

INSPECTION REPORT

ST BIRINUS SCHOOL

DIDCOT

LEA area: Oxfordshire

Unique reference number: 123259

Headteacher: Mr C D Bryan

Reporting inspector: I Thompson
12271

Dates of inspection: 8–12 May 2000

Inspection number: 184645

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-19
Gender of pupils:	Boys
School address:	Mereland Road Didcot Oxon
Postcode:	OX11 8AZ
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr K J Howard
Date of previous inspection:	30 January–3 February 1995

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I Thompson	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it?
			How high are standards?
			How well is the school led and managed ?
J Harrison	Lay Inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development
			How well does the school care for its pupils?
			How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
D Shepherd	Team inspector	French German Equal opportunities	How good are curricular and other opportunities?
			How well are pupils taught?
R Garrett	Team inspector	English	
W Wimshurst	Team inspector	Mathematics	
O Denson	Team inspector	Science	
D Morris	Team inspector	Art Music	
C Worthington	Team inspector	Design and technology Information and communication technology	
A Paver	Team inspector	Geography	
P Mitchell	Team inspector	History	
J Oxley	Team inspector	Physical education	
J Radford	Team inspector	Religious education Special educational needs	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Birinus School is an 11-19 boys' comprehensive school with technology college status, which shares its sixth form with Didcot Girls' School. The school serves Didcot and the surrounding rural area. Its catchment includes estates of social priority housing. The intake is fully comprehensive and pupils come from the full range of social and economic backgrounds. There are 987 pupils on roll, about 170 more than at the time of the last inspection. The school will continue to grow during the next five years. Very few pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds. A below average proportion of pupils are entitled to free school meals. There are 150 pupils on the school's register of special educational needs, of whom an above average proportion have statements of special educational need.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school with many strengths. Leadership has created a positive ethos of achievement in which pupils achieve good standards. The high standard of teaching has a positive impact on pupils' learning and attitudes. The school is very well managed and provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils achieve well in the school. Standards in the sixth form are high.
- Good teaching that motivates pupils and stimulates learning is a feature of the majority of lessons.
- There is good provision for pupils with special educational needs.
- Personal development is very good, supported by high quality pastoral care. Independent learning is well developed as pupils move through the school.
- Provision for extra-curricular activities is very good.
- Very good links with the community and partner institutions contribute to pupils' learning.
- Very good leadership and management are provided by the headteacher and senior staff.
- Development planning is very good.
- Excellent use is made of additional funding to raise standards.

What could be improved

- Standards of literacy.
- The use of assessment data to support curriculum planning, to monitor progress and set targets.
- Pupils' knowledge of their own standards of achievement and what they need to do to improve.
- The quality of reports so that parents know how well their children are doing.
- Teaching of personal, social and health education.
- The pattern of the curriculum and the distribution of subject time, particularly at Key Stage 3.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Standards of achievement have improved. The quality of teaching has improved considerably and is a key factor in raising standards. The key issues identified have been dealt with effectively.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	Compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	C	C	C	n/a
A-levels/AS-levels	A	A	A	

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

In the 1999 GCSE examinations, pupils' results were in line with the national average in comparison with all schools and above average for boys. Using performance data, the school set challenging targets for the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C, which were exceeded. Comparison with pupils' prior performance shows that most boys do at least as well as might be expected and many do better. Data is not available to make comparisons with similar schools. However, in comparison with other specialist schools, the school's results show the greatest improvement of any over the last three years. The school's average total GCSE points score per pupil has risen faster than the national average over the last six years.

In the 1999 GCE A level examinations, results were well above the national average for the average points score of candidates entered for two or more A or AS levels. This has been the case for the last three years.

In work seen during the inspection in English, standards of attainment at age 16 and 19 match average standards nationally. In mathematics, standards match those expected at age 16 and standards in the sixth form are above average. In science, standards at the ages of 16 and 19 are above the levels expected nationally.

In work seen in other subjects, at the end of Key Stage 4, standards are well above the expected level in art. They are above the level expected in design and technology, information and communication technology and Spanish. Standards are in line with expected levels in all other subjects except geography where they are below. In the sixth form, standards are well above the level expected in art. They are above expected levels in design and technology, geography, history and music. Standards in all other subjects match expected levels.

Pupils and students achieve well at the school. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported and make good progress. Those who are gifted and talented also make good progress and achieve well.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good attitudes to learning support achievement.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils behave well. Low rate of exclusions.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Responsibility and independence well developed.
Attendance	Satisfactory.

Pupils show respect for others. Very good relationships contribute to the calm atmosphere in the school and support the ethos of achievement.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

There has been an improvement in the quality of teaching since the last inspection. The overall quality of teaching is good. It is good at both key stages and very good in the sixth form. Teaching is satisfactory or better in 97 per cent of lessons. It is good in 48 per cent, very good in 19 per cent and excellent in one per cent. It is unsatisfactory in three per cent.

At Key Stage 3, the quality of teaching is very good in art, good in design and technology, history, information and communication technology, mathematics, physical education, religious education and science. It is satisfactory in all other subjects. At Key Stage 4, the quality of teaching is very good in art and science. It is satisfactory in French, geography and Spanish and good in all other subjects. In the sixth form, the quality of teaching is very good in art, design and technology, mathematics, music and religious education. It is good in all other subjects. The three per cent of teaching that was unsatisfactory overall was limited to an occasional lesson in several subjects across the school. The teaching of the personal, social and health education programme is unacceptably variable across the school and reduces its effectiveness.

Well-planned teaching, which motivates pupils and stimulates learning, is a key feature of the majority of lessons. The overall quality of learning lags slightly behind the quality of teaching, particularly at Key Stage 3, partly because pupils too often do not know clearly enough what they need to do to improve and because the attitudes of a small minority of boys occasionally impede progress. A lack of literacy skills also holds back progress, but the school is attempting to improve the situation through a literacy programme. It is too early for this to have had a marked impact on standards. Appropriate opportunities to develop numeracy skills are used, with the result that skills are developed in a satisfactory manner across the school. Some teachers make effective use of information and communication technology to support learning on a regular basis, but this is not the case in all subjects.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. Some unsatisfactory distribution of curriculum time. A very good range of extra-curricular activities enriches the curriculum. The programme for personal, social and health education is not consistently effective.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good provision to meet pupils' needs.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good overall. Moral and cultural development are very good. Spiritual and social development are good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good standards of pastoral care. The use of assessment data to monitor and support progress is unsatisfactory.

The school works well in partnership with parents. Reports do not make sufficiently clear how well pupils are doing, or what they need to do to improve. The curriculum is broad and balanced. However, at Key Stage 3 the time allocation is low in mathematics and this is having a detrimental impact on standards. The amount of time spent on German and Spanish is also low and contributes to the slow rate of progress. In Year 9, boys have an uneven amount of time spent on physical education, with higher attaining boys receiving less than others. The distribution of time across the week affects learning, particularly for some mathematics and modern foreign language classes. The school provides high quality pastoral care. Performance data is not used well enough to monitor achievement and to promote progress by setting targets for improvement.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides very good leadership and is committed to raising standards. Well supported by other members of the management team.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very effective governing body plays a full role in shaping the direction of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good self-review process. Effective action to secure improvement.
The strategic use of resources	Very effective use of available resources.

There is a good match of staff to curriculum needs. The school has good accommodation and resources for learning. The overall leadership of the school is very good. There are some weaknesses in the management of geography and music. There are very good procedures for securing best value throughout the school.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good attitudes promoted by the school. • Good progress made and standards achieved. • Good leadership and management. • School is approachable and deals well with problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount and timing of homework. • Information about pupils' progress.

The inspection team agrees with the positive views expressed by parents in response to the questionnaire, which were supported by letters to the Registered Inspector and by parents at the meeting. During the inspection the amount and quality of homework set was satisfactory. However, inspectors agree with parents that the information provided through reports should be improved.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. The results of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests in 1999 were above the national average for all pupils in mathematics and close to the national average in English and science. In comparison with the national averages for boys, results in English and mathematics were above average and results in science were close to the average. Taking the three core subjects together, results were above the national average for all schools. The rising trend in the school's results has broadly matched the trend found nationally. Comparisons with test results from when pupils enter the school show that the majority of pupils do at least as well as they should at Key Stage 3 and the majority do better than might be expected.

2. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, the proportions of pupils obtaining five or more grades A*-C and five or more grades A*-G were close to national averages. In comparison with results for boys nationally, results were above average. The school's average total GCSE points score per pupil has risen faster than the national average over the last six years. Targets based on Key Stage 3 performance data have been consistently exceeded.

3. At grades A*-C in 1999, results were far above the national average in art at 100 per cent. Results were well above average in science and from a small entry in information technology; above average in English literature, design and technology and mathematics; close to average in English, French and physical education; below average in history, religious education and from a small entry in music. They were well below average in geography. Results at grades A*-G were above average in English, English literature, design and technology, geography, history, information technology, physical education, religious education and science. They were close to average in French and mathematics and below average in music. Results for the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) in engineering were above average. The wide variations between subjects in the numbers of pupils and the proportions of the year group entered for examinations make comparisons with national averages unreliable in some subjects. For example, numbers entered in information technology and music are small, making percentages misleading; in religious studies a far higher than usual proportion of the year group is entered, leading to unfavourable comparisons with a national picture in which only a small proportion of pupils take the examination.

4. Pupils' best overall results, compared to their achievements in other subjects, were in art and design and technology. Poorest results were in geography and history reflecting, in part, pupils' continuing difficulties with written work.

5. In the 1999 GCE A level examinations, results were well above the national average for the average points score of candidates entered for two or more A or AS levels. This has been the case for the last three years. Entries in the majority of subjects are too small to make meaningful individual comparisons. However, it is noteworthy that in 1999 standards in art were outstandingly good and there was a 100 per cent pass rate in chemistry, design and technology, French, mathematics, music, physics and religious studies.

6. In work seen during the inspection in English, standards of attainment at ages 14, 16 and 19 match average standards nationally. At Key Stage 3, the emphasis given to

reading and the introduction of literacy support groups enable most pupils to read, write, speak and listen with reasonable competence by the end of the key stage. Pupils with special educational needs have considerable learning difficulties and low reading and spelling standards. At Key Stage 4 most pupils can read with understanding, annotate texts appropriately and structure their written work effectively. The work of lower attainers shows understanding of texts but their standard of attainment is depressed by technical weaknesses, especially in spelling. In the sixth form, the written work of most students shows good knowledge and understanding and awareness of the social and cultural background of their set texts.

7. Standards of literacy are nevertheless unsatisfactory overall. The quality of contributions made by departments to improving standards is unacceptably variable. There is some good practice. For example, the science department has a clear policy on literacy; in art, the use of correct terminology is encouraged and, in mathematics, the use of writing frames helps to develop pupils' skills. However, across the school there are too few opportunities provided for extended writing and insufficient attention is given to basic skills. Written work, particularly at Key Stage 3, is often limited in expression and pupils have difficulty with sentence construction, use of capital letters, handwriting and spelling. This particularly affects standards in subjects such as geography, history and religious education, which have a relatively high written content. Pupils' reading competence is insecure, particularly at Key Stage 3, and in subjects across the school there are too few opportunities to develop skills. The school has recently developed a literacy policy and initiatives such as the paired reading scheme are aimed at improving standards. However, it is too early for these to have had any significant impact.

8. Pupils listen well to each other and to teachers. They respect other people's opinions. A good example was a Year 8 art lesson in which pupils listened carefully and built upon each other's ideas in a creative dialogue guided by the teacher. Speaking skills are more variable. Many pupils lack the confidence to provide extended answers orally and in many lessons barely respond to questions or carry on a dialogue. That it is possible to develop good skills was shown by a group of sixth form GNVQ students who gave a well prepared oral presentation of their research into the Didcot street fair to a small audience. Afterwards, they answered questions clearly and were confident in extended discussion.

9. In work seen during the inspection in mathematics, standards match those expected at the ages of 14 and 16. Standards in the sixth form are above average. By the end of Key Stage 3, number skills are generally satisfactory with many pupils able to handle fractions and percentages confidently. Measuring skills are satisfactory. Pupils show a satisfactory understanding of shape and space. Data handling is satisfactory. Problem solving skills are developed well and by the end of the key stage pupils are able to identify patterns and establish rules. By the end of Key Stage 4, most pupils use calculators confidently and accurately although some pupils still have difficulty in using percentages. Algebraic skills are satisfactory; higher attaining pupils can handle equations and inequalities confidently. Spatial skills are satisfactory. Data handling and problem solving skills are good. In the sixth form students show a good understanding of a range of topics including the use of calculus, and logarithms and have developed a good understanding of the use of forces in mechanics.

10. Standards of numeracy are satisfactory. Number skills are generally satisfactory with many pupils able to handle fractions and percentages. Most pupils use calculators confidently and accurately. Measuring skills are satisfactory; in design and technology pupils measure with appropriate accuracy and in science use units confidently. Pupils show a satisfactory understanding of shape and space; angles are used well in three-

dimensional drawing in design and technology. By the end of Key Stage 4, data handling skills are good. In mathematics lessons, Year 11 pupils can recall a wide range of techniques for handling information and in geography and science pupils can use statistics confidently and draw graphs well.

11. In work seen during the inspection in science, the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 are in line with those expected of pupils of the same age nationally. Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form are above the levels expected nationally. Pupils can describe what they are doing competently and confidently using appropriate terminology. They are able to talk about predictions they are making and theories they are formulating. Pupils draw graphs, which are properly labelled with correct units, to record their observations. They tabulate results from experiments and take measurements accurately. Good use is made of information and communication technology throughout. Sixth form students have a good range of study skills and can organise their own work.

12. In work seen during the inspection in the remaining subjects of the curriculum, standards achieved by pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 are above the level expected in art, design and technology and information and communication technology. Standards match expected levels in all other subjects. At the end of Key Stage 4, standards are well above the expected level in art. They are above the level expected in design and technology, information and communication technology and Spanish. Standards are in line with expected levels in all other subjects except geography where they are below. In the sixth form standards are well above the level expected in art. They are above expected levels in design and technology, geography, history and music. Standards in all other subjects match expected levels.

13. Pupils with special educational needs usually attain the standards that their teachers expect of them and many do better than expected. For example, pupils entering the school with very low levels of literacy gain pass grades at GCSE and some go on to achieve success in the sixth form. In the National Curriculum tests in 1999 the percentage of pupils at age 14 reaching level 5 in English was above average for boys and close to the national average, as was the percentage of pupils gaining grades A*-G at GCSE. This represents significant achievement for many pupils with special educational needs. In their mainstream lessons most pupils, including those with English as an additional language, make good progress overall. Pupils also make good progress in their withdrawal groups and special literacy programmes.

14. Boys achieve well at the school. They enter the school with broadly average standards of attainment. By the end of Key Stage 3 most have made good progress and are achieving above the level expected for boys. This pattern of good achievement continues into Key Stage 4 and last year boys' results exceeded predictions based on their Key Stage 3 results. Those who continue into the sixth form achieve well above average standards. Figures published comparing the performance of specialist schools between 1997 and 1999 show that the school showed the greatest improvement of any in the award of five or more GCSE grades A*-C.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

15. The attendance rate in 1998/9 was 91.9 per cent, which is satisfactory. Attendance in Years 7 to 11 is regularly above or around the benchmark figure of 90 per cent. In recent years, the school has seen a significant increase in boys moving into designated social priority housing from outside the catchment area and in transfers of pupils with poor

attendance from other schools. This has contributed to a small minority of pupils with poor attendance. Pupils are generally punctual in arriving at school in the mornings, apart from the occasional late bus. Lessons start on time.

16. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Pupils often hold open doors for staff and visitors. At lunch times, activities are harmonious. The inspectors were impressed by the mature and friendly attitudes of the boys. In lessons, pupils have overall good attitudes towards learning and often show very good attitudes in the sixth form. During the inspection, there were only a few lessons seen where pupils' attitudes and behaviour were not conducive to learning. These were predominantly at Key Stage 3 and linked to unsatisfactory teaching, or the presence of a few uncooperative pupils. There were two permanent exclusions in the last year and 13 fixed period exclusions. This is a low figure in comparison to schools nationally.

17. Many parents commented on the good relationships between pupils and their form tutors. Good relationships are evident throughout the school. Personal qualities are very well developed. Prefects, house and sports captains play a responsible role in school life. Older pupils set a good example to those younger. Sixth formers and Year 10 pupils assist Year 7 form groups. Pupils wear their full school colours, prefect and sports badges with pride.

18. Most pupils with special educational needs behave well and have positive attitudes to their work and to school life in general. They make substantial gains in self-confidence and organising skills as they move through the school.

19. Pupils show a very good degree of personal responsibility and initiative. Sixth formers organise an entire charity week with productions and fun events. Pupils participate in school decision-making through the school council. Pupils take part enthusiastically in the extensive extra-curricular activities, sports and after school classes. Pupils enjoy the numerous events and residential visits organised in activities week.

20. Pupils show good respect for others and listen to others' viewpoints in discussions. Parents and pupils feel that the school is safe. Bullying is not a significant concern, but is handled swiftly and sensitively if it does occur.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

21. The overall quality of teaching is good. It is good at both key stages and very good in the sixth form. Teaching is satisfactory or better in 97 per cent of lessons. It is good in 48 per cent, very good in 19 per cent and excellent in 1 per cent. It is unsatisfactory in 3 per cent of lessons. Well planned teaching, which motivates pupils and stimulates learning, is a key feature in the majority of lessons. Thorough planning identifies clearly the learning objectives of lessons, which are shared effectively with pupils so that they understand what is expected of them. There has been an improvement in the quality of teaching since the last inspection.

22. At Key Stage 3, the quality of teaching is at least satisfactory in 94 per cent of lessons. It is good or better in 61 per cent and very good in 15 per cent. Teaching is less than satisfactory in 6 per cent of lessons and never poor. The quality of teaching is very good in art, good in design and technology, history, information and communication

technology, mathematics, physical education, religious education and science. It is satisfactory in all other subjects.

23. At Key Stage 4, the quality of teaching is at least satisfactory in 98 per cent of lessons; good or better in 64 per cent and very good in 16 per cent. The quality of teaching is less than satisfactory in 2 per cent of lessons and never poor. The quality of teaching is very good in art and science. It is satisfactory in French, geography and Spanish and good in all other subjects.

24. In the sixth form, the quality of teaching is always at least satisfactory. It is good in 53 per cent of lessons and very good in a further 36 per cent. Teaching is very good in art, design and technology, mathematics, music and religious education. It is good in all other subjects.

25. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen in art, design and technology, English, geography, history, information and communication technology, physical education, religious education and science. The 3 per cent of teaching that was unsatisfactory overall was limited to an occasional lesson in several subjects across the school.

26. The overall quality of learning lags slightly behind the quality of teaching, particularly at Key Stage 3, because pupils too often do not know clearly enough what they need to do to improve and because the attitudes of a small minority of boys occasionally impede progress. However, in science pupils are making increased progress, supported by good assessment practice. Departments across the school provide revision classes which enhance learning opportunities. At Key Stage 4, and particularly in the sixth form, pupils are encouraged to develop independent learning skills. This was clearly shown in a Year 12 geography lesson when the very good teaching of enquiry skills prompted pupils into independent learning to above average standards. Literacy skills are holding back progress, particularly in subjects which have a high written content, for example geography and history, but the school is attempting to improve the situation through a paired reading programme. It is too early for this to have had a marked impact on standards of literacy. There is considerable variation in the way that teachers tackle reading and writing in lessons. Opportunities for reading aloud are too infrequent in most subjects. Teachers do not pay sufficient attention overall to the development of writing skills with the result that standards of spelling and presentation are unacceptably variable. For example, in a Year 10 history lesson, although a good amount of historical and general vocabulary was used, not enough attention was paid to writing to raise its accuracy and the standard of the written work in the lesson was too low. Good standards are achieved in art, where the correct use of terms is encouraged by teachers, and in science, where the careful marking of pupils' work enables them to improve the standard of their written work. Appropriate opportunities to develop numeracy skills are used, particularly in science, design and technology and geography, with the result that skills are developed in a satisfactory manner across the school. Some teachers make effective use of information and communication technology to support learning on a regular basis, but this is not the case in all subjects.

27. Teachers know their subjects well. This results in a confident approach in the classroom, which helps to enthuse pupils and to involve them in their learning. This is a particular strength in science, shown clearly in explanations given in GCSE revision sessions to help pupils develop concepts. In art, teachers give scholarly talks to sixth formers to provide background to their studies. Work and the pace of lessons are generally well matched to pupils' needs throughout the school.

28. The teaching of the personal, social and health education programme varies considerably across the school and reduces its effectiveness. This reflects the lack of confidence of some teachers when working outside the area of their subject expertise and their need for training and support.

29. The great majority of teachers use a variety of methods to ensure that pupils behave well and concentrate, so that they get the most out of lessons. The use of praise in a Year 10 science lesson encouraged responses from the pupils and some of them then began to ask challenging questions. In a Year 10 art lessons, very good quality learning was achieved because enthusiasm was stimulated and results were achievable within the time available. This lesson linked well with previous work and the teacher stressed the requirement for high standards. Teachers know their pupils well; relationships are good and this creates a positive approach to learning, particularly at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. There are occasional lapses of behaviour, usually when lesson planning does not provide sufficient variety to maintain pupils' interest and motivation, and learning is affected. However, during the inspection behaviour was good in most lessons.

30. Pupils with special educational needs are well taught within mainstream subject classes, and there is good teaching of basic skills in the small withdrawal groups for the Successmaker programme. Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of pupils' needs, and adapt teaching styles and learning materials effectively to enable their pupils to learn with confidence and to make good progress. When pupils have support in the classroom, they make good progress. For example, in a Year 9 mathematics lesson, very good use of the support teacher enabled pupils to make good progress through well managed activities adapted to their needs. A lesson based on a story written by the special educational needs co-ordinator in a Year 7 English lesson provided an opportunity for good learning because the good mix of activities encouraged the development of reading skills and teaching styles were well adapted to pupils' needs. Well managed support enhanced the effectiveness of the lesson. The good relationships that exist between teachers and pupils and the effectiveness of classroom support have a positive impact on pupils' learning and personal development.

31. Most teachers use day-to-day assessment and marking effectively to support learning across the school. Marking is regular and sometimes tells the pupils what they need to do to improve. Rigorous and positive assessment is a particularly strong feature in art at both key stages and in the sixth form. Teachers engage students in evaluative dialogue, making a significant contribution to high standards. However, assessment is not consistently used to support learning, by setting targets for improvement or to inform planning in all departments. There is scope for teachers to share existing good practice.

32. Some use is made of information and communication technology to enhance and enrich the curriculum. Coursework for GCSE is often word processed and use is made of the Internet to develop research skills. Lessons are not routinely used as learning opportunities for information and communication technology although most subject areas make regular, if infrequent, use of computer facilities.

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

33. The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. It contains all the subjects of the National Curriculum, religious education and personal, social and health education. The length of the teaching week at 25 hours is in line with the model for comprehensive schools nationally at Key Stage 3 and for the DfEE recommended time at

Key Stage 4. The time allocation is low in mathematics at Key Stage 3 and this is having a detrimental impact on standards. The amount of time spent on German and Spanish is also low and contributes to the slow rate of progress. At Key Stage 4 there is a core curriculum followed by all pupils, with two further options. Unusually, all boys follow a course in religious education. A GNVQ engineering course is provided for some higher attaining boys. In the sixth form there is a wide range of A level courses as well as GNVQ advanced and intermediate courses in business, health and social care, information and communication technology and leisure and tourism, which are run in conjunction with Didcot Girls' School.

34. The school makes good provision for pupils with special educational needs. The curriculum is accessible to all pupils on the special needs register. Individual education plans are effective in ensuring that pupils' particular needs are provided for and short term targets for improvement in basic skills, specific subjects, general organisation and behaviour are well focused. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 benefit from being able to enter for the Certificate of Achievement in subjects such as English and religious education.

35. The school has a literacy strategy but it is in its infancy and has not yet had time to make an impact on standards of literacy. However, sixth formers play a useful part in helping with reading in lower school classes. There is a satisfactory numeracy policy in place.

36. The school makes available a very wide range of extra-curricular activities that enrich curricular provision. About 40 per cent of the boys take an active part in extra-curricular sport, supervised by a total of six staff. Many departments offer clubs, activities and educational visits as well as residential trips abroad. A good range of revision classes and subject help groups is provided.

37. There is equality of access and opportunity to the curriculum with the exception of physical education in Year 9, where higher attaining pupils have less time than others.

38. The programme for personal, social and health education is taught by form tutors, not all of whom are confident in this role. There is some monitoring by heads of year during form time but the quality of provision is variable and there is not enough formal training for the teachers. The programme includes drugs education, sex education and skills for life. The scheme is intended to build progressively throughout a pupil's school life but the current system needs auditing to ensure that all aspects are adequately covered.

39. The provision for careers education and guidance is good. The programme in Year 10 includes the opportunity for all pupils to have work experience which is monitored, with careful preparation and follow-up during the placement by members of the teaching staff.

40. The school has very good links with the community. Strong and effective links with business and industry, as a direct result of the school's technology college status, bring first-hand relevance to pupils' learning and personal development. In design and technology pupils work with Rover; in the sixth form, able physicists are challenged by an Engineering Education scheme with Rutherford Laboratories. A joint geography and science project is based upon visits to National Power. Selected Year 11 pupils have gained in managerial skills from a management consultancy training day, sponsored by Exxon. Local industry is supportive in providing suitable work placements for Year 10 pupils and those taking GNVQ courses. Year 11 pupils have mentors from the business world. The school is very successful in attracting a high level of sponsorship.

41. The school has very good relationships with its partner schools. An excellent partnership with Didcot Girls' School allows the joint sixth form to run efficiently and effectively. The schools share many of the same parents and work closely together in the best interests of all their pupils. Frequent meetings are held with the primary schools and there are effective arrangements for ensuring that pupils settle quickly and easily on transition. Good curriculum link groups are established in several subjects, notably science, where teachers from the school have taken science lessons in the primary schools and a joint science festival has been held. The work of an Advanced Skills Teacher in science offers exciting outreach projects for primary school children and is beginning to have a positive effect on pupils' progress when they enter the secondary school. The school is a local centre for information and communication technology development in the National Grid for Learning. There are also good relationships with further and higher education. Effective support and monitoring are provided for students who are in the school as part of their initial teacher training.

42. Provision for pupils' moral and cultural development is very good. Opportunities for spiritual awareness and social development are good.

43. The quality of both sixth form assemblies observed during the inspection was outstanding. Each was adult in its approach and sensitively spiritual. The programme for other assemblies, which were cancelled during inspection week because the hall was being used for examinations, shows that spiritual as well as moral messages are given to pupils in a variety of ways. The school has evolved a theme for the week and a thought for the day scheme since the last inspection. The intention is that all form tutors give pupils a purposeful time for quiet reflection on beliefs or on their experiences. Some tutors give this priority but there is much inconsistency in the scheme's delivery, which needs to be improved. Local Baptist and Church of England clergy often visit the school. They help pupils prepare to take occasional assemblies. They and a Roman Catholic priest visit religious education classes.

44. The religious education department makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual awareness. Pupils on the trip to Israel were moved by Bible readings on the Sea of Galilee. The art department provides a rich visual experience for all pupils as they come and go in day-to-day life in school. A Year 11 boy's computer animation of two pictures by Matisse with background music is a deep evocative experience.

45. In most departments there are missed opportunities for insight into values. Some subjects, for example music and design and technology, contribute to spiritual awareness in lessons. A Year 8 history lesson had a spiritual dimension when boys heard the story of the sacrifice of two young men who stayed in their crashing Halifax bomber to avoid it landing on the town of Wallingford.

46. There is a strong moral emphasis in the school. Staff are very good role models in their care for individuals and hard work. All departments expect civilised behaviour from their pupils and all make the difference between right and wrong very clear. Pupils are encouraged to collaborate positively in subjects such as physical education, design and technology and music. They are expected to respect other people's views and to listen to each other in all classes. Issues with moral dimensions such as drugs and adoption are discussed in personal, social and health education lessons. Aspects of citizenship are taught in history. Pupils following the Youth Award scheme are developing important links with the immediate community that contribute to their social development. Pupils have an excellent record in raising large sums for charity. They spontaneously organise sponsorships. Pupils cycled to Land's End to raise a large sum for an ex-pupil now a

paraplegic. One boy was well supported in a walk to the Brecon Beacons for cancer charities after the death of his father. Pupils asked for collections for the victims of floods in Mozambique. During the inspection week, pupils were collecting for the Red Cross.

47. Much care is taken to give pupils rich experience of diverse cultures. Departments across the school, such as art, English, history, science and religious education, include aspects of multicultural education in their curriculum. Multicultural displays in public areas of the school contribute to pupils' awareness and appreciation of other cultures. The art department makes a strong contribution to cultural development. Pupils' awareness of a wider culture is extended through their work being exhibited at the Tate gallery in St Ives and at Blenheim Palace. The activities week provides very good opportunities for social and cultural development. There is a very wide range of choice of day activities, in and out of school, together with residential experience in England and abroad.

48. Educational visits abroad contribute to social and cultural development. For example, the art department arranges an annual visit to Paris and a bi-annual visit to Venice. Visits are planned by the history department to St Petersburg and by the religious education department to China. Annual visits are made to the battlefields of World War I.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

49. Form tutors and heads of year move up through the school with their year groups. These teams and the pastoral deputy head provide strong pastoral continuity and very high standards of individual care, which underpin academic achievement.

50. Pupils are given very good educational and personal support. They appreciate the way that teachers often stay behind after school to give them extra help. Many teachers run twilight classes. This dedication contributes to the respectful relationships that are evident in the school. The school employs a part-time counsellor, who provides good support to pupils and their families. The school nurse gives effective support to pupils with a drop-in clinic and help with health education lessons. Good induction into the school in Year 7 helps pupils settle quickly into school routines. The careers programme is good and helps pupils make informed choices.

51. The systems for identifying and supporting pupils in need of extra help and the arrangements for reviewing the progress of pupils with individual education plans and statements of special educational need are good. The quality of the support for pupils with special educational needs is good, and has a positive impact on pupils' learning and attitudes to work. The learning support department works well with subject departments in developing learning materials which help pupils to improve their understanding and to organise their written work successfully. The learning support assistants also make an effective contribution towards the general well-being of their pupils through the good relationships that they have built up over time. The school's well established links with its partner institutions enable pupils with special educational needs to make a smooth transition from one phase of their school life to another. There is also an effective liaison with external agencies and specialist centres.

52. The procedures to ensure pupils' safety and welfare are very good. Child protection procedures are fully in place, following recognised Oxfordshire guidelines. The co-ordinator and heads of year are all appropriately trained. Teachers have clear guidelines. The school takes very good care with health and safety both on-site and for off-site visits. Risk assessments have been carried out in all departments and for the school site as required.

53. There are good procedures to monitor and promote attendance. The recording of attendance conforms to statutory requirements. Recently an increasing number of pupils with prior histories of poor attendance have been placed at the school. Against this background, staff work hard and successfully to maintain attendance, despite a reduced level of support from the educational social service to follow up absence and make home visits.

54. Procedures to monitor and promote good behaviour are very good. Good work and success are duly recognised and celebrated by the headteacher's commendations, house awards and full school colours. The school is currently in the process of refining the behaviour policy in consultation with pupils and parents. Teachers are nearly always consistent in class behaviour management and provide good role models.

55. Teachers are swift to resolve any cases of bullying firmly and very effectively. Pupils express confidence in the system and there is very little bullying at the school. The school's commitment to equal opportunities is effective. There is smooth social integration with the girls in the sixth form.

56. Procedures to support personal development are good because tutors and heads of year know pupils well and provide effective individual guidance. Pupils have mixed experiences of the programme of personal, health and social education, ranging from unsatisfactory to good, depending on their form group. This undermines the value of the programme. The wide range of events and visits on offer at the school and in activities week contribute very positively to personal development. Pupils at the school make good gains in confidence and in assuming responsibility.

57. The procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are satisfactory. Key Stage 2 National Curriculum test results, spelling and reading tests are used to build up a clear picture of pupils' prior attainment and to place them in groups on entering the school. Good arrangements for measuring pupils' attainment are in place in many subjects, for example mathematics, design and technology, and English. Arrangements are unsatisfactory in geography. The use of the available information within subjects, however, to monitor pupils' progress as they move through the school, is not as well developed as it should be.

58. The overall procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' progress are unsatisfactory. The use of the data collected to monitor progress, identify under-achievement and set individual targets for pupils is not yet developed well enough across the school. Information on how well pupils are doing is not shared with pupils in many subjects nor is this information shared well enough with parents in reports. The exception to this is in the sixth form where students are carefully monitored and kept informed of how they are doing. This is particularly good in the case of GNVQ courses.

59. The use of assessment information to guide curricular planning is satisfactory. The information is used well to determine the grouping of pupils and identify pupils with special educational needs. In some subjects, for example modern foreign languages and geography, the information provided is not yet used as well as it might be to plan teaching,

and in others, such as religious education, to raise standards in GCSE examinations. In art, design and technology, history, physical education and science it is used well to plan work for pupils.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

60. The school has good links with parents, which positively support learning. Nearly all parents are pleased with the quality of education and the high standard of pastoral care. Parents find the school is approachable and receptive to their views. Many parents remarked on improvements over recent years in the form of organisation, facilities, results and ethos. They felt that these had resulted in a significant improvement in pupils' motivation.

61. The school has a good partnership with parents of pupils with special educational needs. Communications between home and school are good. Parents contribute to the reviews of their children's progress. They often help their children at home in overseeing homework and with reading. Parents are pleased with the way in which their children are supported and encouraged to make a positive contribution to the life of the school.

62. Parents' views expressed in the pre-inspection questionnaire and in the meeting with the Registered Inspector were predominantly positive and raised no significant concerns. There was most disagreement concerning the information about progress and homework. The inspectors agree with parents' positive views and support their concerns about the quality of reports. The provision of homework, which some parents were concerned about, was found to be generally appropriate in quantity and relevance.

63. The quality of written information to parents is unsatisfactory. Subject reviews and tutor reviews are sent to parents between November and March. The reviews incorporate useful sections for pupils to comment on their progress and these are built upon constructively by teachers in their comments. However, the comments are mainly about pupils' attitudes. Written reports give insufficient information about pupils' attainment, or what they need to do to improve. The reports do not enable parents to assess whether their son is making enough progress or reaching his potential. In most other respects the written information sent to parents, including the prospectus, is of good quality.

64. Parental support for the school has a positive effect on pupils' learning. Parents were suitably consulted over the introduction of the home-school contract, which is working successfully. The Parents' Association gives good support to the school with fund raising, educational evenings and support for school productions and sporting events. Parents contribute generously to the covenant fund, which is used to enhance educational resources. Parents support their children's education through their high levels of attendance at the annual consultation evenings and their support for homework and school behaviour standards. 'The Saint' newsletter is sent each week. This ensures that parents are well informed about, and involved in, the life and successes of the school.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

65. The quality of leadership and management in the school is very good. The headteacher provides very strong leadership and is fully committed to raising standards in the school through a clearly defined review process linked to staff development and training. He has established a very clear direction for the work of the school and, by example and consultation, has brought together a staff that shares a common sense of purpose and good relationships. This has resulted in a shared commitment to improvement

and a very good capacity to succeed. The school's shared aims and values are central to its work, making a positive contribution to the development of good attitudes among pupils. The contributions of all members of staff, both teaching and non-teaching, are recognised and valued. Strengths and weaknesses are clearly understood because the process of self-review is well developed; the long term effects of decisions are evaluated and action is taken to secure improvement. The members of the senior management team provide the headteacher with very effective support and have a key role in monitoring standards and maintaining the very positive ethos of achievement in the school. Their individual strengths complement those of their colleagues. A particular feature is the excellent way in which the curricular and pastoral links with Didcot Girls' School are managed. These ensure the effectiveness of the joint sixth form arrangements. The success of the system is evident in the high standards achieved.

66. The overall quality of leadership at middle management level is good. It is never less than satisfactory. Most middle managers have established clear educational direction for the work of their departments and monitor standards effectively. The exceptions to this are geography and music where the process of monitoring classroom standards as a step towards securing improvement is not as well developed. Outstandingly good leadership in art is reflected in the very high standards achieved by pupils. Very good management is an important factor in rising standards in design and technology and information and communication technology. The school's aims as a special status college are supported well. Although there is some developing good practice, for example in science, assessment is not used effectively across the school to monitor standards, to set targets for improvement or to support the planning of teaching.

67. The commitment of the school to supporting pupils with special educational needs is reflected in the good management of the learning support department. The special educational needs co-ordinator provides clear educational direction, promotes high standards and ensures that daily routines run smoothly. The school meets statutory requirements in respect of pupils with special educational needs and makes effective use of available resources.

68. The governing body has a very good working knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Frequent informal contacts, together with a programme of more formal subject reviews and presentations, ensure that governors understand clearly the challenges that face the school. They play an active role in monitoring its work and in providing direction by working closely with the senior management team to identify areas for development and to set targets for improvement. The professional strengths and experience of governors contribute significantly to high quality strategic planning based on a clear long-term view.

69. Development planning is very good. Carefully identified priorities are linked to the targets associated with the school's specialist technology college status and reflect the commitment to raising standards and improving the quality of education provided. One of the most noteworthy results of this approach is the high quality of staff development. Most of the key issues from the last inspection have been dealt with effectively. Pupils are given opportunities to take initiative and responsibility; a strength of the school is the way in which boys develop as independent learners as they move through the school. Learning in information technology has been greatly extended, partly as a result of the school acquiring specialist college status. The issue relating to collective worship has been met in spirit through the thought for the day programme, although not all group tutors manage it well. There is full access to religious education. Efforts to improve talking and reading have only been partially successful and improving levels of literacy remains an issue.

70. Financial planning is very good. The school manages its enhanced budget, additional funds and grants, outstandingly well, particularly to secure improvement in premises and resources for learning and to support development priorities. Very good procedures are in place to monitor the effectiveness of spending. Strategic and contingency planning are closely related to available and projected finances and benefit from the contribution of governors' expertise to the financial management of the school.

71. Routine administration of the school's budget is very good. The school makes effective use of new technology to monitor spending against the budget and to provide accurate up-to-date information. There are well defined procedures to ensure best value purchasing. Routine administration is very efficient and ensures that the school runs smoothly.

72. The match of the number, qualifications and experience of teachers and support staff to the requirements of the curriculum is good. There are very effective procedures for the induction of staff new to the school. The school's involvement in initial teacher training benefits both parties. For example, in geography a student works productively with an experienced teacher to help design and test materials for activity-based learning which are innovative and useful for the department.

73. In the knowledge that technology college status would make heavy demands on teachers to retrain, the school applied for and gained the Investors in People award. The process ensured a complete review of all monitoring and evaluation of teaching, including performance management and the setting of targets for development. Very good staff development procedures are now in place. Training is well focused on school and individual needs to meet the requirements of the school development plan. The long-term effects of training on classroom standards are evaluated. The monitoring of classroom teaching is not yet fully in place.

74. The quality of the school's accommodation is good overall. It allows the curriculum to be taught effectively in all areas of the school. There are particularly attractive facilities for art and music, and good suites of rooms for modern foreign languages and English. Science has mainly well planned, efficient laboratories. The information and communication technology suites are good, and design and technology uses good, well-maintained workshops. There are some minor deficiencies in accommodation affecting the quality of learning. In history, a substantial amount of teaching takes place in non-specialist rooms. The GNVQ room lacks sufficient space for students to use computers easily. A laboratory used for biology is small and poorly laid out. Because of shared use, access to the adjacent leisure centre is difficult, and pupils also have a five-minute walk to playing fields for some physical education activities. The most significant deficiency remains, as at the last inspection, the temporary classrooms used mainly by the mathematics department. These are in poor repair and short of storage space. Although their condition is well disguised by staff efforts using good displays, they do not provide an environment which promotes the value of the subjects taught in them. A new classroom block is due to be erected which will replace the temporary structures by 2001. Although the site is somewhat cramped and congested around the buildings and there are few social areas, it is well maintained with due concern for health, safety and security by the site manager and a committed team of cleaning staff.

75. The overall provision of resources is good. They are used effectively to support pupils' learning in the majority of subjects. However, in geography resources are inadequate because there are insufficient textbooks and in history, modern foreign

languages and music the resources available to support teaching and learning are only just adequate. Standards in music are affected by a lack of up-to-date, suitably sized instruments; in history there are insufficient textbooks for pupils in Year 10 to be able to use them at home; in modern foreign languages there are insufficient up-to-date coursework books. Good use is made of information and communication technology throughout and there is a good supply of machines around the school and in the library. The provision for control technology is excellent and makes a significant contribution to standards in engineering and design and technology. Very good resources support teaching in physical education. The new library is a well used resource and is well stocked with appropriate texts and fiction. It is a popular place with pupils and supports the school's literacy initiative.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

76. To raise further the standards of work and the quality of education provided, the governors and senior management team should:

- (1) continue efforts to improve standards of literacy by ensuring that the whole school policy on literacy is put into practice in all areas of the curriculum;
(See paragraphs 6,7,26,79,80,122,128,131,138,139,142,184)
- (2) make more effective use of assessment data to:
 - monitor the progress of individual pupils and set targets for improvement,
 - ensure that pupils know how well they are doing,
 - improve the quality of reports to parents so that they know how well pupils are doing and what they need to do to improve;(See paragraphs 26,57,58,63,66,94,102,104,134,136,155,163,165,175)
- (3) improve the teaching of personal, social and health education by:
 - providing staff training and support,
 - monitoring the quality of delivery;(See paragraphs 28,38,56)
- (4) give further consideration to the pattern of the curriculum and the distribution of subject time, particularly at Key Stage 3.
(See paragraphs 33,37,92,165,181)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	175
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	69

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1	19	48	29	3	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7-Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	842	145
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	52	

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	37	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	150	0

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	8

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	31
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	24

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	7.4
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.7
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		1999	142	0

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	92	97	88
	Girls	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Total	92	97	88
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	65(69)	68(66)	62(57)
	National	63(65)	62(60)	55(56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	25(40)	44(38)	24(27)
	National	28(35)	38(36)	23(27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	77	102	99
	Girls	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Total	77	102	99
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	55(54)	72(70)	71(59)
	National	64(62)	64(64)	60(62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	19(32)	43(43)	49(33)
	National	31(31)	37(37)	28(31)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	158	0	158

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	75	145	149
	Girls	0	0	0
	Total	75	145	149
Percentage of pupils achieving The standard specified	School	47(45)	92(92)	94(96)
	National	46.3(43.3)	90.7(89.8)	95.7(95.2)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	39(35)
	National	37.8(36.8)

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and The percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	16 81.2
	National	n/a

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year Who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	46	0	46

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	20.4	n/a	20.4	1.3	n/a	1.3
National	17.7	18.1	17.9	2.7	2.8	2.8

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or Units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	24 75
	National	65.2

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	1
Indian	2
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	964
Any other minority ethnic group	20

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	13	2
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	60.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7– Y11

Total number of education support staff	18
Total aggregate hours worked per week	420

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73.9
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	23.7
Key Stage 4	21.1

Financial information

Financial year	1998/99
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	£
Total income	2291738
Total expenditure	2264546
Expenditure per pupil	2404
Balance brought forward from previous year	123961
Balance carried forward to next year	151153

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	987
Number of questionnaires returned	308

Percentage of responses in each category*

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	37	50	9	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	44	51	3	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	31	58	7	1	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	26	54	15	3	3
The teaching is good.	38	57	3	1	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	34	48	13	3	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	58	34	5	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	61	36	1	1	0
The school works closely with parents.	35	46	13	2	4
The school is well led and managed.	53	39	3	1	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	46	46	6	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	38	42	8	3	8

*Rounded to nearest whole number

Other issues raised by parents

Parents at the meeting had mixed views on the amount and timing of homework.

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

ENGLISH

77. Standards of attainment in English are in line with those expected nationally at both key stages and in the sixth form. Standards are as high as they should be in relation to attainment on entry or prior attainment.

78. Key Stage 3 National Curriculum test results in 1999 were in line with the national average for all pupils. Using average points scores for comparison, pupils' performance was above the average for boys nationally. The performance of boys was similar in English and science, but better in mathematics. The trend in results over the last four years broadly matches the national trend. Results in 1999 for the award of A*-C grades in GCSE English were close to the national average and above average for boys. All pupils entered for the examination achieved a grade in the range A*-G, slightly above the average performance nationally. In GCSE English literature, results from a reduced entry at grades A*-C were above the national average and significantly above the national average for boys. Again, all pupils entered for the examination achieved a grade in the range A*-G. Fifteen pupils took the Certificate of Achievement examination – ten obtained distinction and five merit. GCSE English results have been similar over the last two years. GCSE English literature results were higher in 1998 but obtained from a much reduced entry. Comparison with performance in other subjects shows that in 1999 boys performed significantly better in GCSE English and English literature than in most other subjects. In the sixth form, the small number of candidates for English literature A level makes comparisons less reliable, but results in 1999 were below average for A-B grades and above average for A-E grades. In 1998 A-B grades were about average and A-E grades above average. Overall, performance has at least matched pupils' prior attainment.

79. In work seen during the inspection, standards of attainment at ages 14, 16 and 19 match average standards nationally. At Key Stage 3 the range of attainment is as wide as might be expected from pupils whose attainment on entry is broadly average but who include a higher than average proportion of pupils with special educational needs. The emphasis given to reading and the introduction of literacy support groups enable most pupils to read, write, speak and listen with reasonable competence by the end of the key stage. Higher attainers can speak with confidence in front of their peers and articulate a well-phrased, clear opinion. They can write in a variety of styles with ease and fluency. Lower attainers are more hesitant and prone to stumble when reading aloud or speaking, but are able to write at reasonable length. Pupils with special educational needs have considerable learning difficulties and low reading and spelling standards. In any year group there can be wide variations in the standard of written work, but the most obvious persistent weakness is spelling. At Key Stage 4 most pupils can read with understanding, annotate texts appropriately and structure their written work effectively. Higher attainers can produce written work that is accurate, fluent, quite stylish and illustrated with appropriate examples. Their coursework lacks an emphasis on quality rather than length. It also needs the use of a wider range of vocabulary and better punctuation. The work of lower attainers shows understanding of texts but their standard of attainment is depressed by technical weaknesses, especially in spelling. In the sixth form, higher attaining students show a greater range and depth of analysis than lower attainers and can better express their reasons for a particular judgement. When reading aloud, higher attainers are able to convey the sense of a passage by their attention to sentence and punctuation cues. Lower attainers can be confused by unfamiliar vocabulary or, in poetry, when the sense of a sentence flows into a new verse or stanza. The written work of most students shows good

knowledge and understanding and awareness of the social and cultural background of their set texts.

80. The quality of contributions made by other subjects to standards of literacy is too variable to be regarded as satisfactory. Good speaking and listening skills are developed in physical education, particularly among GNVQ students, and there are satisfactory reading and writing standards. The science department has a clear policy on literacy: pupils learn scientific terminology, use writing frames and have to explain their views to the class. As a result, pupils listen well to others and write confidently. However, presentation of written work remains a problem at Key Stage 3. There are good reading and listening standards in history, but written work, particularly at Key Stage 3, is often limited in expression and reveals difficulties with sentence construction, use of capital letters, handwriting and spelling. Standards in the subject suffer as a result. In geography, although speaking and listening skills are secure, and very good in the sixth form, reading and, particularly, writing opportunities are few. Pupils' reading competence is insecure at Key Stage 3, and spelling generally is weak. Pupils show satisfactory writing skills in mathematics coursework, but they are not good at group discussion – many lose interest and are unable to communicate in a responsible way. Good features of mathematics teaching, however, are the displays of key vocabulary and the use of writing frames. Pupils taking Spanish are taught how to get the gist of a text by picking out key words and other clues from the context and how to write formally and informally. However, they have few opportunities for extended writing, particularly at Key Stage 3. Although listening skills are well developed, speaking skills are weak: pupils lack confidence and barely respond to questions or carry on a dialogue. A similar situation exists in French, where pupils listen well but do not express themselves with any degree of fluency, even in the sixth form. In this subject, there are few opportunities for reading or extended writing. Design and technology pupils at Key Stage 3 get some encouragement for reading, but no opportunities for extended speaking. Year 7 pupils in particular have basic weaknesses in spelling, punctuation and grammar, which affect their work. Spelling mistakes often spoil the potentially informative and helpful posters on display in computer rooms. Some notices around the school also contain misspellings. Generally, spelling is a weakness among a significant number of pupils and often apparent in their own uncorrected comments on subject reviews or reports. The school's provision for improving literacy includes the successful paired reading scheme during tutorial time, the learning support groups at Key Stage 3, and effective special needs support. A framework for department literacy policies was only published in March and its recommendations should be promoted more strongly to overcome the wide variations in key skills development.

81. Pupils' attitudes to learning are satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. A minority of Year 8 and 9 pupils are reluctant learners and their distracting behaviour creates an unsettled atmosphere. Concentration on individual work for these pupils is limited. Such behaviour also occurs among a few pupils in Year 11, but overall standards of behaviour are good. Pupils listen with interest and participate actively in group discussions. They respond particularly well when lessons present a challenge. Good examples occurred in Year 8 when deciding responsibility for the deaths of Romeo and Juliet, in Year 10 when examining how to present a film version of Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*, and in Year 12 when groups produced their own condensed version of each act of *Hamlet*. Pupils with special educational needs in small learning support groups at Key Stage 3 enjoy their work, respond well to it and are well behaved.

82. Teaching is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. In some lessons at Key Stage 3 teachers, largely due to inexperience, failed to make clear their intentions, did not insist on instructions being carried out, or made an inappropriate choice about the type or timing of an activity. However, the strengths of the teaching, which include a high level of preparation, careful choice of interesting resources, the expectation that work will be done and a good range of activities, outweigh the weaknesses and enable satisfactory learning to take place. Those strengths are apparent also at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. For example, a teacher's preparation for a GCSE revision lesson included support material laid out on desks in advance. This produced a prompt start and encouraged a working attitude from the start. Another teacher had prepared material appropriately matched to the needs of a lower attaining GCSE group studying a poem by Simon Armitage. As a result pupils were able to tackle the poem with confidence, annotate it and begin to write their report. An experienced teacher of pupils with special educational needs in Year 8 varied tasks effectively so that they were able to sustain their efforts throughout a double period. In a Year 13 class the teacher's choice of interesting passages by Dickens and Golding, followed by the challenge of a difficult poem by Norman MacCaig, kept interest high and helped students appreciate the different qualities of the writing. Teachers are good at handling the classes approaching GCSE and A level examinations. They have high expectations and provide materials which enable pupils of all abilities and needs to focus on key features. Teachers have good relationships with their pupils, which contribute substantially to pupils' positive attitudes to learning.

83. The quality of learning is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Learning is affected in some lessons at Key Stage 3 by distracting behaviour or the mistakes of inexperience. In one very good Year 8 lesson on *Romeo and Juliet*, pupils were rapidly acquiring and developing skills in text analysis, use of evidence and working together on presentations as a result of the teacher's use of interesting materials and her own enthusiasm, which she communicated to the pupils. At Key Stage 4 pupils develop their knowledge, understanding and skills and make good progress in note taking, annotating text, structuring written work and learning how to identify key features of text. In the sixth form, students show good advances in knowledge and understanding of set texts and in how to tackle demanding critical appreciation work. Older pupils and students are often helped to think about what they have said or written by their teachers' probing and evaluative questions.

84. Standards of attainment and progress reported at the last inspection appear to be higher than they are now. Nevertheless, the department has managed to achieve good results for its pupils given their prior attainment and the fact that more than half of its teachers are new to the school, or newly qualified. The head of department provides intelligent and supportive leadership. He has already created a common purpose, approach and commitment among his substantially new team. There are coherent plans for future developments and the capacity for further improvement is good.

MATHEMATICS

85. In the 1999 National Curriculum tests, the proportions of pupils at the age of 14 achieving the nationally expected levels 5 and 6 were above the national average. The average points score achieved was above the national average when compared with all schools. Results in mathematics in 1999 were better than those in both English and science. Over the three years 1997 to 1999 test results have fluctuated but have remained above national averages. The 1999 results improved at a similar rate to national averages

86. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A* to C

was above the national average. These results represent a significant improvement on 1997 and 1998 results. The proportion gaining A*-G matched the national average. Overall, pupils achieved well, given their levels of prior attainment. Pupils achieved well in mathematics when compared to their performance in other subjects.

87. In the 1999 GCE A level examinations results matched the national average, as they have done for the last three years. Students regularly achieve a high proportion of A grades.

88. In the work seen during the inspection, pupils' standards of attainment match those expected at the age of 14. Number skills are generally satisfactory with many pupils able to handle fractions and percentages confidently. Of all the skills developed, algebra is weakest. Measuring skills are satisfactory; in design and technology pupils measure with appropriate accuracy and in science use units confidently. Pupils show a satisfactory understanding of shape and space; angles are used well in three-dimensional drawing in design and technology. Data handling is satisfactory; Year 8 pupils are able to find different measures of averages although some lower attaining pupils have difficulty with the concepts of probability. Problem solving skills are developed well and by the end of Year 9 pupils are able to identify patterns and establish rules.

89. From work seen during the inspection, pupils' standards of attainment match those expected at the age of 16. Number skills are satisfactory with pupils in design and technology able to calculate accurately in electronics. Most pupils use calculators confidently and accurately although some pupils still have difficulty in using percentages. Algebraic skills are satisfactory; higher attaining pupils in Year 11 can handle equations and inequalities confidently. Data handling skills are good; Year 11 pupils can recall a wide range of techniques for handling information. In geography and science pupils can use statistics confidently and draw graphs well. Spatial skills are satisfactory. Problem solving skills are good with most pupils able to identify patterns and rules, use formulae, predict and test results.

90. Standards in the sixth form are higher than those expected nationally for students following A level courses. For example, Year 13 students show a good understanding of a range of topics including the use of calculus, iterations and logarithms whilst Year 12 students have developed a good understanding of the use of forces in mechanics.

91. The quality of teaching is good. Teaching in the sixth form is very good. As a result, pupils are achieving above average performance in Key Stage 3 tests, GCSE results are improving and good standards are produced at A level. All teachers have a good knowledge of their subject and are able to explain skills and concepts clearly, which gives pupils confidence. Teachers in the sixth form have a very good knowledge of the subject. Teachers plan lessons carefully and make good use of a variety of tasks and resources to develop pupils' skills, knowledge, and understanding. Where learning support assistants are present in lessons they are used well by teachers and give good help to pupils with special educational needs. Teachers usually manage pupils well and maintain a good pace in lessons. Where teaching is weakest, the management and control of pupils are not as good as they should be and time is not used well enough to maintain the interest of the pupils. Teachers question pupils well in lessons, helping them to increase their understanding of the skills and concepts covered. Good use is made of computers and graphical calculators to help with pupils' learning. Homework is used regularly to consolidate and extend learning. Good feedback is often given to pupils during lessons about their progress with tasks. Marking of pupils' work is generally satisfactory.

92. The quality of learning is good. Good progress is being made at Key Stage 3 with all attainment targets. However, the low time allocation in Years 7 and 8 means that not enough time is available for pupils to suitably consolidate their learning before moving on to other topics. There is no difference in the progress being made by different groups of pupils; higher, average and lower attaining pupils all make satisfactory progress. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress because tasks are matched to their needs. The small group of pupils withdrawn in Year 7 is making good progress. Progress at Key Stage 4 is satisfactory; pupils are achieving standards that match their prior attainment. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. This is reflected in the 1999 GCSE results where few pupils did not achieve at least grade G. At both key stages pupils are acquiring skills, knowledge and understanding well. Most work productively during lessons and usually show interest in what they are doing. A good impact is being made with improving literacy skills by displays of the subject's keywords in classrooms. Progress is very good in the sixth form.

93. Attitudes to learning are generally good. Most pupils concentrate on their tasks but the concentration of some lower attaining pupils is not maintained near the end of the long double lessons. Pupils usually listen attentively when teachers are talking although often teachers have to remind pupils continually to pay attention during discussion sessions. Many pupils show interest in what they are doing and appear suitably motivated by teachers. Pupils generally behave well in class. The presentation of work in most pupils' books is satisfactory. Relationships between teachers and pupils are generally good. Pupils generally respond well to teachers' questioning but when pupils do not react as they should, teachers do not manage the pupils well enough. When asked to work in groups, pupils usually co-operate well but some lack adequate skills to be able to discuss ideas sensibly.

94. The department is well led and managed. The head of department is providing a clear direction with an emphasis on raising standards. Teachers work well together as a team and there is a clear aim to raise pupils' attainment. Appropriate priorities and targets for the subject are identified through a good development plan. The department's budget is well managed to provide good supplies of textbooks, materials and equipment. Good procedures are in place to support and monitor teaching. Accommodation is of poor quality. However, it is well maintained and enhanced by good displays of information and pupils' work. The arrangements for assessing pupils' attainment are good. The use of the available information, however, to monitor the progress of pupils as they move through the school, is not yet developed well enough. Reports to parents are unsatisfactory. They do not provide adequate information about what pupils can and cannot do in different aspects of the subject.

95. There has been good progress since the last inspection. Most of the weaknesses identified in the previous report have been tackled successfully. The quality of teaching has improved; most lessons are now suitably structured with teachers questioning pupils better. The standard of presentation of work by pupils is now generally satisfactory. Assessment arrangements have improved.

SCIENCE

96. Standards of attainment in science are close to or above national averages at both key stages and in the sixth form. Pupils make considerable improvement during Key Stage 3, given their attainment on entry.

97. In 1999 Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests, the proportion of pupils reaching level 5 or above was above the national average and the proportion gaining level 6 or above was close to the national average. There was a difference between the test results and the teacher assessments because these were based on the Spotlight Science tests, on which pupils achieved higher scores. The trend of improvement over the last four years has been broadly in line with the trend nationally. Science results are similar to those in English but not as good as in mathematics.

98. In 1999, GCSE results were significantly above the national average for the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C and above average for grades A*-G. The results for A*-C grades were better than in English and mathematics and significantly better than boys' results nationally. The achievement of 61 per cent A*-C grades at GCSE from a cohort which had 32 per cent of pupils at level 6 at the end of Key Stage 3 represents good value added. Over the last three years, GCSE results have improved at a faster rate than nationally.

99. In 1999 at A level, the physics and chemistry results, with 100 per cent A-E grades, were better than those in biology. The average points score for candidates entered for two or more GCE A levels was well above the national average. The trend of improvement over the last three years has been well above that found nationally.

100. In work seen during the inspection, pupils' attainment is broadly in line with expected standards at the end of Key Stage 3. At the end of Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, standards of attainment are above average. Pupils can describe what they are doing competently and confidently using appropriate terminology. For example, in a Year 8 lesson pupils explained the concept of an unhealthy diet as one that contained an imbalance of nutrients. Year 10 pupils are able to talk about predictions they are making and theories they are formulating about factors that affect ozone concentrations at ground level. In Year 12, students are developing a good range of study skills and can organise their own work, although some of them still need advice and support on organising their notes. Pupils come to lessons well prepared, with appropriate equipment and books, so that lessons start promptly. Pupils draw graphs, which are properly labelled with correct units, tabulate results from experiments and take measurements accurately. There is a strong emphasis on correct terminology and frequent spelling tests are given to ensure that pupils are learning key words. They are encouraged to use a variety of recording styles and good use is made of information and communication technology throughout the curriculum. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in science.

101. With the exception of a very small number of lessons at Key Stage 3, pupils' attitudes are good or very good in all lessons. They arrive at lessons on time and their behaviour and motivation are good. Pupils enjoy science and relationships between pupils and with teachers are good. They are polite and express themselves confidently with adults and with each other. Pupils participate in a variety of activities and projects including an ecology club and a Year 7 "Earth and beyond" club. Twenty pupils took part in the Comenius Project last year and more have joined this year as the project has expanded to include a school in Athens. Year 12 physics students have undertaken an engineering project with a local research laboratory and are entering for a national competition. There are a small number of pupils in Years 7 and 8 who disrupt some lessons and waste time. Most of them are middle attaining pupils who are not sufficiently challenged by the pace and level of work.

102. The overall quality of teaching is good. Teaching is at least satisfactory in all lessons. It is always good or very good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Teaching across the department is very good in about 25 per cent of lessons. Teachers have consistently high expectations of behaviour. They have very good subject knowledge and find interesting ways to explain concepts such as circuit diagrams and chemical reactions. They make good use of resources, including ICT, to support learning. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives that are shared with the pupils. The pace of lessons is good and teachers encourage pupils with praise when they are successful. Behaviour management at Key Stage 3 is not always consistent and some pupils waste time whilst others are finishing tasks; they do not have the self-discipline to look over their work and check it. Consequently the quality and quantity of written work in these classes are more variable. Teachers keep excellent records of pupils' progress but day to day marking of work is very variable and pupils are not clear themselves about how they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Where work is marked pupils are not clear what the grades really mean.

103. Learning is good in the majority of lessons. Pupils with special educational needs at Key Stage 3 make good progress in comparison to their peers in some lessons, particularly when the activity allows them to work in pairs or teams, such as designing and making a bridge to a specification using only drinking straws and paper. Support is used well, where it is available. Learning support assistants are well briefed, so that they are able to explain ideas and concepts to the pupils whom they are supporting. At Key Stage 4, pupils make good progress in all four aspects of the science attainment targets. They are particularly competent at investigations and can plan, hypothesise and design experiments. They are confident at using data and can apply their knowledge to new situations. In the sixth form students learn good study skills and are able to work independently. They complete homework and arrive at lessons well prepared.

104. The department is well managed and there is a very good departmental development plan to which the teachers are committed. The handbook is very clear, comprehensive and practical and there are good schemes of work with imaginative resource materials. Technical support is very good and equipment is well maintained in good working order so that pupils are able to get reliable results. There is sufficient equipment for pupils to share at Key Stage 3 and to work independently at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Teaching is monitored and there is very good support for the newly qualified teachers. Monitoring of pupils' performance has improved and there are excellent records at all key stages based on pupils' performance in modular and end of topic tests. However, at Key Stage 3 this information is not given to pupils so they do not know how they are progressing. Pupils at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form are better informed about their progress.

105. The department has made good progress since the last inspection. There is a new scheme of work at Key Stage 3 and pupils' progress is being monitored. The pace of lessons is consistently good and there are opportunities for independent learning at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Literacy is improving because teachers expect proper use of language and pupils' knowledge of scientific terminology is checked. Numeracy across all stages is good and pupils are confident with graphs, data handling and measurement. Good use is made of ICT. Homework is regularly set and marked and the attainment of pupils with special educational needs at Key Stage 3 is good in relation to their targets. The quality of day-to-day marking is inconsistent across the department. The grading system is not well enough explained to pupils so that they can be clear about their progress, particularly at Key Stage 3. Behaviour management at Key Stage 3, particularly in Year 7 and in some groups in Year 8, is not as secure as it should be.

ART

106. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above average. At the end of Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form attainment is well above average.

107. Teacher assessments in 1999 at the end of Key Stage 3 show pupils' attainment to be well above national standards with a significant number achieving exceptional performance. In 1999 GCSE examinations, all candidates obtained grades A*-C, a very high standard and well above national averages. Boys performed significantly better in art than in any other subject. At A level in 1999, in three-dimensional studies all six candidates obtained grade A, in graphics four out of seven candidates obtained grades A-B and in fine art four out of six candidates obtained grades A-B. These excellent results at A level are well above national averages and follow a consistently high succession of results at GCSE and A level over a number of years.

108. In work seen during the inspection, attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above average. Pupils' drawing, painting and modelling skills are of a good standard and they have a good knowledge of a wide range of techniques, artists, styles and art vocabulary. Pupils experience the use of computers in art and are able to use them to enhance and modify images made with the aid of a digital camera. Work in sketchbooks is impressive, not only for its evident quality but also for its quantity. Pupils are able to realise their intentions effectively over a wide range of imaginative subjects because basic art skills are so well developed.

109. In work seen during the inspection attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is well above average. Indeed some of the work is beyond the standard described by a grade such as A*. A good example of this is the animation 'La Danse et la Musique', a superb sequence of moving images based on Matisse pictures to music by Karl Jenkins, by a Year 11 pupil. The figures dance in the most expressive and delightful way, creating some moments of real magic. At all stages, work in three dimensions is particularly strong, for example in the excellent Mirot's hat by another Year 11 pupil.

110. In work seen during the inspection attainment in the sixth form is well above average. The quality and quantity of critical studies and work in sketchbooks are exceptional. One entitled 'Music and Art in harmony?' explores the relationships between the visual arts and music. Visually delightful, it virtually covers the history of art to the present day and there are some excellent details, like Fra Angelico's angel band. In sculpture, work on a really big scale is encouraged and one of the studios with very high ceilings is ideal for this. A number of large artefacts have been created by A level students such as the 'hole in the web' and the 'ram's horn' both excellent pieces by talented students. Other pieces of exhibition quality and standard include a fine 'embracing figures' and a moving and lively 'mother and child' arm in arm. These are only some of a rich and diverse collection of work by this gifted sixth form, all of whom are on course to obtain A grades this year.

111. Students' work from this exceptional department has recently been exhibited at the Tate in St Ives and some of the pieces described above will be in a major exhibition at Blenheim Palace later this year.

112. At all stages pupils' attitudes to art and behaviour in lessons are very good. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, students have very good study habits, often work on their own, and discuss and describe their work in a very mature way. Art is a popular choice for GCSE and for A level.

113. The quality of teaching is very good. All members of staff are talented artists themselves, with the gift of imparting their love and enthusiasm for the subject to their pupils. The head of department provides inspirational leadership and is adept at finding exciting projects in which everybody can get involved such as 'Portrait 2000', the Oxfordshire Art and Design show to be held in Blenheim Palace in July. There have been visits to Paris, Venice and a workshop at St Ives. Each year the school takes the Royal Academy Outreach programme. The head of department has launched an art website for the county. With such stimulating leadership it is hardly surprising that art in the school has a high profile and a distinguished record of achievement. All aspects of lessons are very good and provide an excellent example of the creative application of the National Curriculum in art.

114. The quality of learning by high, average and low attaining pupils is very good. Pupils' acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding, and their intellectual and creative effort, are of a high order. Pupils with special educational needs do exceptionally well. One such group, of whose work the teacher was particularly proud, had made some very good ceramic boxes with reptile motifs on the lids, and all had made lids which fitted. High quality teaching, which stimulates very good learning, together with very good behaviour and overall management are clearly fundamental to the very high standards of attainment and are a great credit to all concerned.

115. Since the last inspection very high standards have been maintained. The needs to develop pupils' oral response to works of art, to include study of works of art from a wider range of cultures and to display high quality pupils' work outside the studios to make a greater impact on the whole school environment have been dealt with effectively.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

116. Standards of achievement are above average at both key stages and in the sixth form. Boys enter the school with average or below average attainment, having had a variety of experiences in primary education. They make rapid progress in their acquisition of skills and knowledge at Key Stage 3, and build on this to achieve good examination results at Key Stage 4. An increasing number take the subject to advanced level qualification, with good results.

117. In 1999, teacher assessments at Key Stage 3 showed above average attainment; 72 per cent of boys achieved level 5 or better, and 42 per cent level 6 or above, which is above the national average for all pupils and well above that for boys. Results have risen steadily from 1996, particularly at level 6 or above, a standard achieved by only 14 per cent in 1996. This improvement is outstanding. Boys with special educational needs generally achieve standards commensurate with their ability.

118. GCSE results in 1999 were above average for grades A*-C and also for A*-G. All boys took at least one GCSE; some took two or the equivalent general national vocational qualification. Over the past four years, results have risen steadily. The GNVQ examination group for engineering, in its first year, achieved an 86 per cent pass rate with one distinction and five merits, which is above average.

119. A level results have had a 100 per cent pass rate in three of the past four years.

120. Standards seen during the inspection at Key Stage 3 were similar to those shown by assessments in 1999. No Year 9 classes were observed, but their previous work was inspected. Some particularly good design work was seen in a project to produce packaging for soft drinks, and pupils successfully combined their electronics, graphics and plastics work in making moisture testers for monitoring house plants. They showed good knowledge of circuit work and electronic components, as well as neat graphics. Year 7 boys start off their work in the Scan-TEK room by undertaking an effective training module, learning how to use the computerised system. They show good research skills for their age in their reports on space technology. In lessons, Year 8 boys are competent in the use of their drawing boards and set squares for oblique drawings, and many enhance their lettering by attractive shading and rendering. Boys of above average attainment working on their clock project competently complete their own step-by-step plans for making their clock, and devise their own effective material and quantities lists.

121. Standards at Key Stage 4 are above average. The Year 11 projects show a range of ability with a large number likely to achieve higher GCSE grades, though slightly fewer than last year because of the disruption caused by teachers being absent and leaving. Some excellent work was seen: one graphics project on Star Wars achieved 100 per cent, before moderation, the work not selected for the project from the design portfolio being of equal or even better quality. Most of the other design and realisation projects produced are of high quality and show some creative design, but the finish on some wooden toys is not so good because of insufficient attention to sanding and final painting. The GNVQ course is particularly effective. The school is a 'centre of excellence' for this and the boys are chosen for their motivation as well as ability.

122. The quality of teaching is good at both key stages, and is very good in the sixth form; teaching in the GNVQ engineering course at Key Stage 4 is consistently very good. Teachers' knowledge within their specialisms is very good, and they show very good expertise in these areas. The teaching of basic skills of design and technology is very good throughout, but less attention is paid to faulty English grammar, which mars display work. At Key Stage 3, where teachers take their own subject, the quality of teaching is remarkably expert. In a Year 8 graphics lessons, for example, a below average group produced some good oblique drawings, when practising lettering in their T-shirt project, as a result of the teacher's very careful skill in demonstration and patience. Boys respond most positively in these lessons and feel confident and comfortable, learning well. Attention was rapt when the teacher demonstrated the best technique, also advising them not to rely on the computer wholly. His high expectation led certain boys to begin their work again to produce a better version. A motto, prominently displayed, gives words of encouragement: 'nothing but the best will do'. All teachers have high expectations, particularly in their own area of expertise, yet some projects are spoilt by the less than perfect attention to finishing. The relatively large class sizes, apparent in all years, make this more difficult for the teacher to correct.

123. Teachers' planning is good throughout; boys know exactly what they have to do, particularly at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Schemes of work are good working documents and can be modified easily after discussion at department meetings. Teachers use a wide range of teaching methods and make sure the boys know what they have to do during each term; this motivates the higher attainers in particular and gives them responsibility which they assume sensibly. Practical lessons are well organised. At Key Stage 4, boys work at their own pace, teachers keeping ahead by demonstrating techniques which some pupils are likely to move on to, for example how to fit hinges to

boxes. Boys taking two subjects are given a very purposeful learning environment, and are encouraged in their personal study skills, deferring to teachers' and technicians' expertise. For example, they make good progress when making their variety of storage boxes. Teaching by tutorial in the sixth form works very well. There is a hard-working atmosphere in all lessons as pupils work at their own pace, using the teacher as one of the many available resources. Workshop discipline is extremely good. Technicians and teachers ensure that boys are well organised and use time efficiently. Most boys - particularly those of higher ability - are good independent learners; this is an improvement since the last inspection. Technicians give good support to teachers and boys alike. For example, they prepare materials and take groups of boys for instruction in the use of lathes. They attend well to health and safety matters.

124. Resources are very good and used efficiently; practical work takes place in workshops whilst theory is learned in classrooms. No time is wasted during lessons. Resources for control technology in the Scan-TEK room are good and used effectively by teachers for all years, and especially for the GNVQ course.

125. Marking and assessment are thorough and good throughout the department. Most pupils have a clear idea of where they are and what they are to do next. A particular strength is the use of a pupil record card with National Curriculum levels of attainment through Key Stages 3 and 4. Continuous assessment is made by computer in the Scan-TEK room; boys always know how well they are progressing. Homework is used well to finish work and for research; the workshops are always available after school for boys to come to do more work.

126. The department is very well led. The head of department has successfully built a good team of teachers, technicians and a learning support assistant, who has worked hard to learn about the subject and has been a great help for boys with special educational needs, many of whom succeed well in this subject. The curriculum is wide, and teachers make good efforts to teach outside their specialisms by discussion and learning from each other. However, food technology is not included and this is something the head of department is aware of and working towards providing.

127. Extra-curricular provision is very good; the workshops are open daily at lunchtime and after school for project work. Pupils often enter competitions, for example to design a cover for spaghetti cans, and there are thriving go-kart and radio-controlled car clubs which are popular with boys.

GEOGRAPHY

128. Standards at the end of the sixth form are good, but standards at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 are not as high as they should be because some boys under-attain at both key stages and teachers do not expect enough of their pupils. Difficulties with literacy depress standards at both key stages and spelling is insecure even in sixth form.

129. In 1999, teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 show that pupils' attainment is well above the standard expected nationally. However, in work seen during the inspection standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are broadly in line with national standards. This indicates that teachers tend to overestimate pupils' attainment. The department does not build as well as it should on pupils' attainment on entry to the school. In 1999 GCSE examinations, results were well below average. This has been the case for the last three years. Pupils perform less well in geography than they do in most of their other subjects. There is clear evidence that, although about two-thirds of boys make

satisfactory or better progress, one-third underachieve. Many of those who underachieve are boys whose prior attainment is above average. GCE A level results are consistently just above the national average in the award of both A-B grades and grades A-E.

130. In work seen during the inspection, standards at the end of Key Stage 3 match the level expected of pupils of the same age nationally. By the age of 14, pupils are able to identify geographic features from visual evidence. For example, a Year 8 class showed knowledge and understanding when they were able to pick out earthworks, from a video about the River Severn, and explain that they were meant to contain flooding. Year 9 pupils produce some good research work on the developed and developing world. Pupils understand how environmental factors affect agriculture. In a challenging Year 9 lesson, pupils acting in a role play as soil conservation officers produced advice for subsistence farmers in Kenya on methods to counteract soil erosion. However, there is insufficient investigation, practical geography and fieldwork to enable pupils to develop the skills required to reach the higher National Curriculum levels of attainment. Some of the work is too easy. Tasks such as colouring, or drawing easy bar graphs, do not provide an adequate level of challenge.

131. At the end of Key Stage 4, standards are below expected levels. Although two-thirds of boys choose to study geography, they say that they find the subject easy. Pupils have good knowledge of earthquake processes and understand their effects. For example, they understand that earthquakes can cause more devastation in less economically developed countries. They are able to use Ordnance Survey maps to identify features in settlements. A Year 11 class showed secure knowledge of traffic studies in using maps to plan cycle routes in Didcot. When they use information and communication technology for investigation and word processing, pupils show good levels of skill, for example in work on developed and developing countries. Standards are not as good as they should be because pupils do not acquire good enquiry skills during the key stage, they are not challenged to work at a high enough level and written work is not well developed, partly because of difficulties with literacy.

132. Standards in the sixth form are just above average. Students are able to use statistical methods and fieldwork experience effectively to produce good coursework. They show well developed enquiry skills and understanding of statistical method. They are able to form a hypothesis from reading, test it through research, analyse results and come to appropriate conclusions. Their subject knowledge is good and expressed well using correct vocabulary. For example, a Year 12 group showed above average understanding of migration within Europe in a task to prepare a television report on Turkish guest workers in Germany.

133. The attitudes and behaviour of boys in lessons are usually very good, only deteriorating when they are bored by the tasks set. Attitudes are best in the sixth form where students adopt a mature approach to their work.

134. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory. It is good in the sixth form. Teachers plan their lessons well. Pupils are always engaged at the beginning of lessons in a task which focuses their attention. Resources are well prepared and clear instructions ensure that pupils know what they are to do and why. For example, the use of an overhead projector in a Year 7 lesson, to show the same map on the screen as the one that pupils had before them, promoted effective learning by helping pupils to understand the teacher's instructions and to use statistics more easily. Most lessons are reviewed towards the end to consolidate learning. Although no unsatisfactory teaching was seen during the inspection, there are weaknesses which have a cumulative impact on pupils' attainment,

evident in results at the end of Key Stage 4. Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of their subject, shown in good fieldwork planning which contributes to the high levels of subject knowledge shown particularly by students at the end of the sixth form. Some lessons are challenging and tasks set demand thought from pupils, but there are not enough of them. Teachers' expectations of pupils are too low overall at Key Stages 3 and 4. At both key stages, pupils are too often asked simply to describe and explain what they have learnt. This results in pupils losing interest and, on occasion, misbehaving with a consequent effect on learning. This contrasts with an approach in the sixth form that is often rigorous and demanding. The subject lends itself naturally to the teaching of numeracy skills but the use of number is unplanned at Key Stage 3 and some of the booklets that contain potentially good use of number are too easy. The department has a good literacy policy that is not yet fully implemented. The positive effect on learning of giving attention to literacy was demonstrated in a Year 10 class when the teacher made skilful use of a variety of techniques to teach technical vocabulary and to improve the quality of writing about rain forests. Teachers are able to make good use of information and communication technology to support learning and to develop pupils' skills, as is evident in the work done in Year 9 on developing countries. However, the use of information and communication technology is not written into Key Stage 3 schemes of work to ensure that all pupils benefit. Teachers manage well the use of classroom support for pupils with special educational needs and this has a positive impact on their learning. Although verbal feedback to pupils in lessons is usually positive and supportive, written comments in books do not tell pupils how to improve their work or set them targets that they understand.

135. There are not enough basic textbooks to support learning in Years 8, 9, 10 or 11 when more than one class is being taught at the same time. The need to share resources slows progress. The three classrooms are en-suite but it is impossible to enter the middle room without disturbing a class in one of the two outer rooms. Storage space is limited and the head of department has no base from which to work

136. Although management is satisfactory overall, there are matters that require prompt attention. Schemes of work do not provide clear enough guidance on teaching and learning styles for the work of the department, particularly in the development of enquiry skills, providing appropriate levels of challenge matched to the needs of pupils and the planned use of information and communication technology. The use of longer term assessment is unsatisfactory because it does not clearly identify objectives and support them. Information is not used effectively to inform the planning of teaching or to set targets for performance. Assessment across Key Stage 3 is too infrequent and the measurement of National Curriculum levels is inaccurate. The department has no information about all pupils at the beginning of a key stage against which to measure progress, nor does it have the techniques to do so. Reports to parents lack advice to support improvement in precise language. Analysis of examination results is not yet used well enough to improve performance. The issues of assessment and of teaching and learning styles were raised at the last inspection and there has been insufficient improvement.

HISTORY

137. In 1999, teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 show that pupils' attainment matches the standard expected for boys nationally. This was confirmed by work seen during the inspection. In GCSE examinations in 1999, the proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades was below the national average for boys. However, the proportion gaining A*-G grades was above the average for all pupils. In the past three years there have been large fluctuations in the number of candidates for GCSE because of changes in the option scheme. A*-C results have been both well above and well below the national

average for boys. A level results have been good for the past three years with the large majority of entrants passing. Of the 22 students who passed in the last three years, eight achieved A-B grades.

138. From work seen during the inspection, attainment at Key Stage 3 matches expected standards. Some pupils achieve high, and a few very high, standards. Pupils show an ability to acquire and consolidate historical information through research. They can express their knowledge through many kinds of diagrams and increasingly extended writing through the key stage. For example, a Year 8 class clearly understood the difference between definite evidence and inference from sources in work on the American Indians. Many pupils have weak literacy skills when they enter the school and difficulties with literacy, particularly spelling, continue to affect their attainment throughout the key stage.

139. At Key Stage 4, many pupils reach satisfactory standards. Causes and consequences of events are well worked out. Good use is made of bullet points. The Unit Award classes make good progress because of straightforward explanations and effective diagrams. Throughout the key stage, spelling is a weakness; poor sentence construction leads to written work that does not show the full extent of pupils' historical knowledge and understanding. At both key stages the oral recall of previous work is often good at all attainment levels. Pupils with special educational needs are helped well by teachers, especially during individual and paired work. Their progress is satisfactory and sometimes good.

140. Standards in the sixth form are above average. Students are able to make effective use of opportunities for paired research and discussion. They are good at organising and analysing large quantities of information to use in a selective way to present arguments. They show their understanding and their willingness to consider new points of view. Some of the work shows high standards of presentation and competent use of information and communication technology, for example, work by Year 12 students using the Internet in their study of Peel.

141. Pupils respond well to interesting work, to orderly classrooms and to firm discipline that is also pleasant. At Key Stage 3, most pupils have positive attitudes. They come to lessons expecting and prepared to work hard. They are generally quick to tackle the different tasks set and many are engaged by the topics studied. There are healthy signs of enquiry by individuals. Teachers have time to listen to questions and comments. At Key Stage 4, pupils are serious and hard working. Some coursework provides evidence of sustained effort. Sixth form students are mature in their approach. Some are academically ambitious.

142. The four main teachers of history are competent historians and good communicators. They believe in the value of their subject and their enthusiasm is infectious. All lessons observed were at least satisfactory. Most were good and more than a quarter very good. At all key stages, good attention is given to historical and general vocabulary. Good opportunities for empathy are provided, such as in a Year 9 class through sensitive study of World War I poetry. In Year 11, during final lessons before examinations, pupils' confidence was raised through positive feedback. Some links are made to present day national and international events. Cross-curricular work, especially with literature, geography and economics, contributes to the quality of learning by encouraging pupils' wider interest. Teachers are beginning to make good use of assessment to raise attainment by giving pupils a clear idea of how well they are doing. Teachers' expectations of pupils' English are too low. Direct attention to accuracy of writing needs to be given in class to raise attainment. Teachers make appropriate, rigorous

demands on sixth formers, expecting and achieving high levels of concentration and personal involvement in the work. Emphasis is well made of the necessity to think and work at speed.

143. Effective teaching leads to good learning at all key stages. For example, a Year 7 class, researching about a feudal village for role play, was given good opportunity to talk which reinforced their learning. At Key Stages 3 and 4, pupils learn well how to tease out information from evidence and to decide on its usefulness and reliability. The cult of Stalin and his rewriting of history fascinate Year 10 classes. Their understanding of the differences in propaganda in totalitarian regimes and democratic states is consequently very good. Students in the sixth form respond positively to opportunities for research through discussion and using information technology.

144. At all stages there is a good balance between the teaching of hard historical facts and causes, results and interpretation. Displays of pupils' work are prolific, colourful and attractive in the specialist rooms; the historical ambience adds to pupils' enthusiasm. Further work and more resources are needed in the development of information technology to take full advantage of the opportunities it offers to enhance learning at Key Stages 3 and 4. Consideration of right and wrong in human actions is frequent, such as in studies of the slave trade triangle and of ideologies of the twentieth century and their effects. The recently appointed head of department is efficient. He is aware of the strengths and of the areas needing development to make a more cohesive department, particularly the monitoring and evaluation of classroom standards. The annual history expedition in activities week, to the battlefields of World War I or to Berlin, is highly successful. Local expeditions had lapsed but are starting again next term when Year 7 visit Oxford. A Year 9 competition, supported by the British Legion, resulted in exhibits at Didcot Library.

145. Since the last inspection, the pace of lessons has increased and is usually brisk. The profile of the department is being raised and there are many areas of improvement. A greater variety of activities is provided. There are now good opportunities for pupils at Key Stage 3 to work on their own and to use their initiative. Studies on the role of women have been developed.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

146. Standards of achievement in information and communication technology are above average at both key stages and in the sixth form. Boys enter the school with average to below average skills, depending on their primary school experiences, and make rapid progress in Years 7 and 8 in learning basic skills which they consolidate and extend in work done in all areas of the curriculum.

147. In 1999, teacher assessments at Key Stage 3 showed above average attainment. Standards have generally risen since the time of the last inspection, when they were judged to be average. This is mainly due to the acquisition of modern equipment, and teachers' increasing confidence in using it through the co-ordinator's efforts in leading departments in teaching and assessing ICT skills through their own work schemes.

148. GCSE information and communication technology is taught to a few pupils who choose to follow the course at Key Stage 4 after school, and results have generally been well above average. Of the 17 boys who took the examination last year, 14 gained A*-C grades, which is well above average. In the sixth form, the department is responsible for teaching key ICT skills in the GNVQ leisure and tourism course, as well as running intermediate GNVQ courses in information and communication technology. Results of the

continuous assessment show that pupils are on line for at least pass grades in the latter - a considerable achievement for most since they have few GCSE passes from Key Stage 4.

149. In work seen during the inspection, standards are above average in the Key Stage 3 skills course. Average attaining pupils in Year 7 devise simple programs to control the flashing light in a simulation of a lighthouse; above average pupils extend this to the sounding of a foghorn, and then consider a car park simulation, devising more complex programs to open and close barriers under specified conditions. Older pupils in Year 8 design their own simple web pages and link them, showing a clear sense of audience in this. They use good research skills in finding suitable images from the Internet, organising and refining images and modifying text and graphics with the use of different styles for different audiences on a 'disco' theme. Keyboard skills, however, were lagging behind in a mathematics class with a large number of special needs pupils. These boys are greatly helped by intensive short courses on 'Successmaker' software, tackling basic literacy and numeracy. Year 9 pupils in an art class were competent in modifying images produced from a digital camera to produce individual artwork.

150. At Key Stage 4, work of a very high standard was seen in science. Boys investigating the Earth's ozone levels were able to search for information on the Internet, download relevant data and load it into a spreadsheet for analysis. In an art lesson one boy produced a stunning animated display when investigating the work of famous artists.

151. In the sixth form, GNVQ students use sophisticated software competently to produce their own presentation work in their advanced leisure and tourism lessons, despite not having the advantage of the IT skills course when they were in the lower school. Others doing intermediate GNVQ show high-level research skills when working on their project on computer control in everyday situations. Their basic literacy skills, however, are weak, and this mars some of their work.

152. All teaching in the ICT skills course is at least satisfactory and three out of four lessons are good. Most teaching of the application of ICT skills across the curriculum in science, mathematics, art and design and technology in particular is good or very good. However, there is little use of ICT skills in geography and humanities: bookings for the computer rooms are considerably fewer than those for other subjects. The very good facilities for ICT have only been in place for two years, and although the co-ordinator has made very good efforts to train all staff to teach ICT in their subjects, it is only just beginning to bear fruit. There is now an ICT specialist in every department who is responsible for co-ordinating the teaching of the ICT component in their subject. A good scheme of assessment of basic skills for each boy within the subject has been drawn up by the ICT co-ordinator. This, when fully operational, will ensure that progress in the acquisition of subject-specific skills is fully met in all departments. At present, most have made some returns on their assessment sheets for this year so that the co-ordinator can see what still has to be covered.

153. The statutory assessment of skills in Year 9 is currently met by combining the results of assessment in the Year 7 and 8 skills course with evidence from the cross-curricular components such as the control technology module in design and technology and desktop publishing in English. This is reported fully to parents at the end of the key stage.

154. Boys respond well to ICT on the whole; they particularly like the self-assessment component of the design and technology Scan-TEK™ programme. Some of the younger ones do not always listen with close attention when being instructed in the lesson activities, however, preferring to play with the mouse and to load pictures surreptitiously whilst the

teacher's attention is on the wall projector. The vast majority of boys, however, are keen to learn and use their IT skills, as shown by the great popularity of the computer rooms at lunch-times. Behaviour is good and quite mature. Boys with special educational needs value the subject highly because of their progress with 'Successmaker', the modified worksheets they are given, and the help they receive from special educational needs assistants.

155. Provision for ICT has improved greatly since the last inspection, and resources are now very good. The computer rooms are well equipped, except for the GNVQ room which has insufficient computers to meet the needs of the increasing numbers; those in the room are so close together that students cannot put their papers down to write easily. Teachers' expertise has improved also, due to the efforts of the co-ordinator in training and making sure all departments understand their responsibilities to deliver IT as part of the curriculum. The co-ordinator leads the subject very well and is ably supported by his systems manager who runs the network. Although the school has suitable software, computers are not sufficiently used in assessment, although there are subjects where this is beginning to be done, for example the computer-assisted learning package in design and technology. Whilst it is very useful for teachers, year heads and the special educational needs co-ordinator to have access to administrative data via the administration network, the system has not yet been extended to whole school assessment of performance and tracking of pupils' progress towards the targets set for them.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

156. Standards in French are average at Key Stage 3 and in line with what they should be, given the attainment of pupils on entry to the school. In German and Spanish, all boys attain satisfactory standards relative to their ability and within the time allowed. At Key Stage 4 most boys attain good standards relative to their ability in Spanish and German and satisfactory standards in French. Standards in the sixth form are as expected.

157. In 1999, pupils were assessed by their teachers as working at the national level by the end of Key Stage 3. This was confirmed by the work seen during the inspection.

158. Examination results at GCSE in French are in line with the national figure for those gaining A*-C grades and A*-G grades. The figures are distorted by the fact that last year only about half of the year group was entered for GCSE examinations. In German and in Spanish the numbers of boys entered for GCSE examinations are too small to make comparisons. However, in 1999 those boys who sat the examination achieved good results. Results in Spanish have improved significantly since 1997. Results in French have shown considerable improvement over recent years although there have been fewer entrants. Pupils who took Certificate of Achievement examinations in French gained good results. There have been few entries at A level in languages so it is not possible to make statistical comparisons.

159. In work seen during the inspection, at the age of 14, boys' standards in listening and reading are average. They are able to understand French, Spanish and German when these are used by their teachers for general classroom communication and taped material spoken by a variety of native speakers about everyday topics. They can read short passages on life in Spain, such as Christmas celebrations or La Semana Santa, and understand restaurant menus. Standards are below average in writing and particularly in speaking. In all languages boys complete mechanical writing exercises accurately, but their experience of writing freely about themselves is limited and often basic grammar is inaccurate. They have difficulty in sustaining simple conversations to book a hotel room in French or to respond to their teachers' questions. Their pronunciation is variable, and weak in Spanish. Pupils with special educational needs make progress that is in line with their ability.

160. In work seen during the inspection, at the age of 16, boys' standards in listening and reading are good, relative to their ability, in Spanish and German and average in French. In Spanish and German they can understand the gist of lengthy passages of written and spoken language. This is also the case for pupils of higher prior attainment in French. However, the boys following the Certificate of Achievement course do not reach the standards expected, although some achieve distinctions. These pupils do very little writing. Pupils in GCSE groups can write about themselves, their past experiences and future aspirations using a simple, but fairly accurate, range of idiom and vocabulary in all languages. They have few opportunities to experiment with more complex language. Standards in speaking are below average in Spanish, average in French and German GCSE classes and below average in Certificate of Achievement classes. In Spanish, only a few boys have the confidence to attempt any genuine communication and their fluency and pronunciation remain weak. In German and GCSE French there is an improvement in speaking at this key stage, but there is room for further improvement.

161. In work seen in French at age 18, boys' standards are satisfactory throughout and are what they should be. Few boys study French, but those who do benefit from the input of the girls from Didcot Girls' School and make good use of the language assistant to practise their speaking and listening skills. Their written work is varied but shows a lack of accuracy in the language used.

162. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall in French and Spanish and good in German. Half of the Spanish lessons seen were also good. Teachers have sound knowledge of their subjects and know their pupils well. The best lessons have a range of activities, which cover the four elements of listening, speaking, reading and writing. A very good lesson at Key Stage 3 enabled pupils to make very good progress in their learning because it was carefully planned, with a good variety of activities in the four skills. It was conducted at a good pace and gave pupils a chance to consolidate work they had done before, as well as to cover new work. Pupils took their work seriously, responding well to the teacher and enjoying the lesson because they were fully involved. In another lesson, slower progress was made because the activities were not well timed and the unsatisfactory behaviour of pupils meant that the aims of the lesson were not fully met. Boys respond with greatest enthusiasm when the lessons are planned to challenge them but the purpose of each activity is carefully explained to boost their confidence, as in a Year 10 lesson comparing a school day in Britain and Spain.

163. Teachers assess pupils' work during lessons, with occasional formal assessments. This formal assessment is linked to National Curriculum levels but does not take place regularly enough for pupils to be aware of the levels at which they are working. Marking is completed regularly but, at Key Stage 3, does not give enough information about what the

pupils know and can do and what they need to do to improve their work. Careless written work is sometimes too easily accepted. Few opportunities are afforded to boys to develop their skills in information and communication technology. Teachers make good use of the Internet as a teaching resource, particularly with sixth form students.

164. Many pupils show interest in their work and have a positive attitude to it, although a minority do not. Learning is better at Key Stage 4 in Spanish and German because the time allocation of only one period of seventy minutes at Key Stage 3 limits progress. Behaviour in lessons is satisfactory. The presentation of pupils' work is inconsistent and often untidy. Inconsistencies in teachers' expectations and the lack of an up-to-date scheme of work in French and Spanish contribute to an uneven rate of progress across the key stages. Overall, pupils show satisfactory and sometimes good learning in their foreign language. Sixth form students work well together and with the language assistantes. They start to develop good independent learning skills at this level.

165. Since the last inspection the head of department has moved the department forward and there has been a good improvement in GCSE results in recent years. Boys understand the purpose of each lesson and have a clear idea where their work is leading in relation to the demands of the GCSE examinations. By Key Stage 4, higher attaining pupils have a good understanding of basic grammar. As at the time of the last inspection, boys still lack fluency in speaking. Schemes of work for French and Spanish are inadequate and need updating, although there is much useful advice for teachers in the handbook. Although adequate time is given to language teaching at Key Stage 3, better use could be made of this so that the second language has a higher profile. Spanish and German are taught in twilight lessons at Key Stage 4. It is important that provision is maintained. The current system, whereby many pupils do not follow a GCSE course in French, needs to be reconsidered so that pupils are prepared for the most appropriate examinations. More analysis of results at both key stages would enable realistic targets to be set and attention to be given to skills that are identified as weaker. There is a thriving French exchange that is proving successful in motivating boys and it is hoped to expand the programme to Germany and Spain. The language assistantes offer a useful cultural input and French exchange students in the sixth form give additional opportunities for St Birinus' students to explore European issues. Although there are adequate resources, they are not always appropriate for the pupils using them and there is a need to re-evaluate them before extending their use.

MUSIC

166. Attainment at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 is broadly in line with national standards. In the sixth form attainment is above average.

167. Teacher assessments in 1999 at the end of Key Stage 3 show boys' attainment to be broadly in line with national standards. In 1999 GCSE examinations, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C was well below average and below average for the award of grades A*- G. However, these results were from a small entry, making comparisons unreliable. Numbers in 1998 and 1997 were even smaller with some good individual results. In each of the past four years there have been two candidates at A level, one of whom has obtained a B grade.

168. In work seen during the inspection attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 matches expected standards. Year 9 pupils can read notation in the treble clef and locate the notes on keyboards with sufficient understanding to be able to play, with practice, the right hand part of Scott Joplins 'Entertainer' with reasonable accuracy. They have a growing

knowledge of harmony and understand a range of compositional techniques such as variations, which they apply in their compositions satisfactorily. Pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of a range of musical terms and styles.

169. In work seen during the inspection attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is broadly in line with national average standards. Year 11 pupils understand a substantial body of knowledge relevant to the GCSE listening examination, although some have difficulty in recalling it when required. Most pupils play an instrument to a reasonable standard and have produced compositions of variable quality. Predicted grades for this year are better than last year but overall are likely to be below national averages.

170. In work seen during the inspection attainment in the sixth form is above average. The present Year 12 group shows a good grasp of musical history, can read complex scores such as the 'Goldberg Variations' with good understanding, and students are able to identify and analyse important features of the music accurately. All have achieved good standards in playing instruments or singing and are secure and confident in these accomplishments. Above average understanding of harmony is successfully applied to analysis and composition.

171. About 10 per cent of pupils enhance their musical attainment by learning to play musical instruments and many gain further experience by participating in the band or choir, which achieve good standards in the many musical events which take place during the year and are much appreciated by the community.

172. Attitudes and behaviour are unsatisfactory in some classes in Years 7 and 8 and this has a negative impact on learning and attainment. In Year 9 attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory. At Key Stage 4 attitudes and personal development are good and in the sixth form they are excellent. This mixed picture reflects the effects of disruptive behaviour by a minority of younger pupils.

173. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4 it is good and in the sixth form it is very good. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and understanding but at Key Stage 3 their expectations are sometimes inappropriate and planning is sometimes ineffective. This is because insufficient account is taken of the need to engage pupils' interest with practical music making activities that are achievable by all the pupils. The long lessons are not adequately planned to provide sufficient variety of activities to maintain pupils' concentration. However, difficulties of classroom management at both key stages sometimes prevent the establishment of an atmosphere in which pupils can concentrate and make appropriate progress. When an initial framework of order is established, objectives are made clear so that pupils know what is expected of them; pace is maintained, pupils work with reasonable concentration and effective learning takes place. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, expectations and planning geared to examination requirements are generally more effective.

174. The quality of learning is satisfactory at Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in the sixth form. Pupils of all levels of attainment make satisfactory progress in the acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding when lessons are effectively planned and delivered. However, learning is not always as effective as it should be, even when activities are well matched to pupils' needs and interests, because resources are inadequate. For example, a Year 9 class concentrated and persevered well to learn a keyboard piece that appealed to them. More than half of them had to play on small sized keyboards. Such instruments have three quarter size keys and are not touch sensitive. Pupils of this age find them very difficult to play and are unable to manage expressive playing. The result was that, for some

of an interested and positive class, a potentially good lesson proved a frustrating experience.

175. Management is satisfactory overall. Planning of schemes of work and related matters is satisfactory. The instrumental teaching arrangements and the extra-curricular groups are well and efficiently managed. However, educational direction is not sufficiently clear and teaching is not effectively monitored. Overall, assessment procedures are satisfactory but do not give pupils sufficient information about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve and information is not used well to support planning.

176. Since the last inspection, standards have remained similar. The time allocated for music has improved. The provision of instruments is better than it was but there are still deficiencies.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

177. In 1999, teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 recorded pupils' standards in physical education as achieving at or working below national expectations. The proportion of pupils gaining GCSE grades A*-C in 1999 was in line with the national average; the proportion gaining grades A*-G was above average. Results compare favourably with pupils' results in other subjects because the majority of those who opt for physical education are from the lower attainment bands. The practical element in the examination assists many pupils whose written work is not strong. The 1999 advanced level results, from a very small entry, were in line with national standards.

178. In the only Year 9 lesson seen during the inspection, attainment at the age of 14, was above national expectations in tennis. Pupils' ability to perform varied strokes with a partner, plan the next stage and evaluate the result, is of a high standard. Standards in other year groups vary between sets. For example, a high ability Year 7 class performed with great skill in softball. A lower ability class in Year 8 had not yet mastered the basic skills and their attainment, despite their enthusiasm, was below the national expectation. In athletics, both Years 7 and 8 perform and evaluate their attempts at putting the shot and in relay running. Their understanding of techniques and strategies is beginning to develop and their attainment is at the expected level. In work seen during the inspection, attainment at the age of 16 is in line with national expectations. In softball, the majority of pupils can throw and pass a ball effectively during a game, but they have difficulty in understanding the strategies of the game. Badminton skills vary from talented stroke makers to beginners' standards, but overall the standard is in line with national expectations. The Year 11 GCSE group has practical skills in passing, tackling and kicking in rugby but their ability in mauling is not as confident. Many pupils try to improve their standards by attending revision classes and a well-presented booklet to aid this process has been produced. The GCSE group has skills in soccer, athletics, badminton and tennis broadly in line with national expectations. Many sixth form students take advantage of the sporting facilities in the leisure centre and the school. Indoor soccer, basketball, tennis and squash are some of the activities that the pupils participate in, often with a high level of skill. Students in the GCE Advanced Level group are achieving a good standard in their understanding of the theoretical aspects of the course, such as anatomy and physiology and sports psychology. The practical performances in discus and sprint starting require quality demonstrations to help them develop more insight into the events. Standards are generally in line with national levels. Pupils of all levels of attainment are making similar progress. Many pupils represent the county in games and athletics. The school produces British champions in weightlifting from the pupils who attend the sessions in the specialist, Lottery-funded, building.

179. There is a positive attitude towards the subject and most pupils are keen to attend both timetabled and extra-curricular sessions. Relationships are good and pupils co-operate effectively in paired and group work. Most activities are performed with enthusiasm and energy, particularly in games. At Key Stage 4 the attitude to physical education is positive and absences are few. Sixth form students show high concentration levels in both theory and practical sessions that help to improve standards. Motivation, respectful behaviour and good learning skills are shown in most lessons and the overall standard is good.

180. All teaching is at least satisfactory and the overall quality is good. All the specialist staff follow the schemes of work consistently. Objectives are made clear and feedback is given in all lessons. Pupils are encouraged to organise their own warm-up and evaluate their performance. Well-planned teaching supports pupils' progress by providing clear instructions, high expectations of performance, praise for good behaviour and skilful class management. Teachers' knowledge of the subject is very good in games, athletics and examination work and is a key factor in promoting learning. The teaching staff work very hard to maintain pupils' progress through the key stages. The overall progress by pupils through the key stages is good. A reasonable balance of activities is offered and there are very good opportunities to extend performance levels through the extra-curricular programme. Co-operative working relationships and the promotion of support rather than criticism enhance learning. Most of the time, lower ability pupils are encouraged to reach individual targets, which help them to progress to partner and small group work. In the majority of lessons work is well matched to individual needs so that learning is consolidated enabling pupils of all abilities to progress at a similar rate. In a minority of lessons, instructions are lengthy and curtail activity. Occasionally learning is hindered because activities are not matched closely enough to pupils' needs. The GCSE groups are generally drawn from the lower bands of Year 9 and their progress to achieve a standard in line with national expectations is very creditable.

181. The curriculum meets statutory requirements. The GCSE option is well supported and contains 60 per cent practical work, which is ideal for talented games players. The extra-curricular programme is very good and links with the sports clubs at the leisure centre and other local clubs. Approximately 40 per cent of the school's population take part in the after-school games programme and six staff conduct the sessions. Assessment procedures have been well documented and practised. Recording is kept up to date. Reports are informative but will need to set targets from September 2000. Schemes of work are in place and development planning is preparing for the revised National Curriculum programme. Leadership provides effective direction for the department. The newly qualified specialist is given strong support and teaching is monitored. There are excellent displays of notices and information in corridors and changing rooms. There is a strong work ethic that pervades the department. The staff are well qualified and their good teaching skills contribute to the effective learning environment. The indoor accommodation is very good when the sports centre is available, the grass areas are well maintained and the recently completed tarmac area is ideal for promoting learning. The provision of outdoor facilities for cricket should be considered for future development. Resources are good and they are very good for tennis.

182. Since the last inspection, GCSE and advanced level results have improved. The quality of teaching has improved. Health and safety procedures are firmly in place. Pupils plan and evaluate their performance more consistently. Apart from unequal access to the curriculum in Year 9, the time allocation to the subject is sufficient.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

183. Standards have risen since the last inspection. The proportion of A*-C grades gained in the 1999 GCSE examinations in religious studies was below the national average and below the national average for boys. However, the proportion of A*-G grades was above average. Results were similar in the two previous years and are lower than in the majority of other subjects. Given that the school enters an unusually high proportion of pupils for this examination, 70 per cent compared with 13 per cent nationally, and that GCSE candidates in Years 10 and 11 have a lower time allocation for religious studies than for other examination subjects, the results are as good as might be expected. All of the five students who were entered for A level examinations in 1999 examination obtained pass grades, three of them gaining grades A-C. However the numbers are too small for any meaningful comparison to be made.

184. In the work seen during the inspection, pupils' attainment at the age of 14 matches the expectations for pupils of that age as set out in the Local Agreed Syllabus and exceeds them in some areas. By the end of Year 9 most pupils have a sound knowledge and understanding of the main beliefs and religious practices of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Pupils can explain clearly the importance of rules such as the Ten Commandments. They understand why people become committed to a religious belief, or a way of life, and they can relate the concept of commitment to their own lives. They know the layout of different places of worship such as churches, synagogues and mosques and they use religious terminology with a reasonable degree of accuracy. In several areas of written and project work, attainment is above the expected standards. For example, many pupils have produced a wide variety of good quality display work using information and communication technology as well as artefacts such as models of Christian churches and special objects used for prayer in Judaism. Illustrations are often of a high standard. Maps and drawings are used well to supplement a written answer and the books of pupils in Year 9 contain some beautiful examples of Islamic calligraphy. Higher attainers have good literacy skills and their work is very well presented. However, lower attainers in Year 7 have very limited powers of expression. They write in short sentences with a narrow range of descriptive vocabulary. Standards of spelling are generally below expectations amongst lower attainers throughout the key stage but work is improved when pupils use well structured learning material such as writing frames and key words.

185. By the age of 16 the attainment of the majority of pupils meets expected standards. Work seen during the inspection shows that pupils taking the GCSE examination in religious studies have a sound knowledge and understanding of key episodes in the events leading up to Good Friday and Easter Sunday, as related in St Mark's Gospel. They are also able to make carefully considered evaluations of the effects of Christianity on behaviour, attitudes and lifestyles. The majority of pupils present their arguments in a satisfactory way in written work and make accurate use of biblical quotations. Pupils who are following a similar course through the nationally accredited AQA Unit Award Scheme attain the grades that their teachers expect of them in their written assignments. Some of the higher attainers in the group achieve above average standards because they are well motivated and research the topics very thoroughly. However, a few lower attainers do not achieve as well as they should because they have difficulty in sustaining concentration and in coping with the disciplines of independent learning.

186. Students follow the A level course in conjunction with Didcot Girls' School. The section of the examination dealing with the Fourth Gospel is taught at St Birinus School. Attainment matches expectations. In the lesson seen, the students were preparing for a timed essay on certain discourses of Jesus and made effective use of reference material,

such as scholars' commentaries, to reinforce their own judgements. The majority of sixth form students follow an A level general studies course within which the Year 13 module in religious education is taught at St Birinus in accordance with the Oxfordshire Agreed Syllabus and is based on religion, philosophy and ethics. In the lesson seen attainment was of an average standard. The students were considering whether or not society adopts certain criteria in putting a value on life. They presented their arguments in a persuasive manner, giving due consideration to the views of the other members of the group.

187. Attitudes are good. Pupils arrive promptly and settle down to work quickly. Most of them enjoy their lessons. They are attentive and responsive and concentrate well on the task in hand. They start to take responsibility for their own learning at Key Stage 3 through projects and become confident in organising their independent work in information and communication technology and research. Pupils usually behave well in class although occasionally they talk out of turn when they want to put forward their own points of view in class discussions.

188. The overall quality of teaching is good and this has a positive impact on pupils' achievement and attitudes to the subject. In three-quarters of the lessons seen the teaching was good or very good. There was no unsatisfactory teaching. The department has many strengths. Teachers are well qualified and experienced and have very good knowledge and understanding of the subject. They work together well as a team so that pupils make consistent progress at Key Stages 3 and 4. Pupils in the examination classes benefit from teachers' very good revision techniques. For example, in a top set lesson in Year 11 the teacher brought the main discussion points into focus very effectively and gave useful examples of the way in which the use of accurate references and key phrases can boost examination grades. Teachers use resources well to capture pupils' interest - for example, in a Year 7 lesson on food laws in Judaism, when the teacher brought her own samples of kosher foods to enable pupils to understand ways in which day-to-day difficulties in observance of the food laws can be overcome. Although teachers usually plan carefully for a range of activities to develop pupils' knowledge and skills, in one or two of the lessons seen there was a lack of opportunity for group discussions and this led to pupils talking among themselves and wasting time. Teachers monitor written work regularly and give advice on how pupils can improve their writing. However, the policy for the identification and correction of spelling mistakes has yet to be fully implemented. Tasks are usually well adapted to pupils' needs, and learning materials such as writing frames and modified work sheets enable lower attainers to produce responses which are accurate and completed in time. There is a good relationship with support staff who are well briefed and well integrated into the work of lessons. Overall, the strengths of the teaching far outweigh the weaknesses.

189. The quality of learning is good. Throughout the key stages, pupils develop their understanding of the way in which religious beliefs affect people's daily lives and their standpoints on ethical issues. By the end of Key Stage 3, they have a firm foundation of knowledge and understanding which stands them in good stead for the GCSE course. Higher attainers in Year 11 express their views fluently in discussion and they have a good understanding of some of the doctrinal differences in Christian beliefs. Most of the pupils studying on the Unit Award Scheme have adapted well to an individual style of working and apply themselves conscientiously, asking for advice when necessary. However, a few pupils make insufficient progress. They find difficulty in coping with this way of learning because they cannot sustain their concentration for the necessary amount of time. At both key stages, pupils with special educational needs are supported effectively in the classroom and achieve well in relation to their prior attainment levels. Sixth form students

respond in a mature way in class discussions and group work and there is a studious atmosphere in the classroom as they consult a range of reference books while planning their essays.

190. Leadership and direction for the subject are clear and purposeful. Religious education enjoys a high status within the school and one of the reasons for this is the programme of visits, especially the tours to Israel which are organised by the head of department. With experiences such as these, and visits from local clergy, pupils have very good opportunities to develop their understanding of the spiritual dimension to life.

191. The department's response to the last inspection has been good. Issues about resources and breach of statutory requirements have been resolved. The quality of teaching has improved, although in some lessons there is still a need for a wider range of teaching styles, and excellent progress has been made in the development and use of information and communication technology skills. Raising attainment at GCSE is now the main priority for the department. The time allocated for GCSE classes is inadequate and is having a negative effect on standards. More effective use could be made of assessment data to identify individual targets for pupils who are capable of gaining higher grades.

VOCATIONAL COURSES

192. The school provides a range of vocationally related courses. At Key Stage 4 boys following the general national vocational qualification course in engineering achieve high standards. In the sixth form, intermediate and advanced level courses are provided in business, health and social care, information and communication technology and leisure and tourism.

193. Entry standards are maintained. The courses are very well managed and skilfully taught. Good relationships are a strong feature of the teaching and learning style and the contributions of all students are valued. This helps build students' confidence, for example in making presentations on financial management. There are high levels of mutual support within the groups. Students are learning to evaluate each other's work and to give and to receive constructive criticism. Many students develop the self-reliance needed to reach very good levels of independent learning.

194. Courses are well supported by extended work experience, by numbers of visits at home and abroad, by visiting speakers of high quality and by practical cooperation with the local Chamber of Commerce. A good example of coursework requiring the practical application of skills is a research project to test local opinion about the annual street fair. Students presented well rehearsed and illustrated findings to members of the Chamber of Commerce and were confident in answering questions, showing a good grasp of their findings.

195. The GNVQ base provides a high quality, well presented, large, flexible open space used in a variety of ways. Display is of a high quality. There are insufficient computers when the intermediate leisure and tourism group is working, because numbers are growing. However, there are others freely available in other parts of the school. There is insufficient bench space around the machines which makes it difficult to use books and papers.

196. The external verifiers' reports indicate no radical weaknesses and make few points for continued development. They praise the management and standards over the last three

years. The school is a centre of excellence for part one of the engineering GNVQ and the county support network for leisure and tourism is managed from the department.