

INSPECTION REPORT

**THE CASTLE SCHOOL
TAUNTON**

LEA area: Somerset

Unique Reference Number: 123886

Inspection Number: 184649

Headteacher: Mr K Freedman

Reporting inspector: Mr J E Johnes
1983

Dates of inspection: 1-5 November 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 708490

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
Type of control:	County
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs S Naylor
Date of previous inspection:	30 January-3 February 1995

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Rona Orme, Lay Inspector		Attitudes, behaviour and personal development Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development Support, guidance and pupils' welfare Partnership with parents and the community
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Derry Hannam	Music	Learning resources
Lynn Jenkins	Religious education	Accommodation
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MAIN FINDINGS

What the school does well

- The school succeeds in encouraging all pupils to enjoy school and strive to reach high standards.
- Standards of attainment of pupils, including those with special educational needs (SEN), are predominantly good and often very good at both key stages.
- Progress of pupils of all abilities is good at both key stages.
 - The quality of teaching is a strength of the school. No weak or poor teaching is in evidence. In nearly eight out of ten lessons it is good, very good or excellent.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good and there is a strong sense of community in the school.
- Pupils are encouraged, successfully, to have pride in their school. Their work is celebrated by a considerable amount of good display in classrooms and around the school.
- Attendance is very good and pupils arrive in school with positive attitudes, ready to learn and participate.
- There is an excellent careers programme that supports pupils well.
- Leadership and management of the school are very good.
- The governing body gives very good support to the school.
- A wide range of successful extra-curricular activities, especially in sport and music, enhances the curriculum at both key stages.
- Financial management is excellent.
- The school's communications and relationships with parents are excellent.

Where the school has weaknesses

- The school is not complying with statutory requirements for information technology (IT) and collective worship.
- The number of teaching and non-teaching staff is barely adequate to meet the demands of the National Curriculum in a school of this size.
- Accommodation and the quality and quantity of learning materials are unsatisfactory.
- Some health and safety issues highlighted in the report require attention.

The school has many more strengths than weaknesses. The governors' action plan will set out how the weaknesses identified during the inspection are to be tackled. The plan will be sent to all parents or guardians of pupils at the school.

How the school has improved since the last inspection

The Castle School has improved in a number of important areas since the last inspection. It is now a very good school with a wide range of excellent features. The quality of education has continued to improve even though there have been reductions in its budget. Medium and long term targets are identified well. The school has still to conform to statutory requirements in IT and collective worship. However, the quality of assemblies is good and makes a valuable contribution to the life and work of the school. Although there are still unsatisfactory features in accommodation and the quantity and quality of learning materials the school is well placed to continue to improve further.

Standards in subjects

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

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

Similar schools in this section means schools with a similar proportion of pupils identified as being entitled to free school meals.

Attainment on entry is slightly above average expectation. At the end of Key Stage 3 national test results show that, in all three core subjects of English, mathematics and science, pupils are attaining above or well above national averages with clear evidence of value added.

Quality of teaching

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 7-9	Good	All subjects are broadly similar	IT when taught through National Curriculum subjects
Years 10-11	Good	All subjects are broadly similar	IT when taught through National Curriculum subjects
English	Good		
Mathematics	Good		

Teaching is always at least satisfactory. No poor teaching is in evidence. In 76 per cent of lessons it is good or better with 33 per cent being very good or excellent. There is some excellent teaching in English, mathematics, science and music. The picture is very similar at both key stages but the proportion of very good or excellent teaching is higher at Key Stage 4. Teaching of SEN pupils is mainly good and never less than satisfactory and is serving the needs of these pupils well.

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

Other aspects of the school

Aspect	Comment
Behaviour	Standards of behaviour overall are excellent both in classrooms and about the school.

Attendance	Very good; the school is diligent in ensuring any absence is authorised.
Ethos*	The school has an excellent ethos. Attitudes of pupils and staff are positive. Relationships are excellent and have a significant effect on the quality of learning. Commitment to high standards is a feature of the school.
Leadership and management	Management of the school is very good. Leadership by the headteacher, the senior management team and the governing body is excellent. They are supported well by staff who carry pastoral and curriculum responsibilities and by the education support staff and the clerical assistants.
Curriculum	At both key stages the curriculum is very good. Assessment is now good at both key stages. There is a very successful wide range of extra-curricular activities that enriches pupils' experience. Delivery of IT at Key Stage 4 within subject departments needs to be improved.
Pupils with special educational needs	Significant improvement in the level of provision, which is now good at both key stages.
Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development	Provision is good overall, with excellent social and very good moral development of pupils. However, although the spiritual and cultural development of pupils are satisfactory, these could be strengthened further, especially the multicultural element.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	Teaching and non-teaching staff are well qualified and receive appropriate in-service training but their numbers are low for a school of this size. Learning resources are barely adequate to deliver the National Curriculum and in information technology resources are inadequate. Accommodation is unsatisfactory.
Value for money	In the light of the quality of education provided and the standards of education achieved the school provides very good value for money.

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

The parents' views of the school

What most parents like about the school	What some parents are not Happy about
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships between staff and pupils are very good. Pupils are cared for. • Standards of academic and other attainment are high for pupils of all attainment levels, including those with special educational needs. • Parents are kept well informed about their children. • Year 7 induction procedures are very good. • Pupils like to attend school. They are 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no aspect of the life of the significant percentage of parents.

encouraged to get involved in more than just their daily lessons.	
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Inspector judgements support parents' views. Parents are better informed than usual due to their involvement in large numbers in the life of the school.

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

To raise the quality of learning and provision the governors and senior management should take steps to:

- I. Strengthen the co-ordination of information technology across the curriculum and within subject departments at both key stages in order to raise standards and meet statutory requirements. (See paragraphs 36, 37, 42, 46, 121, 138, 145, 150, 158, 159, 161, 162, 165, 178, 182, 187)
- II. Continue to seek ways to rectify the deficiencies created by:
 - III. insufficient numbers of teaching and support staff in relation to the size of the school; (see paragraphs 39, 72, 76, 77, 90, 105, 116, 133, 138, 156, 170, 173)
 - IV. insufficient and inadequate accommodation; (see paragraphs 79, 80, 81, 105, 120, 133, 150, 175, 182, 184)
 - V. the variable and often inadequate quantity and quality of the learning resources available. (See paragraphs 10, 29, 82, 83, 84, 85, 133, 138, 145, 150, 155, 156, 158, 165, 175, 184)
- VI. Address those health and safety issues highlighted in the report. (See paragraphs 60, 79, 80, 184)

Some additional weaknesses are noted in paragraphs 35, 46, 50, 54, 62, 103, 126, 132, 134, 137, 150, 155, 159, 161, 162, 174, 191, 192.

INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the school

1. The Castle School is an 11-16 mixed comprehensive school for 1095 boys and girls. It is located on the western side of Taunton and draws its pupils from a wide geographical area and a large number of contributing primary schools. Since the last inspection it has grown by approximately 9 per cent and is currently oversubscribed. There is a wide socio-economic mix. Attainment on entry, as measured by Key Stage 2 tests, is slightly above the national expectation. The number of pupils with special educational needs has grown since the last inspection and is broadly in line with national averages. There are 214 pupils on the special educational needs register, 17 of whom have statements. These pupils have a range of needs, but most are associated with reading and writing difficulties. No pupils have been permanently excluded in the last four years and the number of fixed term exclusions has remained static. There are no pupils from homes where English is the second language. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals has remained broadly similar to 1995 when it was 8.7 per cent.

2. The school has a clearly stated and well understood set of aims which outline its priorities and the values for which it stands, namely to provide an education of a very high standard for pupils of all attainment levels and promote positive attitudes in all aspects of their young lives.

3. The future priority will be to sustain and build on current progress. In particular, the school will continue to develop strategies to raise the attainment of individual pupils, further develop IT facilities and programmes which will enhance the learning of pupils, enhance the quality of the learning environment, and further develop an effective monitoring and evaluation programme which supports high quality teaching and learning.

Key Indicators

Attainment at Key Stage 3¹

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	105(97)	112(102)	217(199)

National Curriculum Test Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	81(66)	91(73)	85(80)
	Girls	98(87)	84(76)	85(78)
	Total	179(153)	175(149)	170(158)
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	82(76)	81(74)	78(79)
	National	63(65)	62(60)	55(56)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	45(52)	58(57)	45(53)
	National	28(35)	38(36)	33(27)

Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	86(68)	92(73)	87(80)
	Girls	98(91)	93(80)	84(80)
	Total	184(159)	185(153)	171(160)
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	85(79)	85(77)	79(81)
	National	64(62)	64(64)	60(62)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	51(40)	62(62)	44(59)
	National	31(31)	37(37)	28(31)

1

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

Attainment at Key Stage 4²

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	106(102)	101(96)	207(198)

GCSE Results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A* to G	1 or more grades A* to G
Number of pupils achieving standard specified	Boys	74(61)	103(97)	104(101)
	Girls	73(60)	100(90)	100(94)
	Total	147(121)	203(187)	204(195)
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	71(61)	98(94)	99(98)
	National	46.3(44.6)	90.7(89.8)	95.7(95.2)

Attendance

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

		%
Authorised Absence	School	5.8
	National comparative data	8.6
Unauthorised Absence	School	.2
	National comparative data	1.1

Exclusions

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

	Number
Fixed period	19
Permanent	-

Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is:

	%
Very good or better	33
Satisfactory or better	100
Less than satisfactory	-

PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

Attainment and progress

4. Key Stage 2 tests and tests carried out by the school show that on entry pupils represent the full range of attainment with the majority meeting national expectations, although there is a larger proportion of higher attainers than average. At the end of Key Stage 3 attainment of pupils in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science is well above the national expectation and shows clear value added. At the end of Key Stage 4 the proportion of pupils gaining five A*-C grades in GCSE examinations in 1999 is overall well above national averages at 71 per cent compared with a national average of 46.3 per cent and tests and GCSE results are also above those of similar schools. The proportion of pupils attaining five GCSE A*-G grade in 1999 is also well above the national average of 90.7 per cent, at 98 per cent. Pupils do particularly well in subjects across the whole National Curriculum and religious education. During the week of the inspection attainment in lessons seen and in pupils' work was predominantly good and occasionally very good. Attainment of pupils with special educational needs at both key stages is good and at times very good in relation to their prior attainment. The gap between boys' and girls' attainment is less than the national average at both key stages.

5. At both key stages pupils' literacy skills develop well and they reach a high standard of competence. Cross-curricular approaches to literacy benefit attainment and include the display of key words by most departments and the spelling books at Key Stage 3 which include important words from a range of subjects. Targets set by the school to raise standards of attainment in literacy and numeracy skills are being met well at both key stages.

6. Speaking and listening skills are very well developed through the opportunities offered in many subjects. In art, design and technology, information technology, English, religious education and science pupils' spoken language is clear, articulate and well developed and they listen attentively to each other and to the teacher. In art pupils are extremely fluent and articulate and show an unusually high level of competence in using subject-specific language appropriately. In history there are too few opportunities for discussion, though a Year 11 class held a very good debate about why women got the vote. In mathematics and geography pupils respond well to questions but there is little developed or planned talk.

7. Reading develops well in some subjects though in general there are few opportunities for pupils to read aloud. However, pupils read with understanding most of the materials presented to them. In English there is a strong emphasis on personal reading which contributes to high standards and well developed responses to fiction and non-fiction texts.

8. Writing is generally neat and well presented, although there are some pupils who find spelling accurately difficult, especially lower attaining pupils at Key Stage 3.

Pupils use writing effectively for a wide range of purposes - notes, annotations, diaries, letters, essays and stories. Handwriting is neat and well formed. In music, the good quality of written work at Key Stage 3 leads to outstanding supportive commentaries which accompany GCSE composition coursework at Key Stage 4. Writing development across the key stages is good.

9. The school has decided to await the arrival of national and local education authority guidance before establishing a whole-school numeracy policy. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of number in a wide range of mathematical contexts, using appropriate methods of calculation to arrive at the correct answers or conclusions. However, the speed at which they perform the necessary processes is not always as quick as it could be. In modern languages, pupils add, subtract, multiply and divide successfully prices, times and dates using the target language. In science, higher attaining pupils can solve problems that involve one or more calculations when finding the acceleration of an object. Pupils use and make sense of tables and graphs particularly at Key Stage 4 as part of their GCSE coursework. In PE, pupils collect data when carrying out fitness tests and are able to analyse the information when displayed in graphical form. In geography, pupils improve their spatial awareness from Year 7 as part of their map reading development and the construction of three-dimensional models from information gleaned from maps.

10. At Key Stage 3 attainment in information technology is broadly in line with the national average. However, at Key Stage 4 pupils attain standards which are below the national expectation. The school is developing schemes of work which ensure that IT is taught through other National Curriculum subjects but because of a lack of the necessary hardware and variable teacher expertise delivery is unsatisfactory. Pupils are not taught the control and measurement aspect of National Curriculum IT and the school is, therefore, in breach of statutory regulations related to information technology at Key Stage 4. The ratio of pupils to computers has worsened considerably since the last inspection and this increases the difficulties experienced.

11. The progress of pupils, including those with special educational needs, is good or better across the curriculum and through time, with the exception of art and IT at Key Stage 3 where it is only satisfactory and in IT at Key Stage 4 where progress is unsatisfactory. In science at Key Stage 4 progress is very good and in music, at Key Stage 4, it is excellent. In religious education, an area criticised in the last report, progress of pupils has improved significantly and is now good at both key stages.

12. The progress of boys in relation to girls is better in this school than the national average. Higher attaining pupils are identified well and make good progress in relation to their potential.

13. Pupils on the SEN register make good progress at both key stages. Those who are withdrawn from a few lessons each week for extra help with literacy make very good progress with reading and spelling. In lessons where learning support assistants are available to provide extra help these pupils do better than would otherwise be expected. Even without extra support their progress is usually as good as that of their peers. By the end of Key Stage 4 nearly all pupils who have been on the SEN register gain several passes at GCSE.

14. Since the last inspection the school has worked hard to continue to raise the level of attainment of all pupils. This is reflected in the predominantly good response and progress made by all pupils at both key stages.

Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

15. The very good behaviour and positive attitudes of the pupils are a significant strength of the school. Almost all parents report that their children like attending the school and this view is supported by the high level of attendance, enthusiasm for learning in lessons and wide participation in extra-curricular activities. Pupils are encouraged successfully to have pride in their school and there is a strong sense of community.

16. Pupils take a real interest in their studies in a wide range of subjects. The response in lessons is always satisfactory and often very good. They sustain concentration well and they use the opportunities they are given to develop their capacity for personal study. For example, pupils work steadily without direct supervision when they use the computers in the library.

17. The progress of pupils on the SEN register is helped by their positive attitudes to work. When they are withdrawn from lessons for extra help they concentrate well and can be trusted to work on their own. Their very good relationships with teachers and assistants from the learning development department are based on mutual respect and pupils also work well together in pairs and groups.

18. Very good behaviour is a feature of the school as nearly all parents report. There have been no permanent exclusions since the last inspection and there are few, but appropriate, fixed-term exclusions. Pupils wear neat, correct uniform and they extend courtesy to visitors and staff alike. Relationships at all levels are warm and very good. Bullying is considered by pupils, staff and parents to be infrequent and effectively dealt with when it does occur.

19. The personal development of pupils is very good and has improved since the last inspection. Pupils take every opportunity to exercise responsibility with enthusiasm, and they frequently show initiative. Pupils of all ages help to run the many House competitions and events. They do this with considerable maturity and this is a strength of the school. Pupils are able to reflect sensitively on the feelings and values of other people when opportunities arise in lessons. The 'Buddy' system, which gives all Year 7 pupils a mentor from Year 10, is widely appreciated by pupils of all ages.

Attendance

20. Pupils and parents appreciate that good attendance is important. A very good level of attendance has a significant effect on promoting continuity and helping pupils to do well.

21. Since the last inspection the school has worked very hard, and successfully, to promote good attendance. As a result attendance has been consistently better than the national pattern. The number of pupils absent with the school's knowledge and permission is well below the national average at 5.8 (national average 8.6). The

proportion of pupils who are absent without authorisation is also well below the national average at 0.2 (national average 1.1).

22. Punctuality is good with many pupils arriving at their tutor rooms well before the bell. However, because of the distances some pupils have to travel within the school, not all lessons start on time, particularly those that follow straight after another lesson.

23. Since the last inspection the school has returned to manual marking of registers. These are marked effectively for most of the time but there are instances where registers are not marked accurately by tutors. As reported at the last inspection, there are still inconsistencies in the way that registers are marked at the start of lessons. However, there is no evidence of internal truancy.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

Teaching

24. Teaching of good quality is a feature across the whole curriculum at both key stages and is slightly better at Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. It has improved significantly since the last inspection. During the week of the inspection teaching was never less than satisfactory. In nearly eight out of ten lessons teaching was good or better. In five per cent of lessons it was excellent, particularly in English, mathematics, science and music.

25. The attainment and progress of pupils at both key stages are enhanced by good use of pair and group work as in English, mathematics, religious education and science where attention to the needs of pupils of differing attainment levels has improved. In modern languages, the target language is now the accepted language of the classroom ensuring that pupils improve in confidence and fluency.

26. Self-assessment and target setting by pupils, assisted by teachers and mentors, are now a regular and important feature across the curriculum. In history, science and design and technology there are now high standards of practical skills being demonstrated by pupils at both key stages. In PE, particularly, more and better opportunities are created for pupils to plan, perform and evaluate.

27. Challenge and rigour are evident and widespread at both key stages. The core subjects of English, mathematics and science are taught well, and in all other National Curriculum subjects and religious education significant improvement in the quality of teaching has taken place. Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach. Management of pupils' learning is very good. Expectations are predominantly high for pupils of all abilities, including those with learning difficulties and high attainers.

28. Time in the classroom is used productively, as seen in art, although at Key Stage 3 there is still too little emphasis on the creative aspect of the subject and in geography, teaching styles need to be more varied.

29. The use of information technology is, however, inconsistent and sometimes weak due to deficiencies in resources and the varying expertise of subject teachers.

30. Planning in lessons is effective, objectives are clear and are communicated to pupils well. Teachers use a good range of teaching methods to maintain high standards and a demanding pace to sustain learning, as can be seen, for example, in design and technology where the teaching is now more consistent than in the last inspection. Praise and reward for good work are used frequently. This improvement in teaching comes as a result of the school making the quality of teaching a major priority over the last three years.

31. Relationships in the classroom are invariably excellent among pupils and between teachers and pupils. They work well together ensuring good progress. There is a shared sense of purpose between teachers and pupils to ensure good quality learning. The frequent use of parents and non-teaching staff to support teachers is effective and helps to develop the strong sense of community evident in the school.

32. The teaching of pupils on the SEN register in the learning development department is very good. Teachers and learning support assistants understand the needs of children with literacy and behaviour difficulties. They provide a good variety of appropriate activities to help them improve their reading. They organise work for pupils very well, so that pupils know what is expected in the classroom and are able to get on with work by themselves when required. As a result, no time is wasted. Learning support assistants provide effective support in mainstream classes. They know the schemes of work in different subjects, but their work would be even more effective if they were more involved in the planning of lessons with teachers. Subject teachers are also aware of pupils' needs. In mathematics, geography and RE teachers often adapt their teaching to take these needs into account, but this happens less frequently in English and history.

33. Good quality relevant homework is set regularly across the curriculum, reinforcing and extending what has been achieved in lessons. Marking is often accompanied by helpful comments.

34. Pupils state that they enjoy their lessons and believe their teachers are sensitive to their individual needs.

The curriculum and assessment

35. The school provides a curriculum which meets statutory requirements except for provision of information technology at both key stages where there is insufficient coverage in some subjects. The curriculum is frequently discussed and reviewed by governors, senior staff and heads of department. All are closely involved and well informed. All pupils have equal access to the subjects offered at both key stages. The 25 hours of teaching time a week meets national recommendations. However many classes at Key Stage 3 are split between two teachers, a feature which encourages liaison between teachers but impairs continuity of learning for pupils.

36. Key Stage 3 provides all National Curriculum subjects and religious education with an appropriate allocation of time for each, and a lesson of drama every week. IT is taught as a separate subject in Year 7 but in Years 8 and 9 the required components are taught across the curriculum and are not all covered fully. An unusual feature of the

Year 9 curriculum is taking time from art to teach textiles, an approach that restricts competence in the former.

37. At Key Stage 4 all pupils study English (language and literature), mathematics, double science, a modern foreign language, design and technology, with compulsory PE, RE and careers. Pupils choose one subject from each of two option blocks; these are created in relation to their preferences, which allows a broad - and for most pupils a balanced - curriculum overall. Pupils are guided into taking either history or geography and an arts subject, and most do so. Numbers taking a second foreign language are at present less than a tenth of the year group, but this proportion should increase when current arrangements in Year 8 work through to Key Stage 4. IT is not taught separately but in subjects, so that only those who take the Compact course receive sufficient coverage. All pupils are entered for eight GCSE subjects and some for eleven or twelve. A few take the Certificate of Achievement in modern languages.

38. Since the last inspection, the school has planned careful withdrawal from lessons of pupils with SEN to ensure that their learning is not disrupted. The learning development department provides a good mix of extra help through small withdrawal groups during Key Stage 3 and in-class support at both key stages. Valuable extra support is provided through a lunchtime "Help Club" through the withdrawal of pupils from some registration periods, for help with basic literacy. At Key Stage 4 a few pupils are given appropriate opportunities to follow vocational courses at the nearby further education college.

39. Planning for progression from one stage of learning to the next is very good. In Year 6 pupils visit the school to become familiar with its routines. The responsible deputy head visits all primary schools to collect relevant information which is passed on and made available to each department in the form required. Similar care is taken within the school, in the compiling of sets, and in preparing pupils for their options at Key Stage 4, and in giving information to school leavers about courses available in local colleges. The one weakness lies in the split classes that occur chiefly at Key Stage 3 and to some extent at Key Stage 4.

40. Personal and social education, including health, sex and drugs education, is well organised and well covered by form tutors in the fortnightly tutorial period. Tutors are prepared for this by a well thought out and thorough programme of training. The school makes excellent provision for careers education, making very good use of the careers service. The school's wide parental and industry links ensure that pupils receive very effective, relevant and current guidance.

41. The school offers a programme of extra-curricular activities that is good in all respects and very good or excellent in many. All pupils can take part in an unusually wide range of musical and sporting experiences, encouraged by both the teaching and non-teaching staff. The house system encourages such a rate of participation that very few are left out. After-school drama, an annual fashion show and foreign exchanges are popular, as are outdoor pursuits, the adventure activities week in the Ardeche and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Pupils take part in Young Enterprise and the programme for Women in Science and Engineering. Work experience is well organised and successful. All this comes about through an unusual level of commitment by very many staff, both teaching and non-teaching, and parents.

42. The curriculum has improved since the last inspection. PE and RE now have enough classroom time. The length of the teaching week has been increased to the recommended level along with a more appropriate length of lesson. IT still needs to be strengthened further however, to ensure that all required components are covered at both key stages. Time is taken across the curriculum to ensure literacy and numeracy skills are practised and improved.

43. As part of the school's continued efforts to raise the individuals' attainment a revised draft assessment policy was produced in March 1998. It has a sound rationale to implement a continuous review of pupils' performance, to provide regular and accurate information for pupils, parents and teachers and to develop a common system of recording and reporting. The policy includes very comprehensive proposals to achieve the declared aims. Consistency within this framework is being achieved through common agendas for meetings that deputy heads have with their area leaders. They also have valuable links with heads of houses. Individual subject differences are recognised, and progress and examples of good practice are shared at these meetings. Whilst different approaches have been adopted by departments, subjects are working towards consistency within their areas by reviewing their practices. The school has introduced interim reports, known as IAs, in addition to the annual reports. This ensures that both parents and pupils are informed of the expected level for the year and individual attainment in relation to that level.

44. At Key Stage 4, pupils also receive Target Minimum Grades (TMGs) and accurate estimated GCSE grades that provide additional achievable goals to which pupils respond very positively. The essential generator of this information is the school's computerised assessment database. Its development has been carefully managed by the deputy head. The growth of data has enabled the generation of accurate targets for both staff and pupils. Teachers further benefit from class lists that contain relevant assessment information, to which they add during the year, enabling them to set targets and monitor the performance of individual pupils. At Key Stage 4, pupils' underachievement is identified and the manual tracking sheets provide a valuable source of information for tutors, mentors and parents to raise the identified pupils' levels of attainment.

45. Some parents and governors have taken on the role of mentors giving not only support to pupils but firsthand appreciation of the effect of the assessment policy. Mentoring also enables members of the senior management team to informally monitor the work of departments, including marking which still shows some inconsistency.

46. The major shortcoming is the assessment of IT at both key stages. The end of key stage judgements are based on a tick list and not founded on hard evidence. Whilst all departments have level descriptors for their subject, they are not able, because computers are not networked and there is no regime of floppy disks to record pupils' work, to check up to see the range of tasks covered or whether they have been completed.

47. Since the previous inspection, the school has been successful in focussing upon improving individual attainment and the accessibility of information to teachers, pupils and parents. Teachers can now interrogate the data to look for

over/underachievement. The school is more open about pupils' attainment and supportive reporting enables parents to know where their children are in the scheme of things. Heads of department are now more informed about value-added data, and its use to prepare departmental targets is becoming more effective. Governors' and parents' involvement has also increased.

48. Very close liaison between the head of learning development and local primary schools ensures that the special educational needs of most pupils are identified before they arrive at school. This information is then clearly communicated to all teachers. A system for producing a range of appropriate targets for pupils on the SEN register is developing well. For example, teachers of mathematics, science and geography are beginning to set useful, subject specific targets for these pupils. Annual reviews and transition plans for pupils with statements of SEN are carried out efficiently. However, the assessment of pupils with literacy difficulties at the beginning of Year 7 takes too long. As a result, extra support for several Year 7 pupils had not yet been provided at the time of the inspection.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

49. The school makes good overall provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all pupils, including those with special educational needs. The range of opportunities for pupils to develop these aspects has improved significantly since the last inspection.

50. There is satisfactory provision for the spiritual development of pupils. The school still does not provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils, although this was a key issue in the previous inspection report. The governing body, having reviewed the provision, states that it is not possible to meet statutory requirements because of the lack of suitable rooms for pupils to assemble in each day. The assemblies that are provided for pupils are usually worthwhile occasions that promote the ethos of the school and sometimes provide planned opportunities for spiritual reflection. However, the assemblies do not always include an act of collective worship and therefore do not comply with statute.

51. The staff use informal opportunities well to promote the spiritual development of pupils, although departments do not have formal policies for this. In music, opportunities for spiritual development are significant because of the high standards achieved and the vast range of opportunities to make music and to perform.

52. The school makes very good provision for the moral development of pupils. Pupils are given opportunities to learn to distinguish between right and wrong in a range of subjects. For example, in history debates about the abolition of slavery are used to good effect, and in drama younger pupils explore issues relating to the holocaust. Adults in the school are very good role models, being considerate and fair-minded.

53. The provision for the social development of pupils is excellent. The range of responsibilities given to pupils of all ages is exceptional, and this makes a significant contribution to the nurture of self-esteem and personal development. The house system enables pupils of all ages to play an active role in the life of the school by

organising a wide range of activities and duties. The 'Buddy' system provides opportunities for older pupils to learn to exercise responsibility and to care sensitively for younger pupils. The wide programme of tournaments, displays, visits, residential and exchanges, arranged by many departments, encourage pupils to learn independence and develop the ability to get on with each other. Pupils with special educational needs are fully involved in all aspects of the school's life.

54. There is satisfactory provision for the cultural development of pupils. The wide range of music and drama activities, combined with visits and some curriculum topics in history, religious education and design and technology, contribute well to pupils' cultural development. However, the provision for multicultural education is unsatisfactory and pupils are not being adequately prepared for adult life in a varied multicultural society. The raising of multicultural awareness is not included in the personal, health and social education programme.

Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

55. The school makes very good provision for the support, guidance and welfare of pupils, including those with special educational needs. Since the last inspection the school has strengthened its ability to support all pupils well by an improved pastoral system and greater parental involvement. It has maintained strong links with a wide range of support services for pupils on the SEN register.

56. There are very good procedures in place for monitoring the academic progress and personal development of pupils. Heads of houses monitor the performance of all pupils effectively and the use of individual targets is good. The focus on target minimum grades at Key Stage 4 has a positive effect on the standards achieved and on pupils' confidence in their ability to improve.

57. The school promotes good discipline and behaviour well so that standards of behaviour in the school are very good. There are effective measures for discouraging bullying. A wide range of rewards is used for behaviour, as well as effort and achievement, and pupils are keen to receive these. Sanctions are appropriate, and pupils and parents agree that they are used fairly.

58. The school's promotion of attendance is excellent and has resulted in improvement. Child protection procedures are effective and meet statutory requirements. There is good first aid provision and pupils injured or taken ill during the day are given good and sensitive care.

59. The arrangements made for the induction of pupils to Year 7 and in other years are excellent and warmly appreciated by pupils and parents. Pupils of all ages settle into their new school very quickly. Pastoral guidance is very good at both key stages and careers advice is excellent.

60. A number of health and safety concerns, such as inadequate accommodation, movement of hazardous materials and unsafe electrical installation, have been reported to the headteacher.

Partnership with parents and the community

61. The school works effectively to promote an excellent partnership with parents. A significant number of parents and others report that they are encouraged to play an active part by contributing to the life of the school as mentors for pupils, by accompanying educational visits and by invigilating examinations. Parents support the completion of homework, regular attendance, the wearing of correct uniform and encourage pupils to take part in the many extra-curricular activities. The Friends of the Castle School provide valuable financial support as well as a focus for social activities.

62. The school provides excellent information for parents. The wide range of curriculum and settling-in guides, the prospectus, the student organisers, newsletters and bulletins ensure that parents have all the information that they need. In addition, a full programme of study and induction evenings and consultation appointments keep parents fully informed about their child's progress and what they are studying; these occasions are well organised. Reports are informative and meet statutory requirements. Parents of pupils on the SEN register are all well informed about their children's needs. They are invited to regular progress reviews, which the majority attend. The prospectus contains all statutory elements but the annual report of the governing body lacks details about arrangements for SEN pupils.

63. The school has developed excellent links with industry and the local community, and these significantly enrich the curriculum. These links are strengthened further by a very good work experience programme. An exciting and effective Industry Day has been developed since the last inspection, which received a Business Partnership award in 1999. The improved business links have produced some valuable resources and enabled a significant number of pupils at Key Stage 4 to receive mentoring. The mentoring scheme effectively supports the standards achieved at GCSE and helps to raise the self-confidence of the pupils involved.

64. There is extremely good liaison with the primary schools which send pupils to the Castle School, and with the providers of the next phase of education. This liaison ensures a smooth transition of pupils with minimum disruption of progress.

65. Pupils are encouraged to take part in a wide range of community activities from playing for sports clubs to providing music at many events. These opportunities all support pupils' personal development well.

THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

Leadership and management

66. The school has formulated a set of clear aims and values which give a comprehensive view of the purposes of the school and the values for which it stands. In particular the school will continue to develop strategies to raise the attainment of individual pupils, further develop IT facilities and programmes which will enhance the learning of pupils, enhance the quality of the learning environment, and further develop an effective monitoring and evaluation programme which supports high quality teaching and learning.

67. Very high standards are set by the headteacher who provides strong and

effective leadership. There is good support provided by an effective senior management team who work hard to promote an open and consultative form of management which is reflected throughout the school at every level.

68. The governing body fulfils its legal responsibilities very well, providing good, informed and sensitive support. However, its annual report to parents does not meet statutory requirements in relation to reporting on pupils with special educational needs. All statutory policies are in place. An appropriate range of effective committees with executive powers continues to ensure the successful development of the school. Individual governors are involved, both formally and informally, at every level of school life. The identified governor for special educational needs works well with the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO).

69. The school's SENCO manages SEN provision very efficiently and has built up a team of committed, effective support staff. The SEN policy meets most of the recommendations of the Code of Practice but lacks any clear criteria for the evaluation of the success of what the school provides for these pupils.

70. The quality of the school development plan has improved further since the last inspection. It has a realistic and appropriate range of targets and contains the necessary financial and training priorities. It is used as a valuable working document to inform planning and is reviewed and modified regularly by a well-structured consultative process to ensure that priorities are sharply focused and that planning is good. However, the school is still not complying to statute with respect to IT and collective worship.

71. Communication within the school is very good. A regular cycle of meetings and briefings is supplemented by considerable co-operation and a very positive team spirit on the part of the whole staff. Communication to parents and the wider community is excellent both in its range and quality.

72. Management of the curriculum on a day-to-day basis is good overall. Leadership at departmental level is generally good and often very good. Non-teaching staff give very good support and work well together, although they are too few in number for a school of this size.

73. The school is aware of any equal opportunities issues as they arise and has worked hard, since the last inspection, to improve the balance of males and females on the staff. Pupils of all attainment levels and backgrounds are given equality of access to the curriculum.

74. Monitoring of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection but to ensure further consolidation of good practice there is a need to increase the amount of direct classroom observation.

75. Overall the quality of leadership and management has improved further and is now very good. The school is now well placed to extend this improvement further.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

76. The match of the qualifications and experience of the teaching staff to the demands of the curriculum is good. All subjects are taught by well-qualified specialists. Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined though at present job descriptions are under review. There is a high pupil-teacher ratio due to a steady reduction in the overall number of teaching staff over the last four years and a rise in the number of pupils. This results in a low non-contact time and large classes, and some Key Stage 3 classes are split between two teachers. Whilst there is no evidence that any of these factors affect the progress of pupils adversely, the situation relies for its success on the goodwill of the staff and the high standards of pupils' behaviour. Last year there were 11 new appointments, many of them newly qualified teachers, and this has improved the balance between youth and experience. The only area where the staffing arrangements are less than satisfactory is in the art department which is struggling with the long-term absences of the head and second in the department and is having to rely heavily on temporary part-time teachers. There is a strong team of learning support assistants. In recent years they have attended much relevant in-service training and have a good range of appropriate experience.

77. Qualifications and experience of support staff are good but their number is inadequate for the workload and the school is relying on their goodwill to provide many hours of unpaid overtime. There are insufficient administrative support staff, no music technician, no foreign language assistants and insufficient science technicians. There has been no improvement in this area since the last inspection.

78. Arrangements for the induction and professional development of all staff are satisfactory. There are comprehensive induction handbooks for new staff, who are closely supervised by their line managers. In-service training is linked to curriculum needs and the school development plan. Staff have the opportunity to attend meetings with colleagues from other schools. All support staff have regular meetings with their colleagues and their line managers. Appraisal for teaching staff is in abeyance at present. However, in many departments teaching is observed by heads of department and members of the senior management team, and plans are being implemented for this to be increased.

79. Although the school is situated on a pleasant, compact site there are serious deficiencies in the quality of over 25 per cent of the accommodation provision. With increasing pupil numbers, there are still 13 temporary classrooms, which are inadequate teaching rooms. They are too small for large group teaching, limiting considerably the teaching and learning strategies of subjects taught, including all the core subjects. The main assembly areas are also too small and could pose health and safety problems of overcrowding. The dining area is small but provides a good service through careful management.

80. Since the last inspection, there have been major improvements in the provision for PE: facilities, which are now of a high standard, are jointly used by the school and the community. Although music is a strength in the school the accommodation used for music is unsatisfactory, rooms being scattered about the campus and practice rooms inadequate. A number of subjects are taught in non-specialist areas. Science is taught in a room without proper services thus requiring the movement of hazardous materials; some laboratories need urgent refurbishment and the need to use three preparation rooms does not make for efficient organisation of resources. The cleaning of some art

and technology areas is inadequate. There is just sufficient accommodation to deliver the curriculum but teaching and learning provision overall is unsatisfactory.

81. There are some pleasant seating areas for pupils and good grass and surfaced provision for a range of lunch and after-school activities. Excellent displays of pupils' achievements and the virtual absence of litter or graffiti all promote an excellent ethos. The general maintenance of the buildings is quickly and effectively carried out by the site manager and his staff, who achieve this without their own workshop accommodation.

82. The overall provision of resources for learning is poor and is inadequate for the school's curriculum and range of pupils. There are insufficient textbooks in science, modern foreign languages, geography, history, design and technology subjects and in mathematics, where although textbooks are new, pupils have to purchase their own copies for homework and reference. Equipment is old and in need of replacement in science, there is only one video machine for all humanities classes, there are deficiencies in quality and quantity of musical instruments for statutory class work at Key Stage 3 as well as deficiencies in design and technology and IT. The history and geography departments make good use of the locality as a resource for learning.

83. The library is well managed and attractively presented but too small for a school of this size. The librarian is a trained teacher and she is supported by an effective team of pupil assistants who are trained to operate the computerised loan system. There is good access for pupils before, during and after lessons and it is well used. A high proportion of books are less than ten years old but book-stock is low for comprehensive schools with a ratio of books to pupils of approximately 7:1.

84. The ratio of pupils to computers at 19:1 is very poor compared to the national average and has declined seriously since the previous inspection due to the removal of the most obsolete machines. The quality of the remaining computers is variable, some being eight years old and the quality of software is unsatisfactory for some subjects. There are no computers at all for pupil use in some departments such as English, modern foreign languages, mathematics (which also lacks graphic calculators), history, art, or religious education. There is no computer aided design or control facility in design and technology and little provision for music technology. The learning development department has insufficient access to computers to help pupils on the SEN register. Several of these pupils would benefit from word processing more of their work and from the use of voice recognition software.

85. Despite improvements in the quality of textbooks in mathematics and modern foreign languages and the access to the joint-use sports hall for physical education there has been a significant decline in resources for learning since the previous inspection.

The efficiency of the school

86. Management of the school's funds has improved further since the last inspection in spite of a significant reduction of funding. Expenditure is overseen by a very effective bursar and reflects closely the clear and well understood aims of the school. Overall financial planning is excellent. An informed and committed finance

committee of governors ensures that finance procedures are effective and monitored well. The most recent external audit (1997) has judged the financial systems employed by the school to be sound. The few minor recommendations have been implemented fully.

87. The school enhances its overall funding well through successful bids for money to such agencies as the National Lottery, the Bishop Fox's Foundation, the Foundation of Sport and the Arts and through the efforts of an active Friends of the Castle School Association.

88. All staff contribute regularly to the dialogue on expenditure. Monitoring of expenditure on a day-to-day basis is excellent, including the use of the extra budget it receives from the local authority for pupils with special educational needs. However, it does not identify clearly the resources it provides for these pupils from its own budget.

89. Funding to subject departments is well organised through a combination of directed funds on a historical basis and specific departmental bids. The proportion of money allocated to bids is, at present, low. An increase in the percentage of funding to bids would improve flexibility and help to reduce the overall effect of a low level of funding related to learning resources.

90. Administrative and technical staff are effective despite the fact that they are too few in number. They are deployed and led well. To achieve good results, however, they have to work above their contracted hours and their present effectiveness is partly as a result of goodwill on their part. Teaching staff, including those who support SEN pupils, are deployed well; they are appropriately qualified and experienced.

91. Accommodation is inadequate with many unsuitable and overcrowded classrooms. There are several health and safety issues to be resolved.

92. In relation to the standards achieved and the quality of education provided by the school it now offers very good value for money.

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

English

93. The national tests for English at the end of Key Stage 2 for 1999 indicate that the attainment of pupils on entry to the school is above the national average for pupils of similar age.

94. During Key Stage 3 all pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in language skills' development. Pupils' speaking and listening skills develop very well. Most pupils are confident in speaking and many are fluent in their use of language in a variety of contexts and groupings. In group and pair work pupils discuss and negotiate thoughtfully, generally express themselves clearly and are able to advance and defend a point of view effectively. Contributions to class discussion are mostly well judged and maturely expressed showing awareness of appropriate language. In a Year 7 lesson pupils who were creating their own "alternative" fairy tales were able to explain their thinking with clarity and enthusiasm.

95. The attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 in the national tests in 1999 was above the national average at level 5 and well above the national average at level 6. These results, which were confirmed during the inspection, were above the average for schools with pupils from similar backgrounds. Taking the three years 1996-1998 together the performance of pupils in English is above the national average. Over this period the performance of boys was above the national average, while that of girls was close to the national average.

96. The department's policy is to enter virtually all pupils for both English and English literature at GCSE. In English the percentage of pupils gaining the higher A*-C grades in 1999 was above the national average for all maintained schools. English literature results were well above average. In 1999 the percentage of higher grade passes for English increased significantly. All pupils entered for these examinations attained at least a pass grade. Over the last four years results have made sustained improvement.

97. Reading skills develop well at both key stages, with all pupils showing increasing competence and improving awareness of implied as well as literal meanings. Reading aloud is mostly well done: expressive, clear and accurate. Pupils' written work is generally good and shows increasing control and accuracy in a range of different kinds of writing. They make effective notes and use drafting well. Presentation of written work is mostly very good and includes a variety of formats such as booklets and posters. There is competent use of word processing.

98. Progress through Key Stage 4 is good for all pupils, including those with special educational needs. All aspects of pupils' language skills continue to develop very well. Speaking and listening skills are displayed in the confident, pertinent and sometimes extended contributions which many pupils make to class and group work and in the responses that they make. A Year 10 group of lower attaining pupils discussing social

and cultural dilemmas which education can provoke - in preparation for reading *Educating Rita* - showed sensitive understanding of the issues through their well-expressed responses to the teacher's skilful questioning.

99. At both key stages pupils have very positive attitudes to their work, nearly always showing keen interest, responding enthusiastically to the tasks set for them and maintaining good concentration and focus. Lapses in concentration are very rare. Pupils respond very positively to encouragement to extend their study through further research. Relationships with teachers are very good. Pupils work well together when asked to do so and show respect for each other's ideas. They are supportive of each other and show appreciation for each other's efforts. When opportunities arise pupils are keen to take initiative or accept responsibility. The department's policy of involving pupils regularly in self-evaluation and target-setting encourages pupils to recognise their responsibilities.

100. Teaching is very good or excellent in almost three-quarters of lessons. In almost nine out of ten lessons teaching is good, very good or excellent. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. The very good relationships which teachers maintain with pupils and the very high quality of most of the teaching contribute significantly to pupils' good progress.

101. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of the subject and are effective in presenting information and ideas to pupils. Lesson planning is well supported by the department's schemes of work and resource materials, although occasionally there is insufficient planning of the use of time to ensure that the pace of the lesson is maintained throughout. Expectations of what pupils can achieve are appropriately high and pupils respond very well to the demands made upon them and to the praise and encouragement with which teachers support their efforts. Teachers use an appropriate range of teaching methods and offer pupils a wide range of stimulating learning activities. There is very good use of pair and group work and also very good whole class teaching. Pupils are managed very well: the interesting, varied and demanding work, and the very good relationships with teachers, contribute to the consistently good behaviour. Learning resources materials produced by the department are effectively deployed but other resources are limited.

102. Written work is marked carefully and teachers' comments suggest ways for pupils to improve their work. In lessons teachers are good at assessing what pupils are doing and suggesting directions for improvement. Pupils have good information about the criteria by which their work is judged, and self-assessment and target-setting by pupils are a regular, important and effective feature of the department's practice. However, there is some inconsistency in the application of this policy. The department is aware of this and is addressing the issue. Homework is used very effectively to support work in class or to prepare for work to come.

103. The English curriculum is well planned and meets the needs of all pupils. The organisation of groups is effective in providing appropriate learning environments for pupils of different levels of prior attainment. Gender grouping in Years 10 and 11 is an interesting experiment, which the department is monitoring carefully, to try to raise attainment further. Many lessons give rise to opportunities for pupils to consider wider

moral, social, spiritual and cultural issues. Although the department has multicultural texts within its resources, there is no policy on using them and no monitoring to ensure that all pupils have experience of reading and discussing them. The department enhances the curriculum through opportunities for all pupils to take part in extra-curricular activities such as the numerous theatre visits, the Writers' Club and the annual magazine which is produced for Year 6 primary school pupils.

104. The head of department provides very good leadership and clear direction for the department, well supported by his colleagues. The department has a lively and innovative approach with an ethos of high achievement and of collaboration and contribution. Teachers work well together and maintain a supportive and effective learning environment to help all pupils reach their full potential. Development planning is very good. Monitoring of the progress and the work of the department is well done through both formal and informal procedures.

105. Two of the rooms in which English is taught are temporary classrooms away from the main department area. Both rooms are small and unsatisfactory; they do not provide a helpful learning environment. An additional difficulty which the department works hard to mitigate is that a number of classes are shared between teachers. This has a potentially limiting effect upon pupils' attainment and progress which requires extra work from teachers to try to offset.

106. The quality of display of pupils' work and other helpful teaching materials on the walls of classrooms is unusually good and creates a positive learning environment. Teachers are effective in using it to enhance pupils' learning.

107. The department has made good progress since the last inspection in addressing most of the issues raised: the schemes of work at Key Stage 3 are better adjusted to ensure progression across the years; a more systematic approach to spelling has been established. There remains the need to ensure further compliance with the department's policy on the use of pupils' self-evaluation.

Drama

108. Drama is part of the performing arts department. All pupils at Key Stage 3 receive one drama lesson (one hour) a week which is an improvement since the last inspection. At Key Stage 4 drama is a popular GCSE option for pupils.

109. Attainment and progress of pupils in drama at both key stages are at least at the national expectation and sometimes above. The percentage of pupils attaining GCSE higher grades of A*-C in drama in both 1998 and 1999 was average in comparison with the 1998 and 1999 results for all maintained schools. All pupils who entered achieved at least a pass grade.

110. Drama is well managed and the teaching is good or very good. Relationships between teachers and pupils are good. Almost all pupils respond very positively to work in drama, bringing enthusiasm, concentration and commitment to their work.

111. Drama makes an important contribution to pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development through the opportunities it presents for pupils to reflect upon

themselves and their relationships as well as to put themselves imaginatively in other people's places. Drama also makes an important contribution to the speaking and listening skills of pupils and provides extra-curricular opportunities by involving many pupils through the annual whole school production and regular drama projects.

Mathematics

112. Pupils' attainment on entry is just above the national average. Pupils' overall performance in Key Stage 3 tests in 1999 is well above national averages for both level 5 and level 6. Attainment is well above that of schools with similar backgrounds. Boys' results are marginally better than girls'. Over a three year period, at the end of Key Stage 3, attainment has improved at a faster rate than is seen nationally and is similar to that in science and better than in English.

113. Higher attaining Year 9 pupils further their understanding of statistics when constructing spreadsheets to calculate the mean, median and range of different sets of data. Lower attaining pupils improve their knowledge of three-dimensional solids when drawing their representations on isometric paper. Whilst pupils have a good feel for number and reliable methods for calculating correct answers, they lack the anticipated fluency for mental mathematics within this key stage.

114. GCSE results continue to be well above those for similar schools as they were at the last inspection. The fall from 63 per cent A*-Cs achieved in 1997 to 53.3 per cent in 1998 was more than restored in 1999 when 65.4 per cent attained these grades; this is well above the national average. Overall there is no significant difference between girls' and boys' performance. Pupils achieve a success rate which is in line with or better than that for most subjects studied in the school. GCSE statistics, taken first in 1997 by the highest attaining pupils, is now being offered to pupils with a wider range of attainment. No valid comparisons or trends can be determined; however, the work studied provides a valuable contribution to the improved levels of attainment in GCSE mathematics.

115. At Key Stage 4, attainment is good and above national expectations. Higher attaining Year 11 pupils are successfully taking the initial steps towards sketching transformations of quadratic functions. Coursework shows a high standard of application of knowledge and understanding of mathematics, for example when using statistics to test the validity of a football commentator's statement that 'a goal is usually conceded quickly after one has been scored'. Standards of presentation are generally good, with pupils usually following teachers' advice to show all working. However, some pupils still need to show more calculations supported by written English to explain their thought processes.

116. Pupils' progress at both key stages is generally good. Higher attaining pupils' enthusiasm and motivation contribute strongly to building good mathematical foundations of discovery, testing hypotheses and developing proofs, evident in Year 8. Year 10 pupils enjoy the intellectual challenge offered by algebraic proofs. Careful setting arrangements across whole-year groups from Year 9, together with teachers' knowledge of pupils, are further factors contributing to good progress. However, when the teaching of a class is split between two teachers, pupils' progress in some classes is adversely affected. Key Stage 4 pupils find the target minimum grades and estimated

GCSE grades an incentive towards an achievable goal. From Year 9, pupils with special educational needs make good progress resulting from the teacher's commitment and faith in pupils to succeed together with high-quality teaching. This is despite the limited provision of additional support from special needs assistants.

117. Pupils' behaviour is good and often very good. They are keen to listen, learn and participate in lessons and sustain concentration throughout. Pupils ask questions to gain further understanding and show team work when working in groups. Relationships with each other and teachers are very good and contribute to the partnership in learning.

118. There is no unsatisfactory teaching; half promotes good educational standards and a further quarter is very good or excellent. The proportion of good and very good teaching is higher at Key Stage 4. Teachers have good subject knowledge and a strong commitment to pupils. Better lessons are characterised by careful construction and by teachers anticipating pupils' difficulties and using their voices effectively to share enthusiasm as well as to set a good pace. Teachers supply prompt support to pupils during lessons through verbal and written comments following the marking of homework. Control of pupils is almost effortless, a further demonstration of the strong relationships which teachers have with classes. Some satisfactory teaching could be improved by increasing the pace and the range of activities.

119. The head of department works with determination to raise standards of attainment through involving all teachers in curriculum development, as in Year 7 and Year 8 where teachers annotate schemes of work to share successful practices. Teachers maintain their own record systems for pupil attainment, which have yet to be evaluated, to provide assessment information to the school's central database. This is used effectively when monitoring pupils' progress and considering changes in setting arrangements.

120. The departmental room is a real asset. It is here that ideas are shared and monitoring takes place informally. However, the demountable buildings are too small, poorly ventilated and pose serious constraints on the range of mathematical experiences and support pupils can receive. Some blackboards are poorly illuminated or in need of refurbishment and pose additional burdens on teachers.

121. The department has made a number of improvements since the previous inspection. A new series of textbooks, which addresses the needs of all pupils, has been adopted and examination results at the end of both key stages have continued to improve. The numbers taking GCSE statistics have grown. Little progress has been made in developing IT to enhance and broaden pupils' mathematical experiences. New appointments and modifications resulting from assessment information have strengthened teaching.

Science

122. Very high attainment is the hallmark of science in this school. There has been a steady improvement since the last inspection.

123. Pupils enter the school having attained standards in the end of Key Stage 2

tests which are about half a level above the national averages.

124. This advantage is improved upon and, in the tests at the end of Key Stage 3, pupils attain standards which are about a whole level above these national figures. In 1999, at twice the national figure, the proportion of pupils gaining the highest test grades is spectacular.

125. This excellent start at Key Stage 3 produces GCSE results which are significantly higher than national averages for similar schools in 1999. Over the past four years standards in double award science have been one grade higher than the national averages. Virtually all pupils gain a pass at GCSE. Compared with similar schools an exceptionally high proportion of pupils regularly gain the highest A* grade at GCSE. Standards observed during the inspection were higher than the national average at both key stages. Attainment for both boys and girls is similar.

126. In lessons observed at Key Stage 3 most pupils make good progress and attain standards which are fully in line with the national expectations. Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of scientific facts. In one lesson, more able Year 9 pupils worked expertly with the electronic structure of elements to figure out the reactivity of metals; a topic which would normally be studied for GCSE. However, many pupils at Key Stage 3 are less proficient at using this knowledge to explain predictions and conclusions from their scientific investigations. In this respect, little has changed since the last inspection. The scheme of work which guides the teaching of science at Key Stage 3 does not always indicate what has already been studied at Key Stage 2 and as a result, particularly in some Year 7 lessons, pupils are not always challenged at high enough levels. This means that at Key Stage 3, even though the test results at the end of Year 9 are outstanding, pupils could attain even higher standards.

127. It is at Key Stage 4 that pupils make best progress. One class of Year 10 chemists studying neutralisation have made as much progress in the first half term of the course as one might expect over two years. A middle ability group in Year 11 studying osmosis exceeds similar expectations. Many pupils make very good progress in lessons. For example a Year 10 group studying enzymes already show they are able to attain very high GCSE grades. A parallel group makes similar progress in developing an understanding of wave motion. Pupils with special educational needs make particularly good progress at both key stages.

128. Pupils enjoy science lessons. They show interest in what their teachers tell them and are motivated to sustain concentration. They are very well behaved and work together well when carrying out practical experiments and investigations. They are particularly good at selecting and using scientific apparatus. They always handle chemicals safely and work confidently. All pupils are developing the practical skills of observation, measurement and recording results at a good rate. Many pupils are good at using their mathematical skills to perform calculations and draw graphs when carrying out scientific work. More and more they are using computers to enhance and enrich their IT capabilities which is an improvement since the last inspection.

129. Very good and sometimes excellent teaching is the strength of the science department. The hard work by a team of talented teachers is a major contribution to the high standards attained by pupils. Teachers are well qualified and have a good grasp

of scientific principles. This enables them to provide very clear explanations of difficult ideas so that pupils find it easy to understand them. Teachers make very good use of questions which probe pupils' knowledge to help them develop better understanding. Teachers are particularly good at organising practical work which engages pupils' interest. They work very hard to prepare lessons and manage them well. Teachers give very clear instructions so that all pupils understand exactly what they have to do. Most lessons are taught at a brisk pace and pupils make good progress. Teachers enjoy very good relationships with their classes, which motivates pupils to participate fully in lessons.

130. Teachers set homework regularly and mark both this and classwork thoroughly. They make reliable assessments of pupils' progress, particularly at GCSE. The assessments made by teachers are supported by an excellent database provided by the school, which shows pupils' prior attainment. At present, teachers are not using this assessment data sufficiently enough to plan their lessons to address the needs of individual pupils.

131. The department is well led by a hard-working and excellent head of science who has a clear vision for a science education that is dedicated to raising standards and preparing pupils for adult life. The department is very well managed on a day-to-day basis and the roles and functions of each teacher are well understood. This very effective organisation provides the secure platform from which good teaching takes place.

132. At present there is no programme of formal monitoring of lessons by the head of science to judge the quality of teaching and learning and evaluate if the aims and aspirations of the department are achieved in practice. The schemes of work for Key Stage 3 do not ensure that key ideas, started in the primary schools, are taught progressively through the key stage. The head of science sees these tasks as high priorities if standards are to be raised even higher.

133. The output of the science department in terms of test and examination success is first class. This job is made very difficult because the hard working teachers are not fully supported by the shortage of funds. The number of laboratory technicians remains as inadequate as reported in the last inspection and is affecting learning and therefore standards. They are a team of well-qualified people who provide an excellent service to teachers and pupils. There are not enough textbooks for all pupils studying GCSE to use at home and this affects standards. A significant number of lessons are taught in classrooms which are not suited to the teaching of practical science and this, coupled with over-large classes in small laboratories, affects standards as well as health and safety.

OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES

Art

134. GCSE results have remained above the national average in recent years. In 1998, A*-C grades, at 73 per cent, compared favourably with the average of 58 per cent for this type of school and were similar in 1999. Compared with pupils' GCSE grades in other subjects in the school, however, these results are less favourable, especially for boys.

135. In lessons at Key Stage 3, standards are broadly average, with attainment in painting above that level, especially in Years 7 and 8. This also applies to many boys' work. In other aspects, boys' attainment is lower and by the end of the key stage, the school's own assessments and the evidence of inspection show boys that achieve well below expectations for Year 9. This is partly because of the current design and technology/textiles project in Year 9, where boys are not attaining well against art expectations. Early in the key stage, and where pupils are studying art only, two-dimensional skills are often good. Pupils' research and their written recording of this are mostly above average. However, pupils often incorporate this imaginatively into their visual explorations. Pupils who now go through into GCSE art at Key Stage 4 produce work which is often well above average. In the current Year 10, the majority of these are girls, of whom expectations are much higher nationally. Almost all Key Stage 4 pupils maintain their good standards in painting and drawing, underpinned by a wide range and high level of well-recorded visual and written research. At this stage, pupils' individual, personal interpretations of this research, and the high quality of their sketchbooks, make a good contribution to the overall standards of their projects. Standards are higher in two dimensional work, with many girls developing high quality in textiles-based projects such as silk painting.

136. Pupils' attitudes to art are variable and affect the progress they make at both key stages, but particularly at Key Stage 4. In art lessons at both key stages, attitudes are good, with pupils learning key practical and research skills very effectively and applying these increasingly creatively in their art work. The art curriculum is, however, currently influenced by a recent decision to introduce the design/textiles project into Year 9, further eroding a large proportion of already limited art time. The project appears to alienate many boys, who are already under-represented at Key Stage 4. These attitudes are not apparent in Years 7 and 8, where both genders respond well to the textiles projects they do. Progress of pupils with SEN is at least satisfactory and sometimes good at both key stages.

137. At the time of inspection the department was adversely affected by long-term absence of the two permanent art teachers, including the head of department. Temporary and supply teachers were covering most of the timetable, with an acting head of department in place. Given these circumstances, the quality of teaching is commendable. All teaching observed was at least satisfactory, with much good and very good teaching evident. The best teaching is at Key Stage 4, where many lessons are very good. The best lessons show teachers using time well, challenging pupils with a good questioning style and giving useful, oral feedback which encourages and stretches pupils. Where it is less effective at Key Stage 3, teaching over-emphasises

technology aspects of projects at the expense of the creative aspects of art.

138. The department has maintained most of its strengths since the last inspection, and the school has sought to minimise the effects of the present difficulties. The acting head of department, ably assisted by one of the technicians, has worked hard to keep the department running smoothly, to integrate a newly qualified teacher into the department, and to use supply teachers effectively. Thus far, adverse effects on pupils' learning have been minimal. However, the criticisms from the last inspection have not been addressed. Sculpture work has not been included into the curriculum sufficiently well; IT is still not available in the art department; pupils' access to computers is thus still lacking, and still limits learning opportunities.

Design and technology

139. Standards in design and technology, at the end of Key Stage 3, are above national expectations. In the 1999 design and technology GCSE examinations over three-quarters of Year 11 pupils achieved A*-C grades. These results are well above national averages. In the workshop and workroom pupils at both key stages attain standards which are above national expectations for pupils of the same age.

140. In Year 9 pupils working with food demonstrated good practical skills as they worked on a rice and pasta project. They have good research skills and can identify and make appropriate use of sources of information. Pupils working with wood in a mirror frame project measured, cut and assembled a range of joints with good accuracy and attention to finish. Their drawing skills are good. Pupils working with textiles conducted good surveys of potential users in a project to design and make tents. They used sketches and drawings well to communicate their ideas. They made good use of modelling to test designs and have good knowledge of the properties of materials and of techniques and processes; they successfully apply this in the work they undertake.

141. At Key Stage 4 standards are mainly above and often well above national expectations. Graphics products pupils working on their major projects produce folders that often feature a high degree of technical expertise. They make very good use of modelling to communicate their designs. Food technology pupils produce some very good examples of research into special diets. In practical sessions they produce work that often demonstrates very high standards of presentation. Some use IT very well to research and to communicate their projects. The specifications they develop for their designs draw on a good grasp of the required areas of knowledge and understanding. Pupils working with resistant materials produce folders that clearly set out the progress of the design process as they work through it. They demonstrate practical skills that are at least satisfactory. Textiles pupils choose challenging ideas for their design work, for example a study of the clothes developed for Marilyn Monroe.

142. Progress at both key stages is good, including the progress made by pupils with special educational needs. Pupils work with support booklets that guide them through the design process and help to maintain good progress. Pupils develop good levels of accuracy in measurement and in their drawing in all materials areas. They also develop their sketching well to explore designs especially in textiles. Pupils learn to use templates, patterns, models other aspects of manufacturing processes. They develop the use of time plans well especially in food technology. Key Stage 4 resistant materials

pupils successfully develop their communication skills in their folder work. Graphics pupils develop appropriate expertise in aspects of technical drawing such as the use of colour and shade. Overall pupils make good progress in the acquisition of the areas of knowledge and understanding required in the appropriate examination syllabi.

143. Pupils have good attitudes in this subject, are well motivated and work with care. They sustain concentration well especially during the times that teachers give instructions, explanations or expert demonstrations. Most maintain these levels of concentration when they are working on their individual tasks. They put in a lot of effort in the research and other work that they undertake at home. Behaviour is very good. Relationships are always positive and in most lessons teachers and pupils create productive and secure working environments.

144. Teaching is overall good. Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of the subject and this is evident in planning, in the expert practical demonstrations and in the quality of the feedback given to pupils. Expectations are high and the pace of lessons is often brisk leading to pupils making appropriate progress. Teachers offer a good range of approach and stress the importance of acquiring practical skills. The impact of this is evident in the good standards of practical skills demonstrated by pupils. Time management is good especially in food technology where timing is often crucial. Teachers assess well. They share assessment criteria with pupils which ensures that the latter are made aware of what is expected of them. The setting of targets is being developed. Homework is well used.

145. Since the last inspection there has been improvement in a number of areas. Teaching is more consistent. The use of information technology is now more extensive and makes a positive contribution to presentation and research. There is a need to acquire new IT equipment to resource the delivery of control technology and to ensure that the research demands of all courses are properly met. The department is developing its Key Stage 3 courses to rationalise the teaching of separate elements of the design process.

Geography

146. Attainment is above average at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. GCSE results for grades A*-C were above the national average between 1996 and 1999 showing an overall improvement. Results for grades A*-G have also been above the national average with 100 per cent pass rate for the last two years. Key Stage 4 pupils can formulate a geographical hypothesis, conduct an effective investigation and draw appropriate conclusions. They have a firm grasp of the relationship between geographical theory and practical observations. They understand and can describe physical factors affecting farming in the UK and models of urban growth.

147. Key Stage 3 teacher assessment results are above standards expected nationally and have improved from 1998 to 1999. By the age of 14 pupils have a firm grasp of map work; they can explain, describe and make comparisons both verbally and in writing. They can present information using graphs and charts and they can respond effectively to written and verbal questions. There are no overall differences in performance between girls and boys, though twice as many boys as girls opt for the

subject at the end of Key Stage 3.

148. Progress is good throughout both key stages. It is most notable in lessons where pupils are encouraged to think for themselves and are stimulated by a variety of activities. For example, the Year 7 practical work constructing a three-dimensional map to illustrate contour lines, and the Year 10 lesson following up fieldwork done on the River Barle were particularly effective. Pupils with special needs are making good progress and some well-planned support is a regular feature of lessons.

149. The overall quality of teaching is good at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4. Lessons are well planned with clear aims and objectives. There is still some lack of variety in teaching styles and limited use of visual stimuli, which was commented upon in the last report. Teachers are confident in their management of the pupils and expect high standards of work. Pupils are interested in their lessons and keen to do their best.

150. Leadership of the department is positive and effective and the ethos reflects a commitment to success. Since the last inspection fieldwork has been developed and is now integrated into the schemes of work for every year group. Schemes to use information technology as a teaching and learning tool have been implemented but cannot be fully developed without further staff training and easier access to computers. Subject-related stock in the library has been improved since the last inspection. Resources such as atlases, textbooks and audio-visual equipment are severely limited and carefully managed. Opportunities to enhance social, moral, spiritual and cultural development are not made explicit in the schemes of work, which means that these aspects are neglected.

• **History**

151. Standards in history by the end of Key Stage 3 are at national expectations. By the end of Key Stage 4 they are well above. In 1999 the department has achieved GCSE results which are above national averages by 20 per cent for both boys and girls, and better than in other subjects within the school. The extent to which girls outperform boys is greater than the average.

152. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils can research the textbook successfully, and make effective notes. They understand technical terms such as *propaganda* and *dissolution*. They are beginning to structure essays methodically, using evidence appropriately. Less than half are adept at using the Internet to acquire information beyond the textbook. Despite work on the reliability of sources at the beginning of the course there is little later reference to bias and alternative interpretations of history. Pupils are weak in chronology, having little idea how one event relates to another.

153. By the end of Key Stage 4 most pupils have reached standards above those expected nationally. They can research and write with much greater maturity. High attaining pupils can construct a well argued essay using appropriate evidence, for instance in drawing conclusions about the relative effectiveness of the suffragists and the suffragettes. Less successful, however, were attempts at arguing about the rights and wrongs of dropping the atom bomb on Hiroshima. Pupils over a range of

attainment can recall the work of Pasteur but cannot debate the historical environment which prompted his discoveries. In their personal projects they acquire a close knowledge of Taunton and its development. The work of low attaining pupils is sometimes weak in literacy and research.

154. Pupils enjoy history and respond very well to the tasks set. The number choosing to continue its study at Key Stage 4 has increased by a quarter in the last year. Progress at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory, and good at Key Stage 4, where pupils have learnt how to research for themselves and cope with extended writing. Progress is at its best when the pupils have time to reflect on and gain some ownership of their material. Pupils with SEN make good progress, better than prior attainment has predicted.

155. Teaching at Key Stage 3 is predominantly satisfactory; at Key Stage 4 it is good. Teachers prepare assiduously, and follow their plans methodically. They have created most harmonious relations with their pupils, so that discipline is never a problem. They explain clearly, using language appropriate to the attainment of the class. In some very good lessons the teacher regulates a variety of activities with extreme precision giving the pupils a firm structure and sense of security. At Key Stage 4 teachers have prepared model essays to illustrate the way an essay should be constructed. However materials used are not always suitable for either the highest or the lowest attainers. Teachers' knowledge, though adequate, is not displayed in such a way as to make the topic vivid with examples or anecdotes. Teachers generally make reasonable demands of pupils, although in a few lessons the tasks did not require much thought. Too rarely were pupils required to think, to reason, or to argue with each other.

156. The department is well managed. Morale is high, but money for resources is such that pupils in Year 11 are the only ones who can take books home for homework. Nearly a third of classes at Key Stage 3 are split between two teachers, thus impairing the continuity of teaching.

157. Standards since the last inspection have been maintained well. Some aspects commented on in the last report have been improved: there is now greater use of IT and visual aids. There is a much greater take-up into Key Stage 4 than four years ago, and examination results have improved year on year.

Information technology

158. Most pupils by the end of Key Stage 3, including those with special educational needs, attain standards that are at national expectations. They follow a basic skills course in Year 7 and most become proficient in a range of applications of information technology. A good number are able to consolidate the skills they acquire using the computers they have at home. They can competently use word processing software though keyboard skills are weak and input is sometimes painfully slow. This affects the progress of many pupils. Desktop publishing skills are generally not well advanced due to the limited software available for use in school. Pupils are able to create databases and search for information contained in them with some confidence as, for example, in a project based on the kind of databases kept by travel agents. They successfully search the Internet to undertake research in a number of subjects such as history,

geography and music. Pupils successfully enter data on a spreadsheet, use formulae and alter figures to explore financial information such as simple profit and loss accounts. They use art software to experiment with pattern and colour and are also able, by writing simple programs, to control the movement of a cursor about the computer screen. In science they make sound use of sensors to measure cooling curves of liquids.

159. Year 11 pupils attain standards that are below national expectations. There are a number of gaps in pupils' areas of capability in IT. Many have not had the benefit of any teaching of IT skills. Though some do undertake a useful IT course this only covers word processing, database and spreadsheet work. It does not cover the full range of National Curriculum IT. There is no systematic teaching of control and measurement at this key stage. The school is developing schemes of work, which make sure that this area of the curriculum is taught through other subjects such as science and technology. Because they are not taught the control and measurement aspect of National Curriculum IT, the school is in breach of statutory regulations regarding the teaching of IT at this key stage.

160. The provision of cross-curricular information technology is patchy but developing. It already provides pupils with some exciting opportunities to use information technology to enhance their learning through a narrow range of subjects. Pupils in music make good use of computers to model their compositions especially at Key Stage 4. In a range of subjects such as design and technology, religious education and history pupils use the Internet well for research.

161. The co-ordination of cross-curricular activities is not yet fully developed. There is no prescriptive scheme of work for information technology across the curriculum to guide and inform subject areas as they plan activities. Assessment in information technology is unsatisfactory. There are useful procedures for the assessment of cross-curricular IT but these are not, as yet, used effectively.

162. Most pupils including those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress during Key Stage 3 in the range of applications of information technology set out in the National Curriculum. Key Stage 4 pupils following the basic skills course make sound progress against the board's criteria in acquiring a range of basic skills. Overall pupils at Key Stage 4 make unsatisfactory progress in National Curriculum IT because they do not further develop their understanding of ways in which computers can control aspects of the world about them.

163. Attitudes are good. Most pupils including those with special educational needs enjoy the tasks in IT. In lessons they show good levels of concentration. Pupils make good use of the IT facilities at break and at lunchtime. They behave very well in class and keep on task, showing good levels of concentration. Pupils help each other and effectively share expertise; a number happily take on the responsibility of being IT assistants and supervise the use of IT rooms during lunchtimes.

164. The teaching observed during the inspection was of a satisfactory standard. Teachers have adequate subject knowledge and are able to give pupils effective guidance as they tackle tasks. Expectations are generally good. Planning is sound and produces lessons that have focus and which engage pupils' interest. Teachers

encourage the use of computers by pupils at break and lunchtime and this makes a positive contribution to pupils' progress especially in research.

165. There have been a number of changes since the last inspection. The provision of equipment has deteriorated considerably. There is one computer for every 19 pupils which is only half the national average. The resources to deliver the control element of National Curriculum IT are inadequate. Provision of software is barely adequate to deliver the rest of the curriculum. There has been improvement in the procedures for cross-curricular IT: all departments now have policies and a clear idea not only of what they should deliver but also how to assess it. The school intends to develop a portfolio approach to the recording of pupils' work and this should complement the efforts that have already been made in this area and produce a workable cross-curricular programme.

Modern languages

166. Pupils study either French or German from Year 7. The six highest of the eight sets now take both languages from Year 8, which is an improvement since the last inspection. All pupils take at least one language to GCSE. Numbers taking both are rising. A certificate of achievement is available to lower attainers.

167. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 show that standards are above national expectations. Average standards of work seen during the inspection confirm that teacher assessments are appropriate. Attainment at GCSE was above average in both languages at the last inspection. This position has been maintained since then, with about two-thirds of pupils in French and three-quarters in German regularly obtaining A*-C. For example, 64.2 per cent in 1998 in French compared well with the national average of 43.5 per cent, as did 75 per cent in German compared with 50.9 per cent nationally. Results dipped somewhat in 1999 to 44 per cent in French but remained high at 77 per cent in German. Results A*-G have been uniformly 100 per cent. Numbers obtaining A* have consistently been above average. Overall standards are above average by the end of both key stages, currently slightly better in German than in French at Key Stage 3. Both boys and girls do better than the respective national averages. Girls do better than boys, but the gap is far narrower than the national average and is improving.

168. Pupils generally listen and respond well to the foreign languages needing little recourse to English. French and German are used for all aspects of lessons including registrations, instructions and explanations. Year 9 pupils grasp relevant information about daily routine from authentic French recordings with little repetition. Year 11 German pupils show a reasonable grasp of vocabulary and tenses dealing with holidays. Speaking is at times hesitant but normally unambiguous. Pupils are careful to copy the good accents they hear. Year 9 pupils produced creative dialogues in French about booking accommodation and Year 11 competently discuss German food and drink, needing few prompts. Higher attainers in a Year 10 French class had no inhibitions engaging the inspector in conversation, but in general pupils are noticeably less confident in free conversation than they are in structured situations.

169. Reading skills are sound. Year 9 needed little support studying material in French on accommodation. Year 11 use dictionaries well to vary or extend their range

in German and to find information themselves. There is, however, no scheme of Reading for Pleasure to help development. Written work is consistently clear and accurate from Year 7 onwards. Lower attainers write sentences well, and higher attainers write freely in paragraphs by Year 9. The Year 11 coursework sampled was lengthy and of good quality.

170. Progress is good in all years. All pupils build up knowledge steadily, responding to the good teaching. Pupils with special needs make good progress towards demanding targets. They are usually hard to identify in class, so well are they helped to keep pace with their peers, especially on the few occasions that a support assistant is present to work in tandem with the class teacher. Lower attainers in Year 11 who began the certificate of achievement course in Year 10 have done so well in just over a year that several intend to try GCSE as well.

171. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are almost always positive, characterised by good relationships among themselves and with their teachers. They work well together in pairs and groups.

172. Teaching was satisfactory in all lessons seen, and good or very good in two thirds of them. Very good departmental management and strong teamwork are evident. The teachers speak the languages well. Some are native speakers. Good planning, matched to needs, provides opportunities for pair and group work, songs and games. All skills are usually addressed in each lesson. Brisk pace is normal, effectively using the time available and keeping pupils engaged. Grammar is well integrated. Suitable homework regularly reinforces classwork.

173. The foreign languages are clearly the languages of the classroom, and teachers expect them to be used. The good relationships between teachers and pupils keep difficulties to a minimum and ensure that pupils are unselfconscious and willing to participate. The large number of classes shared between two teachers, however, does not help to build relationships. Teachers also have to expend extra time and effort to assure continuity.

174. Marking is thorough, with supportive comments. However, the present systems do not regularly convey to pupils the balance of their strengths in the four language skills against national norms, especially at Key Stage 4. Information is as yet held only centrally in the department so that details about an individual's progress are less accessible than they could be. However an electronic system is to be introduced soon.

175. The teaching rooms are spread out so that there is no cohesive languages area. This compromises communication and efficient use of resources. Resources are barely adequate: books have to be shared, some are well-worn, and the lack of IT facilities within the department means that a lot of the good work displayed has been done by pupils at home.

• **Music**

176. Attainment in music through Key Stage 3 is above average for comprehensive schools despite widely variable experiences at Key Stage 2.

177. End of Key Stage 3 teacher assessment figures for 1999 show that more than 80 per cent of pupils were meeting or exceeding national expectations with a small but significant minority demonstrating exceptional performance. Inspection evidence supports this figure and suggests a similar outcome for the current Year 9. There is a tendency for girls to attain more highly than boys, which is a national trend. At the end of Key Stage 4 GCSE results are very good. In 1999 all candidates achieved grades A*-C and in 1998 and 1999 the proportion of A*/A grades was very high, despite the fact that the majority completed the course in one year and that take-up year on year is much higher than the national average.

178. Relative strengths by the end of Key Stage 3 include pupils' grasp of the practical significance of the elements of music, fluency with musical vocabulary, understanding of the basics of notation, the ability to compose and improvise and sensitivity to the music of other cultures. Compositions by Year 9 pupils in a range of world music genres were especially noteworthy as were some examples of Christmas song writing. Most pupils perform confidently using voice and instruments. They listen well and demonstrate thoughtful personal response in appraisal. The attainment of all is enhanced by the skills of the unusually large number of pupils having instrumental lessons and who are encouraged to bring their instruments to class lessons. Electronic keyboards are used extensively at Key Stage 3 and students develop appropriate skills; however expressive use of dynamics is negated by their lack of touch-sensitivity. Pupils acquire an understanding of how computers can be used in whole-class lessons but their scope as composition tools for individuals and small groups needs further development. Written work is exceptionally well presented by the majority of pupils.

179. At Key Stage 4 individual and group performance is of a high standard; composition is imaginative and varied and some is outstanding. Pupils' written commentaries are thorough and well presented. Pupils prepare themselves effectively for the listening component of the examination and the level of supporting knowledge and understanding is high. Pupils make very good use of computers for composition and presentation purposes. The attainment of all candidates is supported by participation in a wide range of extra-curricular music. Pupils who complete the course in one year suffer no adverse effects on attainment at GCSE.

180. Most pupils of all levels of prior attainment make good progress at Key Stage 3. Some good examples of exceptional progress by musically able pupils were observed at both stages especially when pupils were using their own instruments or had the responsibility for directing the efforts of small groups. Pupils with a range of special educational needs usually make at least satisfactory progress in practical lessons at Key Stage 3. The previous inspection report referred to a minority who '...find it hard to sustain concentration.' This group still exists, suffers from a loss of motivation by Year 9, and does not progress as well as the majority. Progress at Key Stage 4 is excellent for all pupils.

181. Most pupils enjoy music lessons at Key Stage 3. Behaviour is good with many examples of responsible collaboration and initiative observed. Unfortunately a minority appear to become daunted by the high standards achieved by so many of their peers. Morale in the Key Stage 4 GCSE groups is outstandingly high.

182. Teaching is almost always good or very good at Key Stage 3 and at times excellent at Key Stage 4. Lessons are exceptionally well prepared, varied, interesting and well paced. On occasion the pace at Key Stage 3 may be slightly excessive for a minority of pupils though explanations are always very clear. Assessment is effective, informative and manageable. High standards are expected and realised in written work. Homework is set and marking is up to date and promotes improvement. Good use is made of audio recording in lessons. The less motivated minority of pupils at Key Stage 3 need to be given more time to air their points of view, perceptions and emotional response to the subject, with a little less emphasis being placed on technical knowledge until this is achieved. This is very difficult for teachers to manage with the large classes they have for practical work.

183. The music department is exceptionally well led. Schemes of work meet National Curriculum requirements in full. The large programme of good quality instrumental teaching is efficiently managed and involves more than 20 per cent of pupils. An exceptionally wide range of extra-curricular music making draws in over a quarter of the school population and offers opportunities for players and singers of all levels of prior attainment. With inspired direction from staff ensembles containing a majority of more experienced performers attain excellence in performance with all other groups achieving a good standard. The Barbershop groups provide a special opportunity for boys to sing. There are frequent opportunities for performance in school, the community, and abroad.

184. Resources for music are barely satisfactory overall, and are unsatisfactory for classroom music at Key Stage 3 where quality and quantity of instruments are inadequate and there is only one computer. Accommodation is unsatisfactory in quality and location; this leads to inefficient distribution of resources. There is no window in the door of the room used for one-to-one instrumental teaching and trailing electrical leads are hazardous in one classroom.

185. Inspection evidence shows that, despite unsatisfactory accommodation and gaps in resources, there has been further improvement in attainment and ethos since the previous inspection. Music has become an even more significant strength in the school and planned developments should support further improvement.

Physical education

186. The 1999 GCSE physical education (games) entrants – the school's first – achieved passes at the higher grades, above the national average for all maintained secondary schools. A*-C passes were slightly below average when compared with other subjects in the school. The percentage of A*-G grades achieved by the 66 pupils was 100 per cent.

187. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above average. Opportunities are provided in most lessons for independent learning and, as a result, pupils plan work and judge performance effectively. In the creative aspects they combine actions into sequences which show control and fluency. High-attaining pupils perform movements characterised by originality and precision. In games, most show above-average individual skills, they communicate well in matches and understand basic attack and defence principles. Lower attainers often achieve beyond expectations, because

teaching is adapted to meet their needs. They have satisfactory individual skills but are less effective under game situation pressure. At the end of Key Stage 4 attainment is above average in relation to national expectations. Pupils undertake a well-structured health-related fitness programme and their knowledge of fitness aspects is good. Most can plan and perform tactics to outmanoeuvre opponents. In a Year 10 hockey lesson a high proportion of pupils effectively planned and performed short corners. Their willingness to make critical comments on each other's performance and ability to judge and adjust performance ensured improvement. GCSE groups are on target to achieve beyond national expectations. In Year 11 theory work, pupils plan individual fitness programmes, analyse data and draw accurate conclusions. The use of IT is under-developed due to lack of opportunity.

188. Progress across the attainment range at both key stages is good. As pupils move through the school they refine technique and develop a better understanding of tactics, rules and safety. Pupils improve their composition of movement skills and develop their ability to plan personal fitness programmes. They listen and want to improve. Their progress is aided by well-planned and challenging teaching. In a Year 11 basketball lesson, lower-attaining pupils improved beyond expectation because rules were modified, instructions simplified and equipment was adapted to their needs. Pupils with SEN are fully integrated into lessons and progress in line with most other pupils. High-attaining GCSE pupils develop good research, discussion and analytical skills.

189. Pupils' attitudes to learning and general behaviour in lessons are very good. They respond positively to questioning, communicate well in group work and try new skills with confidence.

190. The quality of teaching at both key stages is good. Teachers manage pupils very well and maintain first-class relationships with their classes. High but realistic expectations are set and pupils are challenged to deepen their knowledge and understanding. Teachers have clear aims and plan lessons well. In a Year 7 dance lesson the teacher created a stimulating learning environment through use of appropriate music, enthusiastic instruction and well-planned material. Opportunities were provided for pupils to plan, perform and evaluate. Pupils of all attainment levels made progress beyond expectations. Teaching in a few lessons provides insufficient opportunity for independent learning. GCSE homework is set regularly and marked appropriately.

191. Statutory requirements for planning the National Curriculum are met and a broad and balanced curriculum is offered. The subject is effectively led and appropriate policies are in place, including health and safety. Short term planning is good, but medium and longer term planning lacks sufficient detail for accurate forward planning. The department and ten other staff provide a successful extra-curricular sports programme in which 55 per cent of pupils participate. A Sports Mark Award recognises this provision. Individuals and teams perform well from inter-school to national levels, in a wide range of sports. The subject contributes considerably to the moral and social development of pupils.

192. Since the previous inspection curriculum time at Key Stage 3 has increased to the national average. Assessment criteria and learning objectives are well detailed in

the new schemes of work, but the use of assessment to inform curriculum planning is under-developed. Pupils now have more opportunities for independent learning and teaching is adapted to meet individual pupils' needs in most lessons. The new leisure complex provides excellent facilities and indoor accommodation is no longer a problem. Individual responsibilities are still not sufficiently delegated within the department.

Religious education

193. GCSE results at grades A*-C in 1999 are significantly above the national average, showing a steady increase over the past four years, with both boys and girls attaining almost similar high standards.

194. By the end of Key Stage 3, most pupils are attaining good standards, a little above the national expectation of the locally Agreed Syllabus. Many have gained a depth of knowledge about major world religions and spiritual and moral issues related to them. Pupils can discuss with confidence and competence such topics as the significance of the Passover and various religious theories. Strong literacy and presentation skills, including some IT usage, are used to advantage in producing some lengthy, detailed coursework. Pupils with learning difficulties are attaining appropriately, doing better at oral than literacy activities. By the end of Key Stage 4, the majority are also attaining above the national expectation, some achieving very high standards. Some very good coursework assignments are produced on a range of topics such as racism, marriage and abortion. These are well presented using developing IT skills. Some lively discussions on such topics were heard and pupils showed sensitivity and maturity in reaching considered opinions. Good independent learning skills are used to advantage in both class and homework.

195. Pupils' progress is good at both key stages but it is generally sound for those with learning difficulties, who find expressing their ideas in written form more demanding. Pupils develop strong subject knowledge and the skills of research, including the use of the Internet, through many opportunities provided. Most show a ready interest in lesson content, adopt positive learning attitudes and develop good personal relationships. Concentration is sustained well and behaviour is normally very good. Pupils are able to build well on previous knowledge and to use this to meet new challenges with confidence. Group and paired work is done sensibly; the views of others, however conflicting, are listened to with respect.

196. The quality of teaching is always at least good and occasionally very good. Teachers have good knowledge and are committed to the subject. Lessons are carefully planned to use time well, to vary the activities to sustain pupils' interest and to extend their learning. Good levels of challenge and expectation are evident in the variety of resources already developed for the range of ability taught. A number of teaching and learning strategies are employed with much emphasis placed on discussion of issues in paired and group work. Classes are well managed so that pupils can take an active part. Relationships are firm but friendly with teachers using humour appropriately. Marking is done regularly and good assessment of pupils' assignment work is done at the end of study units, recorded and reported to parents at each key stage. Homework is set regularly to extend pupils' understanding.

197. Since the last inspection, all pupils at Key Stage 4 have followed certificated

courses with assessments reported to parents. Schemes of work at Key Stage 3 have been revised and expanded to meet the Somerset Agreed Syllabus and all statutory requirements are fully met. More appropriate resources are being developed to meet the needs of all attainment levels. Sufficient time is allowed at both key stages to meet curriculum requirements.

PART C: INSPECTION DATA

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

198. The team consisted of 14 inspectors. During the week 169 lessons, amounting to over 170 hours of teaching and learning, registration sessions, school assemblies and a range of extra-curricular activities were inspected. Sixty planned discussions were held with members of staff, both teaching and non-teaching, and with members of the governing body. Inspectors looked at the written work of very many pupils. All the available written work of a representative sample of boys and girls in each year was inspected in depth and planned discussions were held with these pupils; informal discussions were held with many more. A large amount of documentation provided by the school before and during the inspection was analysed. The registered inspector held a meeting attended by 32 parents before the inspection and the team considered the written responses to a questionnaire from 225 parents of pupils of the school.

DATA AND INDICATORS

Pupil data

	Number of pupils on roll (full-time equivalent)	Number of pupils with statements of SEN	Number of pupils on school's register of SEN	Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals
Y7 – Y11	1095	17	214	65

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers (Y7 – Y11)

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent)	56.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	19.2:1

Education support staff (Y7 – Y11)

Total number of education support staff	20
Total aggregate hours worked each week	428

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:	79.2
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Average teaching group size:	KS3	25
	KS4	24

Financial data

Financial year:	1998/99
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	£
Total Income	2246132
Total Expenditure	2271952
Expenditure per pupil	2137.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	85795
Balance carried forward to next year	59975

PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out:

1095

Number of questionnaires returned:

225

Responses (percentage of answers in each category):

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel the school encourages parents to play an active part in the life of the school	53.8	40.6	5.6	-	-
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	58.7	34	4.6	2.7	-
The school handles complaints from parents well	34	34	29.6	1.2	1.2
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	52.1	44.5	2.9	.5	-
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	51.6	39.5	8.4	-	.5
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	64.8	32.9	1.8	.5	-
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	68.6	29.7	1	.7	-
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	43.3	46.1	7.8	2.7	-
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	58.2	37.9	3.4	-	.5
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	47.2	46.7	6.1	-	-
My child(ren) like(s) school	55.4	39.5	3	1.6	.5

Summary of responses

Parents feel welcome in the school and many take part in its life.

Most parents have never had cause to complain. The school deals well with any concerns.

Pupils and parents are provided with very good information and feel communication with the school is excellent.

The school's values and attitudes promote high standards and very good behaviour.

95 per cent of the questionnaires returned show that children enjoy school.