement.

15. Pupils have very good attitudes to their work and apply themselves well to the tasks they are set. They try hard to meet the challenges presented. Pupils concentrate well in nearly all classes and persevere in solving problems. They are proud of their achievements. Opportunities for discussion do not arise as frequently as they should but pupils listen well in lessons. Pupils' capacity to learn independently is underdeveloped because

teachers do too much for them; even so, pupils are positive about their achievements and most are eager to improve standards. Their enthusiasm and their enjoyment of a range of different experiences can be seen in the high level of participation in extracurricular activities. Year 7 pupils are enthusiastic about the wide choice of new activities in which they can take part, including chess in the library, singing in the choir and rock climbing.

16. Behaviour is very good, both in class and around the school. Pupils are polite and friendly and teachers have worked hard to establish an atmosphere of trust. Pupils are trusted to enter most parts of the school buildings during lunchtime and breaks, with minimal supervision, and rarely abuse this trust. There is little bullying and harassment; when it occurs, teachers deal with it quickly and effectively. Pupils' good behaviour is a key factor in their good progress. Pupils respond well to the system of privilege points and are motivated by rewards and prizes. The number of permanent and fixed-term exclusions is below average. The return of excluded pupils to school is managed sensitively and fairly; the rate of repeat exclusions is negligible.

17. Pupils with special educational needs are very positive in their response to teaching. In all subject areas at both key stages, behaviour and consequently progress in learning are good and often very good.

18. The personal development of pupils is satisfactory overall. Pupils have many opportunities to take responsibility. Sixth form students and Year 11 pupils help in the summer literacy school and in the paired reading scheme. Sixth form students contribute to the running of the school through the sixth form council. In both key stages, pupils captain sports teams and assist in some of the day-to-day activities, such as taking charge of registers. Some pupils in each key stage assist in the running of the library. Pupils take part willingly in charitable events and raise money annually.

24. **Attendance**

19. The overall attendance figure for the academic year 1998-99 is well below average and is unsatisfactory, as it was at the time of the previous inspection. The attendance figures fell in the early part of 1999 mainly because epidemics of serious illness affected a significant number of pupils and the parents of others who were unaffected kept their children away from school. The most recent figures available show that the attendance figures are responding to the school's vigorous efforts to improve them, although attendance in Years 9-11 remains below 90 per cent. Poor attendance has a negative effect on the standards being achieved.

20. Punctuality is satisfactory. The great majority of pupils arrive on time for the start of the school day and for lessons. A large number of pupils stay at school for extra lessons and to take part in extracurricular activities well beyond the end of the school day.

26. **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED**

26. **Teaching**

21. The teaching is good overall and is good in each key stage and in the sixth form. Teaching has improved since the previous inspection and accounts in large part for the pupils' good progress and quality of their learning. Of the total of 207 lessons seen during the inspection, nearly 23 per cent were judged very good, 47 per cent were good, 28 per cent were satisfactory and nearly two per cent were unsatisfactory.

22. Teaching is good in English, mathematics and science. The strongest teaching at Key Stage 3 is in art, where it is very good. At Key Stage 4, the strongest subject is information technology, where again the teaching is very good. Teaching is mostly good in the sixth form. Because the monitoring of standards is rigorous, there are no subjects in which the teaching is unsatisfactory or ineffective.

23. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is very good. The teachers have a very good knowledge of their pupils' weaknesses as presented in a range of assessment data. This knowledge enables the support teachers to set targets accurately for individuals and to work effectively in collaboration with the subject teachers in lessons.

24. Homework is set and marked regularly. This point was raised by parents as a good feature of the teachers'

work which they appreciate. The marking of work is generally effective and teachers take great care over it. However, pupils do not always pay sufficient attention to the written comments made by teachers in their marking. In art, the very effective 'collective critique' has a long tradition in this school as a method of assessing pupils' work and gives pupils the opportunity to hear their work evaluated by their peers.

25. The main strengths of the teaching lie in the teachers' good subject knowledge, their effective management of their pupils and their very good relationships with them. These factors are instrumental in creating an effective climate for learning in each subject, ensuring that pupils can work in the secure knowledge of what is expected of them, that pupils are kept interested in what they are doing, and that their self-confidence is raised and maintained. Because of these good features of the teaching, disciplinary problems rarely occur.

26. In English, good knowledge and understanding of the subject are conveyed clearly in the teachers' handling of a range of literature which appeals strongly to the particular age group of the pupils and holds their interest, for example, in the treatment of children's classics such as *The Silver Sword* with a Year 7 class, and *The Handmaid's Tale* with a sixth form literature class.

27. Good understanding of the teaching of a particular subject and of the ways in which pupils learn are shown in the detail of the science teachers' expert explanations of scientific principles and phenomena, which are pitched at appropriate levels for the pupils concerned.

28. Teachers are generally well trained to keep abreast of new developments in their subjects. Teachers have the knowledge and confidence to teach the skills of information technology effectively so that pupils are well up to nationally expected standards. The teachers of information technology have good technical knowledge which enables them to support individual pupils quickly when problems arise with hardware or software.

29. In art lessons, younger pupils experience a good balance of basic skills and encouragement of imaginative and creative work and pupils' enjoyment of it. The teaching builds progressively on these skills in Key Stage 4 and pupils apply them successfully in their examination coursework. This accounts in large measure for the high standards achieved in this subject at GCSE.

30. The main weaknesses in the teaching lie in the teaching of literacy skills in all subjects other than English, and a tendency among the teachers to do too much for the pupils so that their ability to learn independently is underdeveloped.

31. In English, the teachers are effectively implementing the school's new strategy for literacy and the Key Stage 3 test results in English have improved dramatically. However, the strategy is not yet being applied consistently in all subjects. Improving literacy is the single most important way in which standards can be comprehensively raised. Written work is usually neat but many pupils do not write in cursive script and teachers are not helping when, as seen in some lessons, they print words on the board rather than write in cursive script. Opportunities for discussion are sometimes missed, for example, in mathematics, and questions are not sufficiently open-ended in that subject to help to develop pupils' capacity to construct an argument.

32. Teachers do not do enough to develop pupils' capability to undertake research, especially through reading. Though this is well done in science it is not in other subjects. Although the teachers wish to support pupils and help them to grow in self-confidence, the long-term effect of doing too much for the pupils is to limit their confidence in learning for themselves.

33. Teachers of modern languages generally conduct lessons in the foreign language but sometimes lower attaining pupils do not fully understand what is said. Again in modern language lessons, less confident pupils need more opportunities to practise their pronunciation.

34. Teachers give generously of their time to mount an excellent programme of extracurricular activities and this is much appreciated by parents and pupils. During the week of the inspection, inspectors were invited to the school's Christmas concert, in which a large number of pupils took part and in which governors, other friends of the school and many staff were involved. The evening was very enjoyable and inspectors were impressed by the high standards of performance and by the pupils' enthusiastic participation.

40. **The curriculum and assessment**

35.The curriculum is good overall. The planning of the curriculum reflects the aims of the school and its emphasis on raising pupils' aspirations and self-esteem. Curriculum planning at subject level is good and leads to effective development of pupils' subject knowledge, skills and understanding. The school provides well for pupils of different needs and abilities, including those of the most able pupils. All pupils have equal access to the curriculum.

36.A well planned PSHE (personal, social and health education) programme is taught throughout the school. It is particularly good in Key Stage 3 and covers a wide range of topics including study skills, awareness of drugs misuse, and healthy living. Careers education is good and includes appropriate information to enable pupils to make informed choices. The strong vocational side of the curriculum, especially in the sixth form, reflects the school's positive approach to preparing pupils for employment.

37.The curriculum in Key Stage 3 includes all subjects of the National Curriculum, religious education, sex education and careers education. The balance of time allocated to most subjects is broadly in line with national averages though more time is given to art than average and less for history, geography and music. All pupils study French but no other foreign language is taught in this key stage.

38.The Key Stage 4 curriculum is well planned and flexible. Three different pathways each provide a mix of subjects and pupils may choose from different combinations of GCSE and pre-vocational courses. The pathways meet the needs of pupils with different abilities, interests and career aspirations. About two-thirds of pupils take nine GCSE subjects and some take more; however, these pupils receive a reduced allocation of time for religious education, only one lesson each fortnight, which is insufficient for them to make satisfactory progress over the key stage in this subject. A pre-vocational pathway is followed by about one-eighth of the pupils. This course includes all subjects of the National Curriculum, leads to five or six GCSEs, and offers a broad approach to the world of work which interests and motivates the pupils. Statutory requirements for design and technology are not met in full because some pupils are offered a choice between art textiles and design and technology in pathways 1 and 2. Despite the fact that GCSE art (textiles) is an excellent course and includes the principles of design and making, which are essential to design and technology, it is not a design and technology subject.

39.Sixth form students have a good choice of 18 subjects to GCE A level in arts, mathematics and sciences, humanities, languages, technology subjects, physical education, religious education and theatre studies. However, the numbers taking some of these courses are very small. Vocational courses comprise GNVQ Intermediate leisure and tourism, and health and social care. Sixth form students also follow a complementary studies programme which includes A level general studies, information technology, careers education, PSHE and recreation. However, the statutory requirement to provide religious education for all students is not met.

40.The curricular provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. All pupils follow the full range of National Curriculum subjects in both key stages. The teaching of literacy to younger pupils with special educational needs is particularly effective. The planning to ensure there is systematic progression in pupils' learning is well established and there is secure, formal involvement of subject departments. Planning is very effective in meeting the needs of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The use of specialist support from outside agencies is well managed within the school.

41.An excellent programme of extracurricular activities enables pupils to pursue interests beyond the normal school programme. The programme includes fitness and sport, drama and musical activities, outdoor pursuits, foreign visits and clubs. A wide range of organised team games for girls and boys includes athletics, netball, football, rugby and cross-country running. Nearly half of all pupils participate in these activities. Pupils participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme at bronze, silver and gold standards. The school holds a musical concert and a drama production at least once a year and a fashion show every two years. Visits to France, Spain and Holland are regular features.

42.The school has effective systems for assessing pupils' attainment throughout their time at school. The system yields a wealth of data, which enable pupils' progress to be monitored so that under-achievement can be identified and targets set for individual pupils.

43.Nationally standardised tests are used effectively to assess pupils' attainment in language and number when they enter the school and to track their progress thereafter. Statutory requirements are met for assessing

attainment in National Curriculum subjects at the end of Key Stage 3. These are accurate in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science but less so in some foundation subjects, for example, in design and technology. The school's policy for entering pupils in GCSE examinations is clear and reasonable.

44. Teachers effectively assess pupils' attainment by testing and evaluating their work throughout the school year. Subject assessments also take place during a formal assessment week held towards the end of each year. The statutory requirement to hold annually updated records of the progress of all pupils is met in full. Subject departments also maintain their own records of pupils' attainment. Parents receive two reports annually: a full report as legally required, and also an interim report which gives grades for effort and progress and, for Year 11 pupils, predicts GCSE examination grades.

45. The assessment of pupils with special educational needs is thorough, regular and of a high standard. Individual education plans are well written and planning is in place for regular reviews. The monitoring and recording of pupils with statements of special educational needs are very good and annual reviews meet the requirements of the national Code of Practice. Pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties are put on a staged behaviour plan with behavioural targets in their individual education plans. Long-term targets are reviewed at least annually and short-term targets are reviewed frequently.

51. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

46. Overall provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and there has been some improvement in each of these since the previous inspection.

47. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory. The school has a clear policy in place for collective worship. This presents a planned programme for assemblies, which are attended by each year group once a week and which include acts of worship of high quality. The policy plans for daily reflection on a thought for the week to take place in morning form-time; however, many teachers do not implement the thought for the week. Religious education has been improved and now supports pupils' spiritual development effectively. The school provides good opportunities for pupils to succeed and take pride in themselves as unique human beings and in their accomplishments. Parents value the contribution the school makes in developing pupils' belief in themselves and feel this has a strong impact on their progress. Assemblies are appropriate for the ages of the pupils and provide opportunities for personal reflection. The parish priest regularly leads assembly. One such assembly for Year 9 pupils led them, by the use of relevant modern day examples, to reflect on the contrast between spiritual and material well-being. Visitors from the community also work with pupils in a variety of settings to develop understanding about shared beliefs and values. In some subjects, such as religious education and English, texts give pupils a good insight into different religious beliefs.

48. Provision for pupils' moral awareness is very good. The close and supportive relationships between staff and pupils reflect the school's aim to provide an ethos, and an environment in which pupils develop self-respect and are caring and thoughtful in their treatment of others. Pupils learn to understand right and wrong in form periods, assemblies, and in their PSHE lessons. They are given very clear boundaries of expected behaviour and are taught to understand the consequences of their actions and to value each other. Parents appreciate the opportunities the school provides for pupils' moral development. Moral issues are often tackled in English and drama lessons so that pupils can explore why self-respect, mutual concern, kindness and consideration of the rights and needs of others are of mutual benefit. Staff are quick to acknowledge good behaviour and attitudes and do so consistently. The system of rewards and sanctions works particularly well in helping to teach pupils the consequences of actions and encouraging them to value each other and respect property.

49. The provision for pupils' social development is very good and is valued by parents. The school has clear aims, which promote achievement, self-respect, and tolerance amongst pupils. Lunchtimes and breaktimes are pleasant social occasions when pupils follow well understood routines. In many lessons, teachers expect pupils to work together in groups or pairs. Physical education fosters fair play, sportsmanship, responsibility and initiative. PSHE lessons help to prepare pupils for the next stage in their school career. They are taught to deal with bias and prejudice. Summer schools and other trips widen pupils' experience and help to develop self-confidence. Through the sixth form school council, students have a say in the running of the school life and are taught to understand democratic principles. Extracurricular activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme afford pupils good opportunities to develop teamwork and leadership skills with successful results. The school provides a range of residential activities tailored to meet the needs of specific year groups and to meet particular needs, for example, activity holidays which increase pupils' self-confidence and self-knowledge.

50.The strong belief of the school in acknowledging cultural differences is reflected in the good provision for pupils' cultural awareness. A variety of festivals are celebrated in assemblies, in religious education lessons and in good displays around the school. Different faiths and customs are taught through work in religious education, humanities and PSHE, and in a variety of subjects throughout the school. Pupils experience a wide range of music from around the world and study the art of different cultures. Attractive displays around the school and in classrooms reflect a broad cultural diversity. In English, texts are drawn from a range of cultures, including pupils' own cultural heritage of Shakespeare and other classics. Representatives from different cultural groups come into the school to run workshops and pupils visit museums, theatres, art galleries and concerts as well as performing in regular drama productions and concerts. Residential visits at home and abroad add to pupils' cultural experience.

51.Opportunities for the development of spiritual and moral experiences of pupils with special educational needs are fostered through the celebration of pupils' uniqueness and diversity. This helps pupils to develop self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. These pupils' social and cultural experiences are enhanced by the work in small groups that they experience in both key stages which encourages discussion.

57. Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

52.The school makes very good provision for the support and guidance of its pupils. Very effective systems are in place to monitor pupils' progress and personal development. Form teachers and subject teachers work closely together to ensure that pupils are supported in a way that enables them to make the best possible progress.

53.The school integrates pupils with special educational needs into mainstream lessons and school life. 'Key workers' effectively support pupils with emotional or behavioural difficulties in mainstream classes, and the pupils can also take time out when they need to. Through the provision of a secure, productive working environment, effectively structured and focused, these pupils are given opportunities to manage their own behaviour and establish good working routines. Pupils with severe difficulties in literacy receive effective support when in small groups and have appropriate and differentiated teaching materials and strategies. Pupils with physical disabilities are supported effectively. Pupils with statements of special educational needs and others on the special educational needs register are also very effectively supported. Clear and measurable targets are set in pupils' individual education plans.

54.Systems to encourage good behaviour are very effective. Good discipline and a recognition by pupils that the teachers genuinely care for them as individuals result in calm and orderly lessons. Parents and pupils agree that incidents of bullying are promptly checked.

55.The school's strategies to ensure good attendance have been severely tried over the past year. Whilst attendance fell sharply over this period, it is now starting to rise again. The system of rewards put in place to recognise pupils who improve attendance, and the supportive relationships established with parents are key factors in the school's strategy. The strategy is working well in cases in which pupils have had very frequent unauthorised absence in the past.

56.The school works hard to ensure the health, safety and welfare of its pupils. The PSHE programme which is taught in Key Stage 3 promotes healthy and safe life styles and is relevant to the background and needs of the pupils. Appropriate child protection procedures are in place and the school maintains strong links with outside agencies. Despite the teachers' best efforts congestion in crowded corridors at lesson changeover is a potential hazard.

62. Partnership with parents and the community

57.The school's partnership with parents is very effective. Parents ensure that their children are properly equipped for school. Most parents supervise their children's homework. Parents' meetings are well supported, with up to 95 per cent attendance. The great majority of parents strongly support the work of the school and are very appreciative of its aims, as shown in the replies to questionnaires sent to parents before the inspection.

58.An active group of parents and friends works hard to organise social events and raise funds to supplement the school's resources. Such activities contribute considerably to the school's strong sense of community which is much helped by the fact that many families live close by. A number of parents help in school, most

particularly in helping pupils with special educational needs.

59.The school provides information of good quality for parents and works hard to involve them actively in the school community. Regular meetings are held to discuss pupils' work and progress, and parents are involved in the choices pupils have to make about their courses of study, particularly important in Year 9. A regular newsletter, *In Touch*, provides an effective means of communicating with parents who greatly appreciate the information it contains. The school canvasses parents' views on important matters. Parents find the school open and welcoming and feel that it is easy to approach teachers and other staff.

60.The school's communication with parents of children with special educational needs is very good. When pupils are placed on the register of pupils with special educational needs, parents are invited for initial and subsequent meetings and every effort is made to keep them informed of their children's progress. A series of training sessions for parents is organised so that they are better placed to help their children at home, for example, with reading.

61.The school has very constructive links with its wider community. Its links with local industries play a major part in the provision made for work experience and careers guidance; for example, a video link with a local employer enabled Year 11 pupils to watch a mock interview demonstrated by the personnel manager and three pupils of the school. An effective partnership with a local college of further education assists the school in providing vocational education and the teaching of work-related skills. The school works hard, through a programme of educational visits and residential courses, to enrich pupils' experience and raise their attainment and personal development.

67. THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

67. Leadership and management

62.The school is very well managed and is a pleasant place in which to work. The teachers and all other staff are confident in the quality of their work and their morale is high. The school achieves considerable success with its aims. The school's ethos is excellent; in particular, the school provides a happy and disciplined learning environment in which pupils can thrive. Very good relationships and very good behaviour assist pupils to learn effectively. Pupils have equal opportunities to study the entire range of subjects and most take full advantage of the opportunities offered.

63.The school is administered well. The school office is a busy and efficient place. The management of the site and buildings is also efficient. The timetable runs smoothly. The school has clear policies and procedures to regulate its work.

64.The school is well served by an effective and hard-working governing body, which is committed to providing a high quality of education for the community the school serves and to reaching standards which are as high as the school can achieve. All targets set by governors for 1999 have been achieved and the school has had its best ever GCSE results.

65.The governors are very supportive of the school as a whole and work in harmony with the Headteacher and other senior staff. Governors work very effectively through their committees and when meeting as the full governing body. They monitor the curriculum effectively and receive reports from subject departments. During the inspection, governors were seen about the school on each day, monitoring its work and making contributions to it, for example by playing the piano in assembly and participating in extracurricular musical activities.

66.On the whole, governors fulfil their responsibilities effectively and all statutory requirements for the curriculum are met, except for the provision of religious education for all sixth form students, as was the case at the previous inspection, and for the provision of design and technology for all pupils in Key Stage 4. The point is a minor one since those who do not take a design and technology subject all study GCSE art (textiles) which involves both design and manufacture, though it is not strictly a design and technology subject. The latest Governors' Annual Report to Parents is accurate and informative but does not make clear the special arrangements made by the school for pupils with physical disability.

67.The development planning is very effective. After full consultation with the governors and all staff, the senior management team produces a plan for development with a three-year timescale, setting out priorities and targets, deadlines and accountability. This plan, which is updated annually, rests on the subject priorities, as expressed in the subjects' plans, and takes full account of financial implications of its priorities and targets. The priorities accurately identify the school's most important needs, especially the need to improve attendance and pupils' basic skills, such as those of literacy.

68.The senior management team is large, comprising the Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher and seven senior teachers. All have well-defined areas of responsibility. The leadership of the school is very strong and purposeful and provides clear direction and is succeeding in raising standards. The leadership of subject departments is at least satisfactory in every case and is mostly good. The pastoral system is very well managed and is very effective.

69.The senior managers' monitoring of teaching and learning is effective and underpins the high quality of teaching seen during the inspection. Appraisal of the work of all members of staff is in place. Departmental reviews take place within a planned cycle so that the work of at least one subject is evaluated each term. These reviews are rigorous and take place over a period of two weeks. Each teacher is observed teaching according to clear criteria for evaluating lessons. The outcomes of reviews appear in subject action plans, subject funding and training. Pupils' work is systematically monitored by the senior staff through snap inspections of homework and other written work. The total of the information gained by the senior staff guides their reporting to governors, their target setting, and the school's development plan.

70.The management of the school's provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. The learning support department is central to the school's organisational and curricular structure and the practice in the school. As a key member of the senior management team, the coordinator for special educational needs is in a strong position to monitor the quality of education and the impact of policy and to monitor pupils' progress. This is very well done. The coordinator works with teaching staff to ensure that pupils' needs are met. Considerable time and effort have been spent on establishing good practice to ensure that work is closely matched to pupils' levels of attainment, especially in the lower ability sets.

71.Overall, the school has made good improvements since the previous inspection and has successfully tackled most of the issues for action raised at that time. The governors and the senior management team have the strategies in place and the necessary capability and energy to make further improvements.

72.The most important improvement since the previous inspection has been the rising GCSE results, which have improved faster than the national trend, though the A level results have not improved in the same way.

73.The previous report found that work was not always well matched to pupils' different levels of attainment, especially in lower sets and that more should be done to motivate the pupils. Teachers now match work much more accurately to pupils' individual needs. Motivation to learn has improved and is now central to pupils' good progress.

74.An important issue at the time of the previous inspection was the need to improve attendance. With hard work and determination, the school managed to raise attendance figures to above average – a great achievement. However, attendance fell back because of an epidemic of serious illness and an outbreak of meningitis at the school in the present year, which involved the death of a pupil. In consequence, parents kept their children from school. Attendance is now coming back on track and there has been a great improvement over the past two terms.

75.The previous inspection expected the school to develop the application of pupils' skills of information technology skills more widely in their learning in all subjects. This has been another success. Skills of information technology are now applied well in most subjects and pupils' ability to use information technology has significantly improved.

76.The previous inspection found that the school did not comply with statutory requirements to provide religious education in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, and statutory requirements for daily collective worship were also not met. Though there have been some improvements, this broadly remains the case. Collective worship of good quality takes place each day in assemblies. Though a spiritual thought for the week was introduced to deal with the requirement for collective worship, it is not implemented by many of the teachers

and there is still insufficient provision for religious education in the sixth form. Statutory requirements are still not met in full for Key Stage 4 because insufficient time is allowed for around half of the pupils not doing a GCSE course in religious education to cover the local agreed syllabus. Though some sixth form students study religious education as part of A level general studies and others through elements in pre-vocational courses, the provision for religious education in the sixth form still does not meet statutory requirements.

82.

82. **Staffing, accommodation and learning resources**

77.As at the time of the previous inspection, the school has sufficient qualified teachers to teach the subjects of the curriculum to match the ages and abilities of pupils. The pupil-to-teacher ratio is average. The teaching staff is a good blend of younger and more experienced teachers. Teachers are well trained and up to date with the latest subject syllabuses and requirements. Their confidence in the use of computers has improved since the previous inspection. There are sufficient well qualified education support staff, administrative, clerical and technical staff for the school's needs.

78.Arrangements for the professional development of staff are very good. The school has achieved *Investors in People* status. Training is linked to the school's plan for development and subject plans, and focuses on the needs of individual teachers. Effective induction arrangements support newly qualified teachers through training. The school's involvement with Initial Teacher Training has a positive impact on teaching since it focuses constantly on good practice.

79.The teaching accommodation is satisfactory. It is clean, bright and in good order. However, the school is crowded and there is barely sufficient room for all classes; in science, for example, some classes are taught in classrooms rather than laboratories. The accommodation for art, which was found to be unsatisfactory at the time of the previous inspection, has improved. Accommodation for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory and rooms are close together. The accommodation for music is crowded to the extent that adversely affects the progress of pupils taking the GCSE course in that subject.

80.Resources are good overall. The ratio of computers to pupils is above average. Books and other materials are generally sufficient for the implementation of the school's curriculum though some pupils have to share keyboards in music lessons. The library is well stocked with a wide and up-to-date range of fiction and reference books.

86. **The efficiency of the school**

81.The school is very efficient. Financial planning and control, and school administration are excellent. The school uses its staff, learning resources and accommodation very effectively.

82.The governors' strategic planning for the budget provides accurate estimates of income and expenditure for five years ahead under all the school's different income and expenditure subheadings. Governors are therefore in an excellent position to foresee and deal with financial problems as they arise. Income to the school from sources other than the local authority is managed very well.

83.The teaching and support staff are well deployed. Though there are some small classes for some sixth form subjects, the sixth form is self-supporting. The income specifically intended for educating pupils with special educational needs is spent appropriately on support of high quality for these pupils, and mainly on staffing. The learning resources are used effectively to support the curriculum. The resources for information technology are also used effectively. Accommodation is crowded but is used efficiently.

84.Financial administration and procedures are excellent. The bursar presents budget information regularly to governors and the Headteacher.

85.The funding for the school is broadly average. Taking this into account together with the following factors, the inspectors find that the school provides good value for money:

- the good improvement since the previous inspection;
- the well below average attainment of pupils on entry to the school;
- the pupils' well below average socioeconomic background;

- the consistently good standard of teaching;
- the good progress pupils make in each key stage and the satisfactory progress in the sixth form;
- the pupils' very good behaviour and attitudes.

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

English

1. The previous inspection reported that standards in English were mostly below the national average and that some pupils made slow progress. Standards are still below national averages but pupils' progress is better. Teaching has improved since the last inspection. National test results at the end of Key Stage 3 were well below the national average in 1998, although well above the average for schools with similar intakes of pupils. The results improved in 1999, when an average proportion of pupils reached national standards though relatively few pupils exceeded those standards. Boys achieved slightly better than girls overall. The results were very high in comparison with those of similar schools and were better in English than in mathematics and science. The GCSE results in 1999 were well below average for both boys and girls, in terms of the proportion achieving grades A*-C, in both English and English literature examinations, as in most recent years. However, they were above average for similar schools. The results have fluctuated only slightly over the past three years. Boys generally perform less well than girls, although the gap between girls here and their counterparts nationally is greater than that of the boys. Performance in English literature GCSE examinations is better than that in English, and is closer to the national average. At A level, the majority of candidates in both English language and English literature pass the examination but in recent years students have not achieved the higher grades.

2. Pupils' attainment when they enter the school is well below average. Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 3 and this can be seen in the work of each year group. Year 7 pupils record their individual reading progress and reflect on their reading as they write simple book reviews. Pupils with special educational needs, especially those needs associated with reading and writing, make similar progress to that of other pupils as a result of the effective support they receive in English lessons. Although many of the lower attaining pupils struggle with spelling and sentence structure, most pupils develop reasonable writing skills, including the use of paragraphs. Pupils improve their speaking and listening skills through discussions. Year 8 pupils refine their writing skills to produce longer pieces of writing and can use computers to design newspaper pages. They are aware of the basic techniques used in advertising. Year 9 pupils further develop their writing skills, although lower achievers are still working hard at producing correctly punctuated sentences. Most, however, have a grasp of how narratives operate and can follow the plot in the texts they study. By the end of Key Stage 3, overall attainment in speaking, listening, reading and writing is below average. Pupils produce extended pieces of writing and can discuss and write about a range of texts and make evaluations of their own work. The presentation of written work has improved.

3. Pupils continue to make good progress in Key Stage 4, as seen both in lessons and in the portfolios of written work that each pupil is building up. Year 10 pupils learn about media forms, which range from tabloid journalism to characterisation in soap operas, particularly in the newly instituted media studies course. Pupils spoke and listened well in a lesson involving group presentations made to the whole class on the female characters in *To Kill a Mocking Bird*. Year 11 pupils also explore literary texts by working in groups; a higher ability set chose appropriate quotations from *Macbeth* to paste on charts to reflect different viewpoints. Lower achievers, meanwhile, develop basic strategies for tackling the poems in their anthology or learn how to follow the chain of events in *Romeo and Juliet*. Several classes came together for a lesson on career interviews, linked by video to a local industrial complex where a number of pupils were actually being interviewed and their performances evaluated by those back at school watching them on an interactive screen. By the end of Key Stage 4, overall attainment is below average. Some pupils still have difficulties with grammar and spelling but an increasing number are able to write at greater length and make useful notes. Most pupils have acquired the skill to redraft their work, and many choose to do this by computer. There is not much evidence of wider reading, but Year 11 pupils are able to make thoughtful comparisons of texts. They also produce worthwhile imaginative work. Although the majority still fail to achieve grades A*-C in the GCSE examinations, what they do achieve by the end of the key stage represents solid progress.

4. Sixth form students who choose to study English language and English literature at A level make satisfactory progress overall. Progress was slow in the Year 12 lessons because most students were reluctant to join in meaningful discussion. They listen well, however, and take useful notes, whether on the linguistic devices used in *Under Milk Wood*, key themes in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, or on how language can reflect gender bias. Their written work is thoughtful and becomes better organised as the courses proceed. Year 13 students

show greater maturity and engage more wholeheartedly in discussion, but there is no evidence to suggest that standards, as indicated by examination results, will improve significantly in the near future. Overall attainment is below average by Year 13.

5. Pupils' attitudes to their work are good and they often show a sense of enjoyment. Earnest concentration and very good behaviour are the hallmarks of most lessons. Pupils' relationships with teachers are excellent, and most pupils can be trusted to work diligently whether on their own or in groups.

6. Teaching is good at each key stage and satisfactory in the sixth form. It was good or better in about 60 per cent of the lessons seen and there were no unsatisfactory lessons. Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of their subject, and use this well in, for example, the study of texts; this is true whether the text is *The Silver Sword*, with Year 7, or *The Handmaid's Tale* with Year 13. Teachers have high expectations of pupils, and expect lower attaining sets to cope with GCSE English literature texts. Lessons are well planned and well paced; teachers employ a variety of methods, ranging from library work to drama, and from quizzes to media analysis. Disciplinary problems rarely occur as classes are managed well. Resources are used effectively, particularly the photocopied workbooks produced by the department. Good use is made of the information and communication technology rooms, especially by the groups of Year 8 pupils who are timetabled to use these areas. Homework is set regularly and written work is marked thoroughly. Assessment is effective, and follows well-established procedures. Day-to-day assessment in lessons is particularly effective in informing teachers' judgements about pupils' learning, and it contributes significantly to progress.

7. The English department is run efficiently, the staff are well qualified and bring a range of experience to the department. Many of the responsibilities are shared; for example, some teachers play a key role in the school's literacy programme, which is already beginning to raise standards in Key Stage 3. This represents a significant development since the last inspection. Much is being learnt from liaison with local primary schools where the national strategy for literacy is well established. The summer school for the new intake of Year 7 pupils and the paired reading scheme are just two more examples of successful innovation in the teaching of literacy.

Key skills - literacy

8. At present, pupils' skills of literacy are barely adequate to support learning effectively in all subjects. Many pupils have low reading ages and have difficulty reading instructions. The evaluation sheets used in physical education, for example, are too difficult for some pupils to understand, although pupils can cope with differentiated worksheets used in many subjects. Writing skills are quite well developed amongst the higher achieving pupils, but these are a minority. Only the upper sets produce work that is in line with national expectations; errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar are common amongst the majority of pupils. Work is usually well presented and neat, although too many pupils are not using joined-up writing, and they are not helped by teachers' printing of words on the board in some lessons. Much effort goes into written work and most pupils produce extended pieces of work by the end of Key Stage 3. Editing and word processing are good features. Pupils listen well, and their work shows clear signs of this, but many pupils are reluctant to speak in lessons. At all ages, many pupils' participation in discussion is poor and they tend to give only brief answers to questions. This even extends into the sixth form, where a reluctance to engage in discussion holds back progress.

9. The school is aware of the need for better literacy, and has an excellent programme in place to tackle the problems. A very thorough policy document has recently been approved and a cross-curricular working group set up with a strong lead coming from the English and special needs departments. Teachers recognise that pupils enter the school with low achievement scores, and are working with local feeder schools to address this. Two successive summer schools for Year 6 leavers were very successful. The school's strategy for literacy has an appropriately strong emphasis on the value of reading. Paired reading, of younger with older pupils, the borrowing of library books, and the provision of home-based textbooks for all GCSE subjects are central to the school's work to improve reading. Pupils entering the school with special educational needs benefit from the *Successmaker* computer package. Other effective features of the literacy initiative include the displays of key words on walls in each subject area and the common correction code.

Drama

10. Drama is part of the faculty of expressive arts, and is taught as a discrete subject throughout the school. The last inspection report noted that good standards were being achieved and good teaching was a strong feature. In 1999, though more than half of the candidates for GCSE examinations achieved grades A*-C in 1999, this

proportion was still below the national average. The small number of boys who take the subject do well; this was particularly true in 1999, when their results were above the national average for achieving these grades. A level results are average and more students are studying A level theatre studies than for the past two years.

11. Standards are about average in each key stage and in the sixth form. Pupils make good progress in drama tackling some difficult work; for example a Year 7 class successfully practised controlled movements as a means of highlighting a story line. Again, a Year 9 class investigated a text to establish meaning and possible interpretations by looking at the language used. A GCSE class discovered some of the possible interpretations of the theme they had just received for their controlled test. Lively teaching contributes very effectively to pupils' good progress, and their responses are very positive: behaviour is always good, and pupils work well with one another.

12. Drama contributes much to the personal development of pupils, including those who are not high attainers academically. Moral and social development springs from the nature of the texts and tasks investigated, but also from the group work involved. The subject is well led by a drama specialist. It is taught in a well-equipped though undersized teaching area, and the school hall and dining area must be used for lessons, which is less than satisfactory. The department is committed to extracurricular activities, and the good variety of public performances is an important part of the school's links with the community.

Mathematics

13. The previous inspection found that standards were below average though pupils made good progress in relation to their capabilities. GCSE and A level results were below average. Many pupils were found to have difficulty with basic numeracy skills. The provision for pupils with special educational needs was unsatisfactory. Teaching lacked variety and marking was patchy.

14. Standards now are similar to those found at the time of the previous inspection, though there has been some improvement in the sixth form and amongst the higher attaining pupils in Key Stage 3. Numerical skills are better. Teaching is better than it was. The marking of pupils' written work has improved and provision for pupils with special educational needs now enables these pupils to make good progress.

15. The results of the Key Stage 3 national tests in 1999 were well below the national average for all schools but above the average for schools with pupils from similar backgrounds. There was an increase in the number of pupils reaching the higher National Curriculum Level 7 in 1999. The results over the past three years show no significant difference between boys and girls. The 1999 results at GCSE were below the national average. This has been the case for the past three years though results have improved year by year in line with national trends. Results are above average when compared with those of similar schools. Again there is no significant difference between boys' and girls' performance. The numbers of A level candidates over the past three years have been too small for valid comparisons with national data though numbers taking A level mathematics have now substantially increased.

16. Evidence from the inspection shows that attainment overall is below the standard expected by the end of Key Stage 3, and the range of attainment is wide. Higher attaining pupils are above the standard expected and cope with the demands of the higher level course, achieving success, for example, in using the sine and cosine rules in trigonometry. Average attaining pupils can calculate the mean and median of data given to them and draw appropriate diagrams accurately, interpreting the results well. Lower attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, simplify basic algebraic expressions correctly though their work with arithmetical processes still includes elementary errors, for example, in short division. Comprehension skills are not well developed.

17. By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment overall is below average. The highest attainers reach well above average standards and are coping well with the algebra element of their course, such as changing the subject of a formula. Average attaining pupils simplify complex ratios accurately without the use of a calculator but their skills in algebra are less well developed. Lower attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, reach satisfactory standards of numeracy owing to the support they receive from the learning support assistants and the smaller teaching groups. In the sixth form, numerical work is satisfactory and supports the course well.

18. Pupils make good overall progress. Progress is good in each key stage and in the sixth form. The setting arrangements and the monitoring of pupils' progress are effective. Teaching effectively targets pupils' needs

and ensures the pupils' good progress. In Key Stage 3, higher attaining pupils make good and sometimes very good progress in lessons and this accounts for the improved attainment seen at the end of the key stage. In Key Stage 4, the higher attaining pupils' interest is aroused by projects specially designed to challenge able pupils. Voluntary evening sessions after school as examination time approaches also make a significant contribution to their progress. Early entry to the GCSE examination at the end of Year 10 reflects the teachers' commitment to high standards and this factor has led to an increased take-up of the subject at A level. Average attaining pupils make good progress through both key stages from a low base on entry to Year 7. By Year 8, these pupils can explain clearly how to find a good approximation to the area of a circle. They know how to calculate the circumference of a circle. Though they make good progress with new work in lessons, their recall of work covered earlier in the term is less secure. In Year 9, pupils use computers well in transformation geometry, and the packages they use provide challenging opportunities for insightful learning. Lower attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in developing further their numeracy skills in Years 7 and 8 through computer assisted learning. By Year 8, for example, these pupils can estimate the likely outcome of the throw of a die and check their answers by practical and theoretical means. By Year 11, pupils are able to plot cumulative frequency curves accurately and draw smooth curves appropriately.

19. In the sixth form, Year 12 students are making good progress at the start of their GCE A level course in calculus. Their answers to questions show sound understanding. Year 13 students are revising hard for the module tests yet to come. They can solve problems effectively; for example, they can use mathematical tools, such as the remainder theorem, to solve cubic equations accurately. Year 13 students are achieving average standards which are reflected in their modular course results at the end of Year 12.

20. The attitudes, behaviour and personal development of pupils are very good. A good working ethos prevails in the mathematics department and relationships are very good. The display of pupils' work is attractive and helps to make the classrooms pleasant to work in. Pupils arrive at their lessons on time and ready for work. They collaborate effectively in pairs. All pupils listen well and develop their ability to concentrate throughout the school. The older, more able pupils concentrate well. Sixth form students develop their study skills well. Absence is a factor which adversely affects the progress of some pupils of all abilities.

21. In general, the teaching is good. It is good in each key stage and in the sixth form. Two-thirds of the teaching is good or better. Nearly half the teaching is very good. The very good methods and organisation of lessons combined with the good, and often very good, management of pupils underpin the very good teaching observed. Teachers' knowledge of the subject and how to teach it are always good, and very good in the sixth form. Expectations are high in Key Stage 3, resulting in neat, tidy exercise books. These standards of presentation are maintained in Key Stage 4. Planning is good and time and resources are used well. However, the use of too many closed questions in lessons means that opportunities for discussion are lost. Assessment of pupils is good and the use of homework is satisfactory.

Key skills - numeracy

22. The pupils' competence in the everyday demands of numeracy is satisfactory in art, geography, history, mathematics and physical education but less satisfactory in science in those calculations involving mental arithmetic. Measurement is satisfactory. Calculators are used confidently in science and well in mathematics. The pupils link colour and space well in the application of spatial concepts and they use models well, especially in the solution of three-dimensional trigonometry problems. Pupils make good sense of information presented numerically and graphically in information technology and mathematics and their processing of graphical and numerical information is satisfactory in geography and history. In science, graphs of rates of reaction are well constructed. Pupils handle statistical information in everyday contexts well in mathematics and satisfactorily in science.

113. Science

23. The previous inspection found that standards were sound in Key Stage 3 though less so in Key Stage 4. Standards were well below average at A level. In some Key Stage 4 lessons, average attaining pupils were significantly underachieving because they were not taught to be effective learners and had negative attitudes to their work. Since the previous inspection, pupils' attitudes have greatly improved. Standards remain mainly below average but there is little evidence of under-achievement.

24. Results of the national Key Stage 3 tests in 1998 and 1999 were below the national averages for all maintained schools though they were much the same as those of schools with similar intakes of pupils in 1999. In these tests, the girls outperform boys, but the gap has narrowed over the last three years. In 1999, GCSE examination results were well below the national average in terms of the proportion achieving grades A*-C and broadly in line with the average for grades A*-G. The results were much the same as those of similar schools. Results in 1999 were similar to though a little lower than those in English and mathematics. The numbers taking A level courses in science have been very small over recent years but results have been low for both chemistry and biology.

25. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is well below average for their age. Throughout Key Stage 3, pupils make good progress in all aspects of their science education. Investigative and experimental skills are being developed well. For example, lower attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in practical skills. They compare different substances, such as fuels, to determine which is best and they have a good idea of a fair test. Pupils of average attainment make good progress in their knowledge of chemical reactions; for example, by means of a series of displacement reactions, they can place common metals in order of reactivity. Higher attaining pupils also make good progress in their understanding of forces, such as gravity and friction, and their relation to terminal velocity. By the end of this key stage, attainment is below average but pupils have made significant gains in their knowledge and understanding of science.

26. The pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is also below average. However, they make good progress, as a result of good teaching, throughout the key stage. Lower attaining pupils have a good knowledge of living things; for example, they can give the name and function of the organs in the digestive system. Pupils of average attainment describe changes that have occurred in the earth's atmosphere over time. Higher attaining pupils write extended accounts of the evolution of the peppered moth owing to environmental factors. The pupils' expertise in experimental and investigative science has improved in this key stage as a result of better teaching which has directly addressed these areas.

27. The students' attainment in the sixth form is again below average but reflects the students' modest grades at GCSE. They are making good progress, consolidating their knowledge and understanding of scientific concepts such as electromagnetism, and their knowledge of research techniques such as mass spectroscopy.

28. Pupils have good attitudes towards their work in science. They are interested in the subject and sustain concentration well, especially in long double periods. They form very good relationships with their teachers, and this factor greatly supports their learning. Pupils are developing confidence in their own scientific ability, especially in the sixth form. The quality of display work in the department is very good. Behaviour in lessons is good and always at least satisfactory.

29. The teaching is predominantly good. It is good or better in about two-thirds of the lessons observed. The teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of the subjects that they teach. They explain processes and theories at a level appropriate to the ability of their pupils. They have high expectations of pupils both in terms of behaviour and achievement. Discipline and management of pupils are good; the lessons are well planned; the lesson time and resources are used effectively in most lessons to ensure that learning objectives are met. However, in a small proportion of lessons there is a lack of focus on learning objectives and not all pupils are fully engaged in learning.

30. In Key Stage 3, a focus on literacy skills by means of key words displayed on the walls raises the pupils' understanding of scientific vocabulary. However, poor literacy skills, such as comprehension, hinder the pupils' progress in both key stages. In Key Stage 4, a good range of courses meets the needs of pupils. Pupils' work is assessed regularly as they progress through the key stages. The procedures for this assessment are good but in Key Stage 3 the interpretation leads to an overestimation of the pupils' attainment. The marking of pupils' books is satisfactory but strengths and weaknesses are not highlighted clearly enough to show the pupils how to improve. The teachers use computers well and make a good contribution to the development of pupils' capability in information technology. The accommodation is satisfactory although not all lessons are taught in laboratories.

121. **OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES**

121. **Art**

31.The previous inspection found standards in art were above average. It also found that the accommodation was unsatisfactory. Standards have improved still further since the previous inspection and the accommodation has also improved and is now entirely satisfactory. The results of the 1999 GCSE examinations were very high in comparison with the national average: 91 per cent of pupils achieved grades A*-C against the national average of 59 per cent nationally. The girls generally achieved higher grades than the boys. A level results are average, and the girls achieve better results than the boys, as is the case in Key Stage 4. The A level results are better than those in other subjects, though there are few candidates.

32.There is no clear evidence of pupils' attainment in art on entry to Year 7 but work retained in folders shows good progress in the development of basic skills and in understanding through, for example, the study of drawing in line and tone and the theory of colour and its application. At the end of Year 9, the pupils' attainment is above average in relation to the standard expected nationally. The pupils with special educational needs also make good progress as a result of effective matching of tasks and teaching strategies to pupils' differing abilities.

33.Pupils draw and paint accurately from observation and develop their drawings into successful compositions based upon the work of major artists such as Cézanne and Picasso. The shortcomings in drawing which were noted at the time of the last inspection have been successfully addressed. Good brush control shows in the pupils' work, which is taken to a high standard of finish. They are skilled at printmaking, using tie and dye techniques on silk with careful workmanship. Three-dimensional work is also very good at this stage; pupils use waste materials, paper and card imaginatively, skilfully and confidently and on a reasonably large scale. Information technology in the form of computer aided design is available to pupils and is used by some in presentation, though it is not yet fully integrated into schemes of work. The combination of historical and theoretical material with pupils' practical work fully covers both major areas of the National Curriculum.

34.The pupils make very good progress in each key stage. They use a wide range of resources, including oil paint, pastel, resist techniques, printing and collage, together with information technology where appropriate. Pupils use their sketchbooks very well in the development and consolidation of ideas and they also make effective use, in their personal research, of reference books retained within the department and in the library. The sixth form students begin with a very good base of skills, and make satisfactory progress in the A level course.

35.Standards are high in the GCSE courses and the pupils' attainment is well above average by Year 11, which is reflected clearly in the examination results. Individual work in projects shows very strong composition and drawing and, as at Key Stage 3, very good work linked with the study of major artists and also designers such as Rene McIntosh. Pupils use skills of wax-resist, their skill in painting and the application of colour to produce striking compositions on silk. The pupils' confidence in their choice of direction gives their work maturity, which shows in examples of large-scale painting displayed in the school and in project work in the studios. Sixth form students achieve average standards, as shown by the A level examination results.

36.The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good; their interest is consistently sustained in almost all lessons and they concentrate well on their work. Pupils progressively develop the capacity to work independently from Key Stage 3 through to the sixth form. The pupils' conversation during work in studios helps the development of good working relationships. Pupils respond positively to questions and a good atmosphere prevails in lessons.

37.The teaching is good overall. It is very good in Key Stage 3, good in Key Stage 4 and satisfactory in the sixth form. Lessons are well planned and thoroughly prepared. At Key Stage 3, the particular needs of younger pupils are fully acknowledged with a good balance between the teaching of basic skills and the encouragement of imaginative and enjoyable involvement. At Key Stage 4, these basic skills are built upon, being incorporated in individual projects and developed in depth. Much of the teaching at this level and in the sixth form takes the form of individual help and supervision, which are based on the teachers' very good subject knowledge and expertise. The pace of lessons at all stages is very good. Expectations are very high in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, though less ambitious in the sixth form. Homework is profitably used throughout the teaching and is used to complement work in class and to maintain progress.

38.Pupils' work is assessed regularly and grades for attainment and effort are awarded at the end of projects.

Pupils are involved in their own assessment and their observations provide valuable insight which helps teachers to plan the curriculum. A good feature of assessment in art is the collective critique. This has a long tradition in art education and is used to good effect, giving the pupils an opportunity to hear their work assessed by others and, in turn, to exercise responsibility in making thoughtful comments on the work of other pupils.

39. At all stages, the teachers are working to implement the school policy on language and literacy. Lists of terms are displayed in studios and words are explained as they arise in lessons. Supervised extracurricular sessions are held at lunchtimes on four days a week and art clubs on four evenings.

40. The rich and attractive displays of pupils' work make a strong aesthetic impact upon the pupils' surroundings throughout the school. The art teachers use displays of work effectively in the art studios as examples of techniques and learning resources.

131. **Design and technology**

41. The previous inspection found that standards were average overall. However, electronics was under-developed and information technology was not used sufficiently to develop computer-aided design. The GCSE results in CDT (craft, design and technology) were well above average in 1993 but below average in 1994. The results in GCSE home economics were broadly average. The present inspection has found that standards are much the same as in the previous inspection. The GCSE results for 1999 were in line with the national average overall. Results were average in design and technology (food) and a little above in design and technology (resistant materials). In the recently introduced GCSE course in design and technology (graphics), the examination results were below the national average. The GCSE results for home economics (child development), which is not a design and technology subject, were also below the national average. In general, the girls achieve better results than the boys at GCSE. An A level course is now running though no sixth form candidates have taken an examination in the subject for some time. The school enables a number of sixth form students to take GNVQ Intermediate courses in health and social care and in engineering, in collaboration with the local college of further education. The results of the vocational courses are satisfactory.

42. In Key Stage 3, pupils make good overall progress in relation to their low attainment when they enter the school. The majority of pupils make good progress in a broad range of projects involving board, wood, metal, plastic and food materials. Most pupils also make good progress in projects which involve graphics, mechanisms and control devices. Pupils learn to use hand tools and simple machinery competently and safely. Some lower attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, find some of the work which is set for them unchallenging and they make slower, though satisfactory progress. By the end of the key stage, pupils' attainment is broadly average.

43. In Key Stage 4, pupils continue to make good overall progress in GCSE courses, with a range of specialisation. Pupils undertake a number of major and minor projects using materials which are appropriate to their course and some of this work is of a high standard. By the end of the key stage, pupils' attainment in the GCSE courses in both design and technology food and resistant materials is average and is improving.

44. In the sixth form, the students are making good progress in the A level and GNVQ courses. There are only three A level students in Year 12, but their attainment at this stage of the course is above average in both design and manufacturing skills. Standards achieved by students on the GNVQ course in health and social care are average.

45. This is a friendly subject department in which relationships between pupils and teachers are very good. Pupils help each other when they work in groups and are always willing to help less able pupils when appropriate. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good overall but occasionally less satisfactory when the work is inappropriate. All pupils are eager to learn and they respond well to challenge.

46. The teaching is good overall. Teaching is at least satisfactory in nine out of ten lessons and good or very good in six out of ten lessons. Teaching is satisfactory in Key Stage 3, good in Key Stage 4 and very good in the sixth form. All teachers are well qualified and have secure knowledge of their subject; they are keen to do their best for students. Good lessons are characterised by clear planning, well selected projects, good class management, good use of time, rigorous marking and helpful feedback to pupils. In a small number of lessons, the topics fail to interest some of the pupils, particularly the lower sets, resulting in slower progress. The GCSE courses in design and technology are offered in a single group of options along with a GCSE course in art

(textiles). About three-quarters of pupils choose design and technology courses and the remaining quarter take the art option. Whilst the standard of work is good the arrangement does not satisfy the requirements of the National Curriculum for all pupils to take a design and technology subject in Key Stage 4.

137. **Geography**

47. At the last inspection, standards were below average. The teachers' assessments made at the end of Key Stage 3 and the GCSE results indicate that is still the case. The 1998 GCSE examination results were below the national average, though they compared favourably with those in their other subjects. In 1999, the results declined to well below average. However, passes at all grades, A*-G, have been more consistent over time at about 98 per cent. Few pupils achieve the highest grades.

48. Most pupils, including those with special educational needs, make satisfactory progress in each key stage. Some pupils in Year 11 make good progress but few pupils show sufficient independence to use the library for research. Lower attaining pupils can explain the meaning of some key words, but many pupils do not yet have a secure understanding of the key geographical methodologies, and are dependent on the teacher to tell them what they need to do.

49. By the end of Key Stage 3, overall attainment is below average though pupils make considerable gains in knowledge and understanding. Year 7 pupils form views about Runcorn, and about what they see as its benefits and weaknesses; for example, they explore matters such as vandalism, noise, traffic and crime in the context of modern towns and cities. Year 8 pupils are making sound progress in their study of Kenya; for example, they know who the Maasai are and how they live, and higher attaining pupils' writing is well supported by models, for example, of small villages. In Year 9, pupils develop a satisfactory understanding of the nature and purpose of the European Union. They know how member states benefit from membership, for example, through the aided provision of new roads, winter sports facilities, new factories and improved health care in Italy.

50. Pupils taking a GCSE course in geography continue to make satisfactory progress though overall attainment is below average by the end of the course. Year 10 pupils effectively use census data for the Halton area to draw population pyramids and graphs about housing tenures. Year 11 pupils understand the key facts about the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, and appreciate its cause and its immediate effects on the environment in Britain, for example, and also the long-term effects. The lower attaining pupils use maps effectively, for example to extract key information about the speed of travel of clouds. Pupils understand the differences between hydroelectric power and nuclear power, and the advantages and disadvantages of both. Pupils develop a sound understanding of the geography of developing countries through, for example, their study of the effects of international tourism, in terms of economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits and disadvantages. Pupils know the various location factors involved in the choice of a site for a particular industry, such as the availability of raw materials, labour, market and power, and apply their knowledge effectively in the context of the Halton area.

51. A level students make satisfactory progress through the course. They have a sound understanding of human geography, for example the way in which space is utilised in cities. They understand, for example, how patterns of spatial utilisation affect the evolution of various urban areas, economically and socially, in response to changing conditions over time, and can name the most widely studied models. They understand the views of demographers, such as Malthus, of the dangers of over-population and that, for example, food supply is considered the main limit to the growth of population. By Year 13, the A level students' attainment is broadly average.

52. Pupils' literacy skills are well below average. Many pupils are unable to write extensively and are too content to write the minimum. They do not explain their answers in any detail, restricting answers to description and explanation of what happens rather than why. Some pupils do not understand the meaning of key terms, and often spell them incorrectly. Some are not able to work out what is meant by written questions, particularly in test or examination conditions.

53. The attitudes of pupils towards geography are good in Key Stages 3 and 4 and satisfactory in the sixth form. Most pupils want to achieve and their behaviour is good. Poor attendance slows the progress of a number of older pupils. Some pupils are too concerned with colouring-in and doing similar simple tasks and this also slows the pace of their learning. The sixth form students are too content to listen to the teacher's exposition without questioning, challenging or reading around the subject.

54.The teaching is satisfactory overall. It is never unsatisfactory and is sometimes good. Teachers are experienced and have good subject knowledge. Lessons are well planned; worksheets and other materials are well matched to the needs of pupils, and the best of them are very good. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and use the results to plan lessons; however, they do not set targets with individual pupils. Homework is set regularly, but insufficient attention is given to ensuring that all pupils, particularly the higher attaining ones, understand and act on the many comments made when teachers mark their work. Many pupils use information technology in all aspects of the subject and this is a good feature. The teachers enjoy good relationships with pupils, but do too much for them, and dominate lessons too much. They do not insist that pupils express themselves more and undertake more independent work, such as research, which is neglected.

History

55.The previous inspection in 1995 reported the GCSE results as just below average. The GCSE results were well below the national average in 1998 but improved in 1999 though they were still below average. Though the proportion of pupils achieving a grades A*-G was in line with the national average in 1998, it fell to below average in 1999. In 1998, the boys' results were significantly below those of the girls. Very few pupils achieve the highest grades at GCSE. No sixth form students are studying history.

56.Overall, pupils make good progress in each key stage and Year 10 pupils sometimes make very good progress. The pupils learn facts well enough and develop a sound understanding of chronology but make slower progress when interpreting events and examining information, including statistical data. Oral work is sound at both key stages but written work is weak. The ability of pupils to transfer their skills to different aspects of history is below expected standards, and many pupils are too dependent on the teachers. Many are unable to interpret historical facts and data independently and teachers are not doing enough to remedy these weaknesses by explicitly, and consistently, raising pupils' own awareness about their levels of attainment. For example, though written work is marked regularly and thoroughly, pupils are not clearly told what levels they are achieving in the different key skills, and are not guided about what they need to do to raise their standards. Teachers do not insist that their detailed comments are acted upon, so that the same points about finishing work or adding more detail to answers are repeated without any effect. In this way, assessment is not being used as effectively as it could be.

57.Standards at the end of each key stage are below average, as confirmed by the teachers' assessments made at the end of Key Stage 3 and by the GCSE results. Standards are as they are mainly because of weaknesses in pupils' written work.

58.In Key Stage 3, Year 7 pupils know what the Domesday survey was. They understand why William was pleased with the result and why the peasants were not. They write from the viewpoint of both, setting out why each held the views they did; for example, that the survey gave William knowledge of the country and therefore greater control over it so that he could increase his wealth. Year 8 pupils know about the gunpowder plot, who the conspirators were, and why they joined the plot. They know how the plot was discovered, and how the conspirators were punished. They understand the underlying reasons for the conspiracy, and use evidence skilfully to come to their own conclusions. They know who the Puritans were, what their beliefs were, and understand their relationships with the Roman Catholics. Year 9 pupils know the difference between recruitment and conscription, and the meaning of conscientious objection. They understand the impact of the cartoonists, and why the government regarded conscientious objectors as a problem and how they tried to deal with them. Higher attaining pupils use their own analysis of sources effectively to form their own views; for example, they know the meaning of propaganda and its purpose. By Year 9, pupils' overall attainment is below average.

59.In Key Stage 4, Year 10 pupils know why cartoons were used during wars; they understand the significance of their key features. Higher attaining pupils use information well to inform their debate on the problems with the League of Nations, especially the issues surrounding the membership of the United States. Year 11 pupils understand the steps Hitler took to avenge the Treaty of Versailles, and what the response of Britain and France was. They know the key events of the 1930s, and assess Hitler's aims at the outbreak of war. They consider the merits and demerits of appeasement, and the conflicting pressures and tensions. By Year 11, pupils' overall attainment is below average in relation to the demands of the GCSE course.

60.Pupils' attitudes to history are very good at Key Stage 3, and good at Key Stage 4. They behave well and form constructive relationships with each other and with the teachers. They listen well. They come in to the

history classrooms expecting to work hard and do so. However, the pupils' organisation of work, and the development of learning skills are less good. Another factor which hinders the progress of many Key Stage 4 pupils is poor attendance.

61.The teaching is good overall. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen and most lessons were good. This consistency in the teaching is a significant strength in this subject. The good teaching is well represented throughout the department. Teachers are well experienced and have good subject knowledge. Planning is good. Worksheets and other materials are usually well matched to the needs of pupils, and the best of these are very good. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly, and they use these assessments to inform their short-term planning, but do not set targets and share them with individual pupils. Teachers are rigorous in commenting on the standards of pupils' presentation. Homework is set regularly but insufficient attention is given to ensure that all pupils act on the comments made when teachers mark their work. Many pupils use information technology well. Teachers enjoy good relationships with pupils, but do too much for them, and dominate lessons too much. They do not let pupils express themselves enough or work independently often enough. Displays in the classrooms are of a high standard and help to raise the level of pupils' interest.

Information technology

62.At the time of the previous inspection, standards in IT (information technology) at Key Stage 3 were average though some pupils achieved high standards. In relation to pupils' earlier attainment, overall standards were found to be high. In Key Stage 4, standards were average. The quality of teaching was good and the pupils were highly motivated. The subject was well led but computer resources were insufficient for the needs of other subjects in both key stages. Standards have improved considerably and resources are now much better.

63.Pupils do well in this subject and GCSE results are consistently above the national average. Pupils' results are generally better than in other subjects. In both 1997 and 1998, they were well above average. In 1999, results were less good than those of the two previous years but were still above the national average. The majority of Key Stage 4 pupils taking pre-vocational courses have passed their courses. The small numbers of sixth form students taking A level pass their examinations and those taking GNVQ Intermediate courses succeed in achieving their qualifications.

64.In Key Stage 3, all pupils, including those with special needs, make similarly good progress. Pupils of all abilities carry out the same coursework and achieve good standards. The pupils gain and apply knowledge in the range of work specified by the National Curriculum. They retain knowledge well and develop their skills quickly and the majority become confident and capable as they work through set exercises and apply these skills in their work. Year 9 pupils use desktop publishing effectively and creatively to produce advertising posters for different audiences. By the end of Key Stage 3, the pupils' attainment is above average. This is confirmed by the teachers' own assessments at the end of the key stage, which indicate that the greater majority of pupils reach expected standards and a significant number achieve higher levels. Boys and girls achieve equally well.

65.Pupils continue to make good progress in Key Stage 4. Most pupils are competent and confident users of IT. They can select and use appropriate software and apply it in completing a variety of set tasks. They develop knowledge and skill in the use of word processing, desktop publishing, spreadsheets, databases and other graphical and presentational programmes and use these effectively in a variety of projects. In Year 10, pupils apply a range of these skills when they analyse a mailmerge problem, develop appropriate outcomes and write user guides for different audiences. Year 11 pupils continue to develop and apply their skills when producing well planned slide presentations as part of a magazine advertising project. Work is constantly improved and pupils annotate and evaluate their work effectively. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' overall attainment is above average and those taking the GCSE examination course reach a high standard.

66.The sixth form students make satisfactory progress. A level students develop and apply appropriate knowledge and skills but the progress of some students is affected by their erratic attendance. Students taking vocational courses develop and use basic skills effectively. Most of the small number of students taking examinations complete their courses and, by the end of the sixth form, overall attainment is broadly average.

67.The pupils have very good attitudes towards their learning and behaviour is also very good.. They show considerable interest when using computers and all sustain their concentration well. As they develop their knowledge and skills they avail themselves increasingly of the opportunities to show initiative and take

responsibility for their own learning. In particular, the higher attaining pupils show good capacity to work independently. Pupils respond very well to their teachers' high expectations. Relationships are very good.

68.The teaching is never less than satisfactory; it is good or better in almost all lessons and very good in over half of lessons. Teaching in Key Stage 4 is consistently very good. Teachers have good technical knowledge and provide very good individual support for pupils. They have high expectations of pupils regarding achievement. Lesson planning is good and an appropriate range of teaching methods are used. Lessons proceed at a brisk pace. Pupils are well managed and consequently working relationships and discipline are good. Good assessment procedures are in place and pupils have frequent information about the quality of their work through individual teaching and written comments. Homework is used well to extend classwork.

Key skills - information technology across the curriculum

69.In Key Stage 3, an increasing number of pupils make effective use of computers in their work in an increasing number of subjects. Pupils of all abilities are becoming confident and competent in using computer software and carrying out research using CDs. In Key Stage 4, most pupils are confident in using computers. They present coursework for IT and other subjects effectively, using word processing and other presentational skills.

Modern foreign languages

70.At the time of the previous inspection, standards were found to be sound overall though there was some under-achievement at Key stage 3. The GCSE results were slightly below average. Some improvements have been made since the previous inspection. All pupils now take a language in Key Stage 4 and Spanish has successfully been introduced as a second foreign language at Key Stage 4. Teaching has improved and there is now no significant under-achievement in Year 9.

71.From the time of the previous inspection up until the present year, the number of pupils taking GCSE examinations in modern languages has remained low. In 1998, for example, just under half of Year 11 were entered, of whom 55 per cent gained A*-C grades. In 1999, three-quarters of Year 11 were entered for GCSE, either for the long course or for the short course. The remaining Year 11 pupils were prepared for the Certificate of Achievement. About half of the pupils took the full GCSE long course. Of these, 42 per cent achieved a grade A*-C. All of the lower-attaining pupils on the GCSE short course gained grades between D and G. Overall, these results were below national averages for all maintained secondary schools, but they reflected good progress in relation to the pupils' generally low attainment on entry to the school, especially in literacy. The girls achieved more highly than boys, replicating the national pattern. The number of students taking A level French has been very low over the three years 1997-99 so the small numbers involved make comparisons with national figures unreliable. No boys studied French in the sixth form during this period. Over the three years, two girls gained D and E grades and one did not pass the final examination. These results were broadly in line with the same students' achievements in other subjects.

72.The pupils generally make good progress in Key Stages 3 and 4. They are generally clear about what needs to be done and they can ask for and get help when needed. Good teaching and the pupils' own good behaviour are major factors in their good progress. Pupils with special educational needs are mainly in classes with smaller numbers and they receive good support. These pupils also make good progress on the Key Stage 4 Certificate of Achievement course, which suits their needs.

73.The first-hand evidence of the inspection shows that, by the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' attainment is below average in terms of nationally expected standards. Most pupils listen carefully to the French spoken by the teacher and heard on tape, but many need much support and repetition. The few higher attainers are confident when taking part in simple dialogues about themselves. Many other pupils make no more than very brief answers and are hesitant when performing in front of others. The short reading passages made up by teachers and shown on overhead transparencies are mostly well received and understood by pupils. All pupils make great efforts to keep their standard of presentation in written work high; their copy writing is good from Year 7 onwards. By Year 9, pupils in the higher sets can write short descriptions with care and begin to show some understanding of the use of tenses, provided they receive support from the teachers.

74.At Key Stage 4, the pattern of attainment is similar to that at Key Stage 3. All pupils take French and a small number also begin an optional GCSE course in Spanish. In French, the demands of the modular long

course help to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding. For example, the required tape recordings made by the pupils about themselves help to develop their speaking skills, particularly those of the higher attainers, who add considerable detail to their accounts. All pupils develop their writing skills carefully and methodically and receive effective guidance when working towards completing the prescribed assignments. The pupils' progress in work on tenses is, however, often hindered by the amount of vocabulary they need to absorb in each module. Pupils on the short GCSE course have less time to keep up their listening and speaking skills in one lesson a week. They are very much more hesitant and unsure in recalling vocabulary. The lower attainers on the Certificate of Achievement course perform well in working towards limited but achievable objectives.

75.No Year 13 students are studying modern languages though a good number of Year 12 students are taking A level in French. Most of these students are making good progress. Because of the sixth form open access policy, the spread of attainment on entry to the Year 12 French class is relatively wide. However, students' overall attainment is broadly in line with the expectations of the course. Students bridge the gap between GCSE and A level courses with varying degrees of success, especially in grammar. The higher attainers make good progress in their reading and writing skills and they benefit greatly from the foreign language assistant's support. The less talented students are much weaker in expressing their opinions in spoken and written form.

76.Pupils have good attitudes towards languages and show interest in their work. They listen attentively to the teachers and concentrate fully throughout the 50-minute lessons. Their behaviour is always good or very good, and relationships between teachers and pupils are friendly and constructive. Pupils respect one another's contributions and even give generous applause to particularly good efforts. Places on the spring trip to France have already been enthusiastically taken up.

77.The quality of teaching is good: almost three-quarters of the lessons seen were good and included a small number of very good ones. The other lessons were satisfactory. Teachers are very committed to the success of their pupils. Teachers generally use the foreign language well, but they need to check rather more carefully on whether all pupils fully understand. The lack of consistent and concentrated practice of pronunciation, and of vigorous chorus work means that the more hesitant pupils do not always have the speaking practice they need. Teachers' high expectations of pupils' behaviour ensure that a purposeful learning atmosphere is quickly established, even in the groups of lower attainers at Key Stage 4. In many lessons, a good initial revision session is followed by linked activities using a wide variety of materials. Language games and songs enhance lessons at times. The aims of lessons are not always clearly stated at the beginning or discussed at the end. Lessons in the computer room are well established in Key Stage 3 and are well coordinated with the school's programme for information technology. The 1999 teachers' assessments of pupils at the end of the key stage were slightly too generous, judging from the performance of the same pupils in the present Year 10. The teachers need a more detailed Key Stage 3 scheme of work to help them to focus their attention on where improvements can be made.

168. **Music**

78.The previous report found standards were good throughout both key stages and very good at A level. Recent results in GCSE, including those for 1999, are now below the national average for all maintained schools nationally. With the growing number of instrumentalists in Key Stage 3, this situation is likely to improve. The A level examination results are well below the national average.

79.The pupils begin Year 7 with little knowledge of music, few skills and limited experience. They make steady progress in lessons throughout Key Stage 3 and good progress over the key stage to reach average standards by the end of Year 9. Pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to that of other pupils. There are no able instrumentalists in this key stage, though there has been a recent increase in the number of pupils taking instrumental lessons at the school's expense, bringing the number to more than 70. These pupils make progress more quickly than their peers in performance skills and musical literacy. Most pupils, however, are still at an elementary stage, and the effects of the increase in instrumentalists may not be seen for some time. In class, most pupils in Year 9 can play chords on keyboards, using letter names and rhythmic patterns. Pupils' composition also uses rhythmic symbols and letter names, but it is rarely more than a few bars long, though there is balance and tonality. Listening is the weakest element.

80.Progress in Key Stage 4 is satisfactory though the large number of pupils leads to overcrowding of the music room, which necessitates sharing resources, sometimes with only one keyboard among three pupils. The amount of individual attention the teacher can give is limited by these factors in lessons but teaching continues

after school for these pupils. Pupils' skills in performance and composition still vary widely, as at the time of the previous inspection. Listening is still the weakest aspect of pupils' work. By the end of the GCSE course, attainment is below average, as confirmed by the examination results.

81.Few pupils continue with music in the sixth form, so standards vary widely from year to year. Though students are making satisfactory progress in relation to a low starting point, attainment in the current Year 12 is currently well below the standard expected of A level students at this stage. Listening skills are underdeveloped, as is harmony, so students struggle with work well below standard.

82.In Key Stages 3 and 4, the pupils have satisfactory attitudes to their work and sustain their concentration, though there is a falling off when they work on their own because most of them tend to rely heavily on the teacher for information. Relationships are very good and pupils show respect for resources and the feelings and efforts of others. Behaviour is always good. Collaborative skills are beginning to develop in some classes, and some pupils help others. Pupils show little initiative, however, even when the opportunity is given. Sixth form students are too passive, often taking no active part in the lesson. They are reluctant to answer questions and rarely ask for further explanations or offer opinion.

83.Teaching is satisfactory overall and sometimes good, especially in the sixth form. Teachers' knowledge and understanding are usually sound and their skills of musicianship are good. Discipline is very good and relationships are also very good. Praise is used well for effort as well as achievement, and attempts are made to raise self-esteem and self-confidence. Expectations of pupils are realistic, though high for the pupils' ability, and on occasions when they prove to be too high, a speedy diagnosis of the difficulty and quick reactions remedy the situation. In the better lessons, tasks are broken down into easily accessible steps and learning and understanding are monitored. Schemes are appropriate and up-to-date, and planning for lessons is satisfactory. Assessment is carried out regularly and efficiently and results are used well to plan future lessons. The curriculum is under continual review, as is necessary in an improving situation. Homework is closely related to work in class. The teaching is made more difficult by a short allocation of time in Key Stage 3 and overcrowding of the accommodation when two lessons are timetabled together, and the wide range of ability of large numbers of pupils in Key Stage 4.

84.Generous time and energy are given to extracurricular activities, which are well attended. At the recent Christmas concert, a great many pupils thoroughly enjoyed entertaining a large audience with their music. Such events raise pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence, and contribute substantially to the cultural life of the school and its community.

175. **Physical education**

85.The pupils' attainment at Key Stage 3 is similar to that found at the previous inspection but has improved at Key Stage 4. There have also been improvements in the quality and consistency of teaching and an increase in the numbers of pupils involved in extracurricular activities.

86.Over the previous five years, the GCSE results have been below the national average but have improved steadily until the present year. In the 1998 GCSE examinations, 30 per cent of pupils achieved A*-C grades. The 1999 results declined, however, and were much lower than the national average. A level examinations were taken for the first time in 1999. The two girls entered for the examination achieved B and C grades.

87.All pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in Key Stage 3. The pupils come to the school with little or no knowledge of trampolining, hockey and health related fitness. They gradually acquire the new skills involved. Progress is best in performance skills but pupils make less progress in planning activities and observing the performance of others, except in gymnastics, in which these aspects are particularly well developed. The attainment of pupils at the end of the key stage is broadly average in terms of national standards. Boys have good basic skills in football but their knowledge of the game is limited. Girls have sound skills and a good knowledge of rules and tactics in netball. Standards vary in badminton but a third of pupils are working above the level expected for their age. The attainment of some individual pupils and teams is very good. They achieve well at district and county level in football, netball, hockey, cricket and basketball.

88.Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 4 and achieve above average standards by the end of the key stage. Girls and boys build on their work in Key Stage 3, develop further performance skills and become more

perceptive in their observations. Pupils make equal progress, regardless of their different physical abilities, and this is mostly well supported by the use of appropriate equipment and some separate teaching of boys and girls. However, too many groups are expected to perform the same tasks, when their range of attainment demands greater flexibility and guidance. Pupils in GCSE groups in Years 10 and 11 are attaining in line with national levels. In trampolining, girls have very good body tension and some boys have a high level of performance. In basketball, boys and girls, have good ball-handling skills and a knowledge of some defensive and attacking strategies of play. The majority of pupils in Years 10 and 11 do not take the GCSE examination but are reaching above average standards. The boys are achieving average standards in football and boys and girls are attaining above this level in trampolining. Most pupils know how to warm up and stretch effectively and through their health related fitness programme they have a clear understanding of the principles of training.

89.The A level students are making good progress. Most have very good practical ability and a sound knowledge of the various aspects of sport in society. A level students are achieving above average standards.

90.Pupils' attitudes to their work are good. Most are keen and interested and regularly participate in their lessons. They behave well and have good relationships with their teachers. They wear the school physical education uniform and look smart and well turned out for their lessons. A small number of pupils do not participate and these need to be fully monitored and encouraged to rejoin activities. The numbers of pupils, more boys than girls, who choose to study physical education at GCSE level show their interest in the subject. They are enthusiastic about the many extracurricular activities which are provided by the department. Over half of the boys in the school and more than a third of the girls regularly take part in these activities – a very high proportion. They play for school teams and outside clubs in a competitive and confident manner.

91.The teaching is good overall. All lessons are at least satisfactory and teaching in a sixth of lessons is very good. The best teaching covers all aspects of the National Curriculum in the appropriate balance, written work cards support the tasks set and many independent learning opportunities are given to pupils. However, this good practice is not sufficiently well shared amongst the teachers. Teachers manage pupils, equipment and space well, with safety in mind. However, the teachers do not always ensure that non-participants have sufficient to do. Overall, teaching has improved since the previous inspection, activity is high and time is well used.

92.The curriculum meets statutory requirements but there is no general sixth form teaching. In Key Stage 4, pupils are taught in full year groups and this necessitates the involvement of nine teachers who are not subject specialists. The work of these teachers is valuable but, being non-specialists, they give pupils too few opportunities to plan, evaluate and act as coach and referee. The subject is very effective in developing the moral and social awareness of pupils, who are taught fair play and sportsmanship and learn to collaborate in teams and small groups. The management is concentrating appropriately on raising standards, including a more effective monitoring of teaching and improving the curriculum in Key Stage 4. The indoor and outdoor accommodation is sufficient but the quality is poor. The sports hall is dusty and dirty and some pupils find it difficult to work to their full capacity as a result.

183. **Religious education**

93.This is an improving subject with a number of strengths and the potential for further development. At the time of the previous inspection, a key issue for action was the failure of the school to meet statutory requirements for religious education in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Though there have been some improvements in Key Stage 4 the provision is still inadequate. With regard to the sixth form provision, the position is much as before.

94.The GCSE examination results were well below the national average in 1999 though the percentage of pupils gaining grades A*-C is rising more rapidly than the national trend. Very few sixth form students take A level in religious studies.

95.In Key Stage 3, the majority of pupils make good progress, both in lessons, and over the key stage. At the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' overall attainment is broadly average. By the age of 14, they have an appropriate knowledge and understanding of the richness and diversity of religion, of the place of Christianity and other principal religions, of the distinctive features of those religions, and of religious language, concepts and symbols.

96. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' attainment is below average in terms of the standard expected in the local agreed syllabus. The majority of pupils pursuing the GCSE examination syllabus make good progress, both in lessons and over the duration of the course. However, whilst the majority of pupils pursuing the local agreed syllabus in Key Stage 4 make good progress in individual lessons, their progress is not sustained over time and is unsatisfactory over the key stage as a whole. The unsatisfactory progress of pupils following the agreed syllabus at Key Stage 4 is not a reflection of the quality of teaching or the attitude of pupils towards the subject but it is a consequence of unsatisfactory allocation of teaching time for the subject in Years 10 and 11. A minority of pupils are taught religious education weekly and the majority have only one lesson a fortnight. The time is too little for the syllabus to be studied in the breadth and depth necessary for progress to be satisfactory over the key stage, and for most pupils to reach the standards of which they are capable. The syllabus expects the study of Christianity and at least one other religion through six dimensions. However, the pupils study only one of these dimensions in depth, the moral and ethical dimension, together with some elements of one other. Though the work is of average quality, since there is relatively little of it overall standards are below average. There is no provision for religious education to be taught to all pupils in the sixth form. Statutory requirements are not therefore met for Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.

97. The attitudes of most pupils towards the subject are good, and have improved since the previous inspection. Pupils come to lessons keen to learn, settle down quickly, listen and sustain concentration well. They behave very well and enjoy very good relationships with each other and with their teachers. They are keen to ask and answer questions and listen with respect to the opinions of others, for example, in a Year 9 lesson exploring the importance of the five senses in Hindu worship in the Temple.

98. Pupils are given very good opportunities for developing skills of collaboration through working in pairs and small groups, as, for example, in a Year 9 lesson on symbol and ritual in a Hindu wedding ceremony. They are provided with some opportunities for developing skills of independent learning, research and enquiry, but these are too infrequent and the teachers recognise the need to do more to improve pupils' learning skills.

99. The teaching is good. It was good in two-thirds of lessons observed and very good in a further third. Teachers have a very good command of their subject. They are clear about what they wish their pupils to learn, they communicate their intentions to them and plan their lessons effectively to achieve their aims, as, for example, in a Year 10 lesson on Christian values of caring. Teachers engage and hold their pupils' interest through a variety of interesting and challenging activities and tasks, which are well matched to their different needs, as in a Year 8 lesson when pupils were working to create contemporary newspaper style accounts of the trials and crucifixion of Jesus. Teachers make good use of artefacts to help to bring the subject alive, for instance through the use of a Christingle candle in a Year 7 lesson to bring out the importance of symbols in religious teaching. Teachers make very good use of pupils' self-evaluation at the end of topics to help them to understand their strengths and weaknesses, and how to improve their attainment. They also make good use of homework to extend work done in class, and mark work conscientiously and supportively. The teaching is underpinned by the very good relationships which teachers enjoy with their pupils. They know and value them as individuals, and have high expectations of them in behaviour as well as achievement. Where teaching is less strong, it is overly directive in style and gives pupils insufficient opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning, for example by giving too few opportunities to develop skills of independence, research and enquiry.

100. The subject is very well managed and much has improved since the previous inspection. The subject management is concentrating on raising standards through, for example, improvements in the planning of the subject and procedures for assessment and monitoring pupils' progress. The quality of teaching has significantly improved since the previous inspection and is responsible for the good progress of the majority of pupils in Key Stage 3 and of those taking the GCSE course. However, even good teaching cannot compensate for the insufficiency of time given to teaching the subject to the majority of pupils in Key Stage 4.

191. PART C: INSPECTION DATA

191. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

101.The inspection was conducted by a team of 14 inspectors. It covered all National Curriculum subjects and religious education in Key Stages 3 and 4, and optional subjects in Key Stage 4. The inspection covered sixth form academic, vocational and religious education. The inspection also investigated the quality of personal, health and social education, careers education, sex education, form-time, registration, assemblies and extracurricular activities.

102.More than 53 inspector-days were spent in school, 207 lessons were inspected, and 162 hours were spent in lessons. More than 37 hours were also spent inspecting samples of pupils' written 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 seen teaching and received reports on the quality of lessons taught by them.

103.Meetings were held with the governing body before and after the inspection, and discussions with the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors during the inspection contributed significantly to the evidence of the inspection. Interviews were held with the Headteacher and other senior staff, with all heads of department, and with other staff with posts of special responsibility. Four evening meetings of the inspection team were held during the inspection week and the conclusions of the report represent the corporate views of the team of inspectors.

104.Before the inspection, 298 parents completed and returned questionnaires sent to them by the school and the Registered Inspector held a meeting attended by 20 parents. Views expressed by parents in the questionnaires in writing, and raised at the meeting, were noted by the Registered Inspector and fully taken into account by the team of inspectors.

195. **DATA AND INDICATORS**

195. **Pupil data**

	Number of pupils on roll (full-time equivalent)	Number of pupils with statements of SEN	Number of pupils on school's register of SEN	Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals
Y7 – Y13	1081	58	212	372

195. **Teachers and classes**

195. **Qualified teachers (Y7 – Y13)**

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent):	66
Number of pupils per qualified teacher:	16.4

195. **Education support staff (Y7 – Y13)**

Total number of education support staff:	9
Total aggregate hours worked each week:	290

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:	77
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Average teaching group size:	KS3	23
	KS4	21

195. **Financial data**

Financial year:	1999
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£

Total income	2,667,598
Total expenditure	2,695,498
Expenditure per pupil	2,491
Balance brought forward from previous year	20,267
Balance carried forward to next year	7,633

195. **PARENTAL SURVEY**

Number of questionnaires sent out: 1081

Number of questionnaires returned: 298

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	27	65	7	1	0
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	49	46	3	2	0
The school handles complaints from parents well	31	47	18	4	0
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	30	62	6	2	0
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	39	51	7	3	0
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	44	51	4	1	0
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	39	53	7	1	0
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	36	53	5	5	1
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	32	58	8	2	0
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	35	55	7	3	0
My child(ren) like(s) school	38	49	6	4	3

195. **Other issues raised by parents**

At the meeting with the Registered Inspector, a majority of parents agreed with a view expressed by some of them that their children should have lockers in which to keep their heavy bags. The Registered Inspector promised the parents that he would make enquiries to see whether lockers could be provided.