

INSPECTION REPORT

CHESHAM HIGH SCHOOL

Chesham

LEA area: Buckinghamshire

Unique Reference Number: 110504

Inspection Number: 184663

Headteacher: Mr T J Andrew

Reporting inspector: Dr R G Wallace
1050

Dates of inspection: 20-24 September 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 708046

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Selective, grammar
Type of control:	County
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	White Hill Chesham Buckinghamshire HP5 1BA
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr F S Sanger
Date of previous inspection:	24-28 April 1995

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Mrs G Riordan Lay Inspector		Attitudes, behaviour and personal development; attendance; support, guidance and pupils' welfare; partnership with parents and the community; accommodation; learning resources.
Mrs M Cawdron	English	Curriculum and assessment; equal opportunities.
Mr R Shaw	Mathematics	
Mr C Parsons	Science	
Mrs J Davis	Music	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
Mr R Grogan	History; religious education	
Mr G Headley	Art, physical education	
Mrs S King	Geography	
Mrs M McElroy	Modern languages	Staffing
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MAIN FINDINGS

What the school does well

The quality of teaching is high and is a strength of the school.

- The school enables pupils to make very good progress in most subjects at Key Stage 4.
- There is a very supportive atmosphere for learning and for the personal development of pupils.
- Pupils are well behaved and they are attentive in lessons.
- The leaders of the school (headteacher, senior staff and governors) have a clear sense of direction, have tackled some difficult problems and know what next has to be done.

• Where the school has weaknesses

Senior managers do not oversee adequately the contributions of subject departments to the school's goals.

- I. The marking and assessment of pupils' work are not consistent and at Key Stage 3 do not conform to the requirements of the National Curriculum.
- II. IT skills, which have improved greatly since the last inspection, are still not consistently developed for all pupils at Key Stage 4 or used regularly in subject lessons as required by the National Curriculum.
- III. Some pupils embark on A Level courses with insufficient prospect of success.

The school's strengths greatly outweigh its weaknesses. The governors' action plan will set out how the weaknesses identified during the inspection are to be tackled. The plan will be sent to all parents or guardians of pupils at the school.

• How the school has improved since the last inspection

The school has made improvements since the last inspection, whilst maintaining the strengths identified at that time.

The school's response to the key issues of the last inspection have been partially successful. It has achieved a better match in the timetable with the needs of departments; there are still some unhelpful features, however, such as 90-minute lessons in modern languages and double periods spread across breaks. The quality of religious education lessons has improved but the allocation of time has not improved. The teaching of IT is much better, with new equipment and more time, but still does not comply with the National Curriculum in some respects. There has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching. Planning for school improvement is better, although not at departmental level. The effectiveness of form teachers remains varied. Accommodation has improved greatly.

The school has the capacity to continue to improve from a confident base.

Standards in subjects

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

Performance in:	Compared with all schools	with	Compared with similar schools	Key
				ey
				<i>well above average</i> A
				<i>above average</i> B
Key Stage 3 Test English	A*		D	<i>average</i> C
GCSE Examinations	A		E	<i>below average</i> D
A/AS – levels	C		NA	<i>well below average</i> E

The pupils are making the progress that they should on the basis of their attainment when admitted to the school. A* means very high attainment. The intake to the school is based on a minimum score in an LEA verbal reasoning test and the exercise of parental choice between grammar schools. The comparisons with all schools reflect this. The school's intake, whilst selective and including many very able pupils, has a higher proportion of pupils towards the lower end of the grammar school range of attainment than do most grammar schools. This accounts in part for the unfavourable comparisons with similar grammar schools as shown above. The 1998 GCSE pupils made the progress from the age of 11 that they should have done. The school can point to above-average progress by its pupils during Key Stage 4.

At Key Stage 3 attainment in mathematics has been consistently higher than in English and science. At GCSE the boys at Chesham High do better relatively than girls when compared to the national averages for their genders. There is a wide variation in attainment in different subjects at A Level, with the history results unsatisfactory in recent years.

Quality of teaching

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 7-9	Good	} There were no	significant
Years 10-11	Good	} differences	subjects at all key
Sixth form	Good	} between	
English	Good	} stages	
Mathematics	Good		

The quality of teaching is a strength of the school. Teaching is at least satisfactory in all but about 4% of lessons. It is good or very good in about half the lessons. Within this overall high standard, there are some weaknesses that need attention such as inconsistencies in the quality of marking and of homework set.

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	Very good: pupils behave well around the school, despite very congested corridors, and are mostly attentive in lessons.
Attendance	Good: attendance rates are well above national averages; pupils arrive punctually to most lessons.
Ethos*	Very good: there is a good atmosphere for the promotion of learning, relationships are good and the school's management has a strong commitment to measuring and promoting progress.
Leadership and management	Satisfactory: the direction is clear, planning at senior management and governor level is good, but departments are not held sufficiently to account and departmental planning does not respond sufficiently to school aims.
Curriculum	Satisfactory: attention needs to be given to IT skills at Key Stage 4 for some pupils; the use of IT in most subjects, and particularly in mathematics, is inadequate; more time is needed for religious education.
Pupils with special educational needs	Good provision is made for the very small number of pupils with statements and for those who need support with continuing weaknesses in English.
Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development	Good overall and particularly for the pupils' moral and social development; unsatisfactory for their spiritual and satisfactory for their cultural development.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	Satisfactory overall: the staff are well qualified and deployed; resources are adequate, despite a low level of funding; accommodation has been much improved.
Value for money	Good: the school has a very low per capita income which it deploys well, allowing pupils to achieve what they should be achieving.

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

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

What most parents like about the school

- IV. The school is a happy and supportive place in which pupils can learn well.
- V. A very high proportion of parents are satisfied with their children's progress at school.
- VI. The school is very approachable and responsive.

What some parents are not happy about

- VII. About 13% of parents would like to ing.
- VIII. There are concerns amongst a

Parents are rightly pleased with most aspects of the school. Some concerns were expressed at the meeting about homework, and inspectors found that this does vary in its quality and the frequency with which it is set.

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

The school needs to take these steps to ensure its continued progress.

- * The school's plans to increase monitoring of teaching quality and departmental achievements should be implemented promptly and with rigour. In particular:
 - IX. the training of all heads of department in assessing teachers' lessons and monitoring improvements in teaching quality should begin promptly (paras 25, 53, 54, 106);
 - X. the school's appraisal pilot should be extended to all departments without delay (paras 53, 54, 62);
 - XI. means should be found to bring staff development needs into the school development plan (paras 53, 57, 62);
 - XII. a thorough analysis followed by an action plan with targets and short timescales should be devised by the senior management team for tackling continuing weaknesses such as those shown by the history results (paras 7, 12, 27, 131);
 - XIII. departmental development plans should respond to school priorities and indicate how the departments will contribute to the achievement of the school's targets. The plans need to be forged in dialogue with senior managers and then monitored for progress (para 57);
 - XIV. monitoring of homework and marking, which vary greatly in quality within and between departments, should be carried out (paras 24, 25, 136).
- * The school needs to ensure that the assessment methods which are in place in all departments for Key Stage 3 are used more effectively by:
 - XV. modifying them in some cases so that they relate to the National Curriculum (paras 32, 106, 120, 164);
 - XVI. using the outcomes to justify end of Key Stage 3 statements on the pupils' attainments which should be conveyed more explicitly to parents (paras 32, 106, 120, 164, 172);
 - XVII. using the assessments to modify lesson planning and teaching methods where necessary (paras 33, 120).
- * The school should systematically develop IT skills at Key Stage 4 for all pupils and ensure the use of IT skills in subjects at both key stages, in order to comply with the National Curriculum and to equip all of its pupils with this important expertise (paras 12, 27, 59, 73, 141, 142, 146).
- * The school needs to develop a strategy for its Sixth Form which ensures a better match between offering open opportunities for A Level and providing young people with the chance to succeed. The strategy needs to concentrate on curriculum planning, admissions procedures and guidance, and take account of new opportunities arising from national plans for developing post-16 education (paras 7, 28, 42, 71).

In preparing its action plan the Governing Body should also consider these other matters:

XVIII. Use of tutor period (para 41).

XIX. Weaknesses in curriculum planning and timetabling not already covered by the key issues (paras 26, 27, 106, 172, 180).

· **INTRODUCTION**

· **Characteristics of the school**

Chesham High School is a selective (grammar) school within the Buckinghamshire system which allows parental choice amongst the grammar schools for pupils who achieve a minimum score in tests. It had 1,086 pupils at the time of the inspection, with significantly more girls than boys overall, but with different imbalances in different years. It has very few pupils from ethnic minorities and very few entitled to free school meals. Two pupils have statements of special educational needs, but neither of these is for learning difficulties. There are 57 pupils on the register of special educational needs. Pupils come from a very wide geographical area and are predominantly from families with a good economic background, although there are a few pockets of deprivation locally.

The aims of the school are to:

XX. promote the learning and achievement of each of its pupils in an atmosphere which is friendly and caring;

XXI. have a culture of caring for the individual through maintaining a happy and purposeful school where academic success is highly prized and other achievements are also recognised and celebrated;

XXII. promote a culture which bolsters the self-esteem of all pupils, instils a sense of pride in the school and encourages a sense of responsibility for themselves and for others; the qualities of independence, self-motivation and self-confidence are developed within a disciplined framework; working as a member of the school community has an important part to play in developing these qualities;

XXIII. providing a curriculum in its broadest sense which challenges pupils, offers the widest possible opportunities to develop their talents, equips them to lead fulfilling and socially useful lives and enables them to make a successful transition into higher education and employment;

XXIV. enables pupils to reach the highest possible individual achievement in examination whatever the level.

The targets agreed by the school and the local education authority for the year 2000 are:

XXV. 95% of all pupils to obtain 5 or more A*-C grades

XXVI. 100% of pupils to obtain one grade A*-G

an average points score for all pupils (all subjects) of 55.

• **Key indicators**

Attainment at Key Stage 3²

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1998	63	62	125

• National Curriculum Test		English	Mathematics	Science
Results				
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	61	62	63
	Girls	62	61	60
	Total	123	123	123
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	98(99)	98(96)	98(96)
	National	65(56)	60(60)	56(60)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	86(91)	95(94)	84(85)
	National	35(23)	36(37)	27(29)

• Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	51	51	58
	Girls	51	52	51
	Total	102	103	109
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	99(99)	100(100)	99(100)
	National	62(59)	64(63)	62(61)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	79(80)	95(96)	78(83)
	National	31(28)	37(37)	31(29)

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2

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

Attainment at Key Stage 4³

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1998	57	76	133

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	55	57	57
	Girls	70	73	73
	Total	125	130	130
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	94(92)	98(96)	98(96)
	National	44.6(43.3)	89.8(88.5)	95.2(94)

Attainment in the Sixth Form⁴

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 who were entered for GCE A/AS examination in the latest reporting year:	Year	Male	Female	Total
	1988	52	85	137

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	17.8	18.0	17.9(17.2)	0	0	0(4.3)
National	NA	NA	17.6(17.1)	NA	NA	2.8(2.7)

.....

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

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

Attendance

Percentage of half days (sessions) missed			%
through absence for the latest complete reporting year:	Authorised	School	5.9
	Absence	National comparative data	7.9
	Unauthorised	School	0
	Absence	National comparative data	1.1

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• Exclusions

Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school age) during the previous year:		Number
	Fixed period	18
	Permanent	2

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Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is:		%
	Very good or better	52%
	Satisfactory or better	96.4%
	Less than satisfactory	3.6%

PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

Attainment and progress

4. Attainment in public assessments at the ages of 14, 16 and 18 is well above national averages, as would be expected in a grammar school. It is below average when compared nationally with attainment in grammar schools; however, whilst the school does have some of the very ablest pupils, it does not have them in the same proportion as in most grammar schools. Nationally-validated data shows that the pupils make above-average progress between the ages of 14 and 16. Attainment overall in the school is similar to what it was at the time of the previous OFSTED report.

5. In Key Stage 3 Standard Assessments Tasks (SATs) the standards are very high in all three core subjects of English, mathematics and science when compared with the national average. When compared with the average scores for 14-year olds in grammar schools, the results are below average. Within that overall high level of attainment, results in mathematics were best in 1998 and have been so on average for the last three years. When the pupils' attainment is compared with the national figures by gender, there is a difference by subject. Boys exceed the national scores for mathematics and science by greater margins than do the girls. Thus in these two subjects the boys are out-performing the girls by more than the national figures.

6. At GCSE the attainment of the pupils is very high when compared with the national average. In 1998 (the most recent confirmed figures) 94% of pupils achieved grades A*-C in at least five subjects. In 1998 boys outperformed girls overall for the first time, although boys at the school have consistently in recent years achieved results that are further ahead of boys nationally than those of Chesham High girls have been of girls nationally. The average total GCSE score (all pupils) has shown little variation for the past five years against an upward national trend. When compared with similar grammar schools, the GCSE results are well below average, but they are in line with what the pupils ought to have achieved on the basis of their attainment at the age of 11.

7. The average points score in the 1998 GCE Advanced Level results was 17.5 which was above the national average of 17.2. The school admits a significant number of pupils each year to its Sixth Form and has quite generous admission criteria for its own pupils and those from other schools. Despite some pupils not continuing with A Level courses, (an almost 10% loss between Years 12 and 13) there were 26 ungraded results in 1998 and 29 in 1999. Results were particularly good in art, textiles, food, psychology and sociology in 1998. The results in history, physical education and music were poor.

8. The school uses a nationally-validated system for assessing the progress of pupils from Year 10 to GCSE and from GCSE to A Level. It shows that pupils make above average progress from Year 10 to GCSE, overall and particularly in design and technology, and satisfactory progress from GCSE to A Level. There was considerable variation at GCSE by subject, with history, economics, music and religious education contributing little or nothing to the overall progress. Over the last three years (1996-1998) the subjects at A Level that have enabled the pupils to make the greatest progress have been biology, business studies (although not in 1998), home economics, art and sociology. Over the same years the pupils taking history and chemistry have done worse than they should have done.

9. The attainment of pupils as observed in lessons and in other work observed is above average overall in all subjects. It is average in about 40% of lessons. The highest attainment overall is in Year 8. Attainment in design and technology is mostly average; in mathematics and geography it is high; in

history it is mostly above average, although the highest levels of work that should be expected are rarely seen. There is no significant variation by gender or ethnicity in the quality of the work seen during the inspection.

10. Standards of literacy are high. The pupils speak and listen well. They are fluent and articulate, speaking at length when required. Their listening skills are well developed. Their use of subject-specific vocabulary is good. Teachers need sometimes to take greater care to ensure that more retiring pupils are encouraged to make verbal contributions in lessons. The pupils can read well with accuracy and understanding. Their research skills are mostly good, but are not developed sufficiently in geography at Key Stage 3. The pupils write well, fluently and with mostly good grammar. They can write at length, but are not given sufficient opportunities to do so in some subjects at Key Stage 3. The pupils' ability to make notes is generally high. Some Sixth Form teachers, for example in sociology and politics, take care to reinforce this skill at the start of new courses. Note-making skills are also developed in personal and social education lessons. Notes made in lessons in Key Stage 4 and Sixth Form history lessons are not checked often enough to ensure that they are presented in a form that facilitates the consolidation and revision of learning. The presentation of pupils' work is generally good, but not so in some Key Stage 4 geography and history files. In a school otherwise free from graffiti, there is much of it on the covers of exercise books.

11. The pupils' knowledge and handling of numbers are good. They have a good grasp of basic number skills. Mental calculations are made well. Number skills are applied in several subjects, for example in IT, science and design and technology.

12. There has been an improvement in the pupils' IT skills and in the school's provision for IT since the previous OFSTED report. Knowledge of IT is developing rapidly in Years 7 and 8, especially in IT communication skills. Year 9 did not have taught IT lessons until last year and their standards reflect this. At Key Stage 4 IT skills, apart from those acquired by pupils taking the short GCSE course and those acquired independently by some pupils, are inadequate. The school's provision does not meet National Curriculum expected standards at Key Stage 4, and more generally for the use of IT across the curriculum. There is some use of IT for control in design and technology. Most Sixth Formers are independent users of IT, mainly for wordprocessing, and many of them are self-taught. There is inadequate use of IT in Sixth Form lessons. The computer rooms are unused at many times during the day, confirming the inadequate use of IT in the school.

13. The progress made by pupils is satisfactory in about half the lessons, that is, the pupils make the progress that they should. In all but about 6% of the remaining lessons, where progress is unsatisfactory, it is good or very good. Satisfactory or good teaching and the ability and attitudes of the pupils are the reasons for the satisfactory or good progress in the very large majority of lessons. The few incidences of inadequate progress in lessons are mostly due to temporary factors such as the inadequate knowledge of algebra by some Year 12 mathematics pupils in the first weeks of their A Level course. Progress over time is more varied but still satisfactory or good overall for all year groups. Able pupils do particularly well. Those few pupils who have learning difficulties are well supported in overcoming their difficulties, which are mainly in the accurate use of written English, although some of these difficulties persist into Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form. Variations in teachers' standards of marking, their expectations about the completion of homework to an adequate standard, and the quality of presentation that they demand from pupils, are the main causes of unsatisfactory progress over time.

• **Attitudes, behaviour and personal development**

14. Pupils are interested in their work and are confident learners. Behaviour in most lessons is very good. Pupils are willing to contribute to class discussions and co-operate well in group work. In the

great majority of lessons, the pupils' response to teaching is good or very good. Pupils concentrate well and generally take pride in their work. They enjoy finding out information for themselves and are able to express their ideas fluently. In all of these matters, the favourable findings of the previous OFSTED report have been maintained.

15. Behaviour around the school is also good. When some corridors and entrance points become congested between lessons, pupils deal with the situation in a generally good-humoured way. Pupils are supportive of each other, polite to adults and helpful to visitors. Relationships are good. Most pupils fulfil the expectations of pupils incorporated in the school's behaviour policy. A large majority of parents considers that the school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on their children and that good standards of behaviour are achieved. Parents and pupils state that any episodes of bullying which occur are dealt with swiftly and effectively. The pupils respond to the incentive of the newly-extended commendations system. Exclusions in the past year, similar in number to the previous year, are intended as a warning that pupils have challenged the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. While interference with pupils' personal belongings occasionally occurs, school buildings and property are generally treated with respect.

16. Pupils have opportunities, in annual reports, records of achievement and university application forms, to consider and comment upon their own progress. Most pupils take up opportunities to show initiative and responsibility, co-operating to put Charity Week ideas into effect, participating in house events such as drama and sport, and often showing considerable commitment to extra-curricular activities such as sports teams, pony club and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. Sixth Formers volunteer to become involved with community groups and, in school, they are attached to lower school forms and help younger pupils with language or number work. Some produce a very readable school magazine or take on a World Challenge Leadership Training programme, which in 2000 will be to India. It is intended that the newly-redesigned house system will offer further opportunities for initiative and creativity across a range of school activities.

• **Attendance**

17. The school achieves good standards of attendance. Monitoring systems have been continued since the last inspection and comparable levels of attendance have been maintained. These systems apply also to the Sixth Form which, over the first few weeks of the autumn term, was achieving attendance levels similar to those for the rest of the school.

18. Punctuality to school in the mornings is good with occasional problems caused by the transport system. Pupils' punctuality to lessons is satisfactory, given the widespread nature of the site, but several minutes are frequently lost from the start of lessons particularly following afternoon registration.

• **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED**

• **Teaching**

19. The quality of teaching at the school is satisfactory or better in all but 4% of lessons. In about half the lessons the teaching is good or very good. Good teaching was seen in all subjects including personal and social education. The small amount of unsatisfactory teaching occurred in single lessons of a very small number of teachers. There is now a greater range of teaching methods than at the time of the previous inspection. There are no significant variations by key stage or subject.

20. The characteristics of good teaching were evident in a Year 8 English lesson where the pupils were

reading a play. The objectives of the lesson were clearly stated, the teacher had a lively and enthusiastic manner, advice was given on the quality of the pupils' reading, and the pupils were stimulated and engaged in their work. Very good mathematics teaching was seen in a Year 12 further mathematics class on vectors, when the teacher's lively manner and humour established a good pace and the abstract topic was related to real life; the teacher's relationship with the pupils was based on friendliness, high expectations and clarity of explanations. A Year 7 science lesson on classification was very well taught and enabled the pupils to make good progress. This was because of the teacher's good basic techniques: excellent timing, well-established ground rules for the class, activities well related to the desired learning outcomes, movement around the class giving advice to individuals, high expectations on the presentation of work and thorough marking.

21. The effective teacher of a Year 7 geography class on map-reading kept a good balance between volunteered answers and questions directed at individuals to check for understanding and to require participation. The pupils were given confidence that all could succeed in the task. The First World War, always an interesting topic for Year 10 pupils, was the subject of a very well-taught history lesson. Pupils were engaged in their learning and behaved excellently, with good recall of previous knowledge, and made good notes as a result of the clear instructions given. A Year 10 religious education class tackled the question of whether God exists. The teacher's planning made excellent use of the 30 minutes available for pondering this profound matter, evoking serious and sensitive debate between pupils. Year 12 business/economics pupils made very good progress when planning structures for different companies, because the lesson was demanding and well planned with class presentations that were evaluated. Year 11 pupils, engaged in role playing with cards in a French lesson, working at different levels and pace according to their needs, whilst the teacher worked effectively with each group. In a German lesson on travel, Year 8 pupils attained well and made good progress because the teacher effectively built up language carefully yet at a good pace, conducted the lesson in good German and had high expectations of the pupils, including a requirement for them to correct themselves.

22. A design and technology (textiles) teacher conducted a very good lesson with Year 9 pupils, with very brisk recall of previous work, clear demonstrations, good pace, very good resources and helpful comments on previous work. Amongst several very good IT lessons were two Year 8 lessons on data-handling using Excel and Word. The lessons were well planned with clear objectives stated to the pupils. The teachers worked well with individual pupils, giving the more advanced pupils extended tasks to take their skills further. A Year 12 art lesson (GCSE photography) was notable for the teacher's good analysis of the material and successful stimulation of the pupils' interests. Pupils in Year 10 made good progress in their music lesson on *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* because the teacher kept their interest by the use of clear explanations, anecdotes and analogies. They benefited in particular from clear guidance on how to follow a score. In one of several very good drama lessons, Year 7 pupils worked effectively on *The Magic Box* as a result of the teacher's clear instructions, encouragement of the pupils' use of language including the correct terms, praise of pupils for their effort, effective checking of short-lived flippancy by two pupils, and good timing.

23. The physical education teachers are effective in developing sports skills. In a Year 7 hockey class, for example, the activities were carefully selected to relate practices to playing the game, with timely interventions by the teacher and good demonstrations, using pupils for this purpose, to enhance skills. The department uses Sixth Formers effectively, to the benefit of both the Sixth Formers and the younger pupils, including those who need particular help.

24. There are examples of work pitched to different levels of attainment in the same class, but there are also cases when no distinction is made between such pupils. The quality of marking varies between subjects and between individual teachers. It is not sufficiently geared to National Curriculum skills or attainment targets in some subjects, mainly at Key Stage 3. It is not making a sufficient contribution to the realisation of the school's aim to raise attainment.

25. Some parents have expressed concern about the frequency and nature of the homework set. The inspectors found that some very helpful and challenging homework tasks are set, with some homework intended to enable pupils to prepare for the next lesson; however, there are examples where the homework consists of little more than finishing off classwork, which the ablest pupils have sometimes already done during the lesson so that they do not have opportunities through homework for taking their work to a higher level. The small amount of unsatisfactory teaching is contributed by a small number of teachers and needs to be tackled by the school's management.

• **The curriculum and assessment**

26. The organisation of the school day is the same as during the previous inspection, when questions were raised about its effectiveness. There are now fewer instances of unsuitable combinations, but too many still remain and have a negative impact on progress. Examples include double lessons split across breaks and 90-minute lessons for languages. The school needs to continue to improve its allocation of lessons through, for example, its planned extension of double lessons for religious education every other week.

27. The curriculum is broad and balanced, although some weaknesses remain. Only half the time recommended for religious education is available at Key Stage 3. Statutory requirements for religious education are not met in the Sixth Form, where provision for the subject is not accessible to all pupils. There is insufficient use of IT across the curriculum and most subjects do not meet the requirements to use and develop IT skills in a range of contexts. Statutory requirements for IT are not met at Key Stage 4. Dance is not available for boys as part of the physical education syllabus. Sketchbook work is underdeveloped in art at Key Stage 3. A good programme of Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), including careers education and guidance, is taught to all pupils. More systematic use of the library would provide better support for reading activities in English. There are good examples of subjects developing banks of key words, but more emphasis needs to be placed on developing co-ordinated literacy activities across the school.

28. Care is taken to make the curriculum relevant to the needs of pupils. They have a range of options for GCSE, allowing them to follow more than one language or to study the three sciences. Some courses, such as A Level chemistry are chosen specifically for their focus on the applications and social implications of the subject. The school has not developed its provision for non-specialist work in the Sixth Form following the review recommended in the previous report. There has been an improvement in induction procedures, such as the development of study skills, but a significant proportion of pupils still leave their A Level courses before the end or fail to achieve pass grades. The school needs to develop its Sixth Form provision to ensure, that pupils given a chance at A Level have a reasonable likelihood of succeeding. Access to the curriculum is ensured for pupils with severe special needs. A combination of effective welfare help and sensitive class teaching, both particularly good in physical education, ensure that the small number of pupils gain much from lessons.

29. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory, with curriculum requirements outlined in their individual education plans (IEPs) being met. There is equality of access to the curriculum which is often reinforced in lessons with teachers pitching work at the appropriate level or providing extension activities for the range of attainment present in the class. There does need, however, to be a more consistent matching of work to the needs of individuals in some lessons and more emphasis placed on this in planning, particularly in English and mathematics. More opportunity needs to be provided in design and technology for Key Stage 3 pupils to attain at higher levels.

30. Planning is satisfactory. Overviews and schemes of work exist that set out clearly how the key

aspects of subjects are expected to develop across key stages. These usually support teachers in their day-to-day planning and they sometimes make good use of the schemes, in science for example, to review ideas covered earlier in the course before moving on to develop them to higher levels. At Key Stage 3, modern language schemes of work, with the exception of Year 9 French, are not good planning tools. Sometimes, for example in art, lesson plans focus on the activities to be undertaken rather than on what the pupils are expected to learn and this can lead to a lack of focus.

31. A wide range of extra-curricular activities, trips and visits is used well to support and extend the curriculum. Good use is made of fieldwork in geography and biology. Residential activities, such as the history trip to World War 1 battlefields, and language exchanges are well supported. Some departments, such as mathematics, provide activities to encourage and support the pupils' enjoyment of the subject. Activities are developing in music, following a dearth in recent years. Many pupils enjoy the benefits of instrumental tuition. There is strong extra-curricular provision for sporting activity which is well attended and well taught.

32. Most departments have systems in place to measure the attainment of pupils, but some of these are not effective in practice. There is no regular assessment in music, other than routine marking, and statutory requirements are not met in this subject. The requirements of GCSE and A Level syllabuses are generally well met; however, the information collected at Key Stage 3 is not in a useful form and does not sufficiently reflect National Curriculum descriptors. The result is that the assessments made by teachers at the end of the key stage in many subjects, including design and technology and art, are not secure. Assessment at Key Stage 3 is unsatisfactory.

33. The school has used systems to measure the progress made by the pupils from Key Stage 3 to GCSE and from GCSE to A Level. This data is increasingly being used to compare the performance of different pupils and departments. An analysis and evaluation of other data collected is not always sufficiently used to help develop the curriculum further. Nor is it used by teachers to plan successive lessons and match work more accurately to the needs of pupils. Assessment in history, for example, needs much development if it is to meet the stated aims of locating and remedying weaknesses in the pupils' understanding, let alone evaluating the quality of teaching in the subject.

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

34. The school's provision of opportunities for pupils to reflect on their spiritual awareness and self-knowledge are unsatisfactory. There is no act of collective worship in assemblies and the school does not provide other means of meeting this statutory requirement. Religious education provides some limited opportunities for pupils to reflect on their beliefs, and occasionally a youth group from three local churches conducts the assemblies. A very successful Christian Union group meets at lunchtime and pupils can share in and reflect on the Christian faith. During the inspection this was attended by approximately 45 pupils and included a video clip, a quiz game about understanding friendships and a testimony by one Year 11 pupil.

35. Pupils know the differences between right and wrong and parents are happy with the values and attitudes promoted by the school. Staff devote considerable time to pupils through curricular and extra-curricular work and set a good example. School rules and codes of conduct are not made high profile because pupils generally behave well and have a high regard for each other. Lessons in PSHE are well planned and teach a mixture of topics such as bullying, rules, rights and responsibilities.

36. Moral and social concern is developed well. Pupils make an outstanding contribution to local, national and international charities through house, form and school events. During the inspection pupils were preparing for Charity Week and were keenly planning a mixture of activities to support their

nominated charities. Charity representatives, for example from Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital and from Toybox, a local charity, have attended assemblies to inform pupils about their work and then reported back on how money donated was spent. Pupils organise and help out with Christmas parties both for the elderly and for a local special school. Last year twenty pupils helped with one party for the elderly on Christmas Day. Sixth Formers regularly help with community groups such as Take a Break and Chiltern Youth Action. By these means the pupils learn how to work with others and can develop their own understanding of moral questions.

37. The school's provision of opportunities for pupils outside the Sixth Form to take responsibility is limited but increasing. Sixth Formers have a council and help with numerous charity and community projects such as working with local primary schools. Sixth Formers are assigned a form group which they support throughout the year. The house system was re-launched in September 1999 and allows groups of pupils greater opportunity to plan for and organise events and competitions.

38. Pupils relate positively to one another and respect their school environment. During the very wet inspection week pupils often remained inside during breaks and lunchtime under minimum supervision with no sign of damage or litter.

39. Social and cultural development is also fostered through the wide range of extra-curricular activities. The provision for pupils' cultural development is satisfactory. The musical *Bugsy Malone* was being cast during the inspection week. A range of social and cultural visits such as theatre trips, geography residential fieldwork and history visits are organised. One unusual feature of the school is the pony club, which, as well as providing opportunities for pupils to learn about the responsibilities of caring for the ponies, has close links to the local community and is involved in several charity events. Non-European cultures are not adequately covered in the curriculum.

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

40. The strong pastoral system is central to the school's policy that all pupils are viewed as individuals and their social welfare is inextricably linked to behaviour and academic progress. Parents praise the balance achieved by the school between academic expectations and the pupils' individual development. After Year 7, pupils remain with year teams for two years at a time. Form and year tutors know their pupils well, monitoring their progress and offering support if difficulties arise. The current system of monitoring, which is under review, comprises pupils' progress reports, their homework diaries and the referrals connected with the rewards and sanctions systems. Sensitive guidance to pupils and staff is provided for pupils with severe special needs. For most pupils on the special needs register, whose needs relate mostly to accuracy in written English, some teaching is provided on a fortnightly basis and is of high quality. The school also engages outside guidance for pupils with special educational needs.

41. Parents speak positively about the guidance offered to pupils at the time of their entry into Year 7 and for the options procedures in Years 9 and 11. Careers guidance is thorough, with an appropriate course for each year, the involvement of the Careers Service, an easily-accessible library and a wide-ranging biennial careers convention. Careers is one strand of an impressive PSHE programme, which also includes sex and health education, citizenship, and economic and environmental education. PSHE is taught consistently well across the school, by form tutors in the lower school and a specialist team in Years 10 and 11. Form periods themselves are often not used productively. Work experience in Year 11 is well organised with appropriate preparation and de-briefing and the additional incentive of the Whitbread Awards scheme.

42. As almost a third of pupils in Year 12 join from other schools, special efforts are made to achieve an integrated Sixth Form, with taster lessons during an induction course in the summer term, a study

skills course at the start of the autumn term, small-sized forms and careful monitoring. Despite these efforts, a relatively high proportion of pupils begin but do not successfully complete A Level courses. Following a recent review, the Sixth Form PSHE course is now taught by form tutors, with information on post-18 guidance made available to all Year 12 pupils in the summer term.

43. The school celebrates its pupils' achievements through newsletters, assemblies, opportunities in house events and extra-curricular activities, and attractive displays of work. The commendations system is valued for its recognition of effort and achievement, while a credits scheme in the Sixth Form encourages pupils to volunteer for community service and to involve themselves in school activities. Referral cards and a range of detentions reflect increasing levels of severity in situations involving poor work and inappropriate behaviour. Effective systems are in place for monitoring attendance.

44. A designated member of staff is responsible for child protection measures and ensures that staff are aware of procedures to be followed. Liaison is maintained as required with members of the pastoral team and with outside agencies. Important contributions to pupils' knowledge, understanding and welfare are provided by outside agencies.

45. Effective procedures are in place for dealing with emergencies, accidents and illness, and for the arrangement of school journeys. Many aspects of health and safety requirements are well organised. A safety check of each room is efficiently carried out each term and action taken as necessary. Arrangements for more formal risk assessment, however, are not consistently in place throughout the school and the lines of responsibility are not always clear. The school is to carry out an audit to check that glazing complies with current safety requirements.

• **Partnership with parents and the community**

46. Parents are very supportive of their children and of the school. They regularly attend consultation evenings and school and house productions, and help with activities such as the pony club. They make generous contributions through their children to events such as Charity Week, and to the school itself through the many activities of the parents' association. A hard-working committee organises social and fund-raising events, the proceeds from which play an important part in providing opportunities for the pupils and enhancing their working environment.

47. Communication with parents is regular and courteous, through newsletters, letters about specific events and the pupils' homework diaries. Members of the pastoral team contact parents when difficulties arise. Most parents find the school approachable, although some would like more encouragement to play an active part in school life.

48. Most parents feel well informed about their children's progress. Short reports, with an emphasis on effort, are followed later in the year by progress evenings and full reports. The school gives financial restraints as the reason for some short reports not being produced at present. For some parents, this entails a six-month gap between the receipt of reports and the next annual progress consultation evening. Full reports, which are generally liked by parents, are mostly concerned with congratulating pupils on what they do well. A more consistent approach to analysing strengths and weaknesses and suggesting specific ideas for development would be helpful. Many parents would welcome regular provision of information about the curriculum so that they could more effectively support their children's learning at home.

49. Firm links are maintained with the many primary and lower schools from which pupils transfer, and with the other secondary schools in the area. The school has a policy of active involvement with the community, believing that pupils gain in responsibility and understanding through a commitment to

working with groups outside the school. In 1998-9, about a quarter of Sixth Formers undertook to help regularly in local schools, old people's homes, hospitals and environmental centres. Many others were involved in charity collections, holiday play schemes or Christmas activities for local community groups. School trips abroad and participation in World Challenge Leadership Training programmes extend pupils' awareness of the wider world. The whole school is involved in Charity Week when pupils find out about and recommend charities for support. A balance is maintained between international, national and local recipients of the considerable sums which are raised.

50. Representatives of the police, local health organisations and charities extend the pupils' knowledge and understanding through participation in assemblies and PSHE courses. Regular lettings are made to local groups concerned with sporting, cultural and social activities.

51. The school values its links with the business community which provides places, through the Education Business Partnership, for pupils to undertake two weeks' work experience in Year 11. Through activities such as Playing for Profit and Young Enterprise, pupils gain valuable insights into business and industrial processes. Links are further strengthened through initiatives such as the Whitbread Awards for work experience, Arkwright Technology awards and Rotary Club sponsorship for the biennial careers convention.

· **THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL**

· **Leadership and management**

52. The headteacher and Governing Body provide clear and sensitive leadership of the school. Their focus is firmly on the quality of the pupils' learning, with an emphasis on assessing the extent to which pupils make greater than average progress. The structure of the Governing Body's committees is sound, governors are knowledgeable about the school's strengths and about aspects that need development. They offer a good balance of support and challenge.

53. The school's monitoring procedures are undergoing development and much planning has gone into the creation of alternatives to the recommended national appraisal procedures, which are no longer used. Although staff development interviews continue informally, there is currently no appraisal scheme involving all teachers and support staff. Monitoring of pupil performance in public assessments at the ages of 14, 16 and 18 is thorough. The Governing Body have satisfactory monitoring procedures in place to fulfil their responsibilities. The headteacher and the Governing Body know where improvements need to be made and effective action has been taken to overcome some weaknesses in teaching and middle management. Some problems such as the persistently unsatisfactory results in A Level history, remain to be tackled, and greater urgency is required.

54. The school rightly acknowledges that steps in monitoring of teaching methods and pupil attainment need to be taken further and this is rightly a priority for the school. There is currently little monitoring of marking and homework, for example, and the result is a wide variation in practice and quality. Departments that have results which are unsatisfactory, or satisfactory but not contributing as much as others to the school's raising of attainment, do not receive routine monitoring. There is a need for monitoring to be increased.

55. The school's aims are consistently promoted. The school is comfortable with itself, without being complacent. It provides a good standard of education for able pupils in a relaxed and happy atmosphere that enables the large majority of pupils in most subjects to do well.

56. There have been improvements in planning since the last OFSTED report when the school development plan was in its infancy. The current school plan is a thorough document, emphasising developments that will raise standards and improve teaching, and using value-added data. It does now contain the means for judging the successful achievement of targets and deadlines. It is not used as an action plan by all departments and is not for them a working document.

57. Several departmental development plans give scant attention to the school plan's priorities, and some do not have timescales for the achievement of objectives. The mathematics plan, for example, has objectives which are all about the department's organisation, not the school's priorities of raising standards and improving teaching quality, and five of its six timescales for the achievement of these objectives are "ongoing". The English plan has many references that could relate to the school plan, but these are vague, such as "boys' performance" without any indication of targets, strategies or deadlines other than "ongoing". It is difficult to see what is intended and how such statements can be used as a planning tool by the department itself or by senior managers. Where targets are precise, such as that for A Level history of an average C grade by 1999, they have not always been met and are then carried forward to the next year. The modern languages plan has only one target directly related to learning. It covers an important development, the encouragement of more independent learning, but related this only to the Sixth Form, thus indicating that the department sees no need for developments for 11-16-year olds. These and some other subject plans have not been forged as a result of rigorous dialogue with senior managers, who do not in any case monitor their implementation. The links between senior management and departments are sometimes tenuous. Neither the school plan nor departmental plans are costed. Departmental reviews are intended to be a source of guidance on future development, but these are not annual. The pace at which the school intends to introduce revised procedures is too slow.

58. The school has a positive ethos and is providing an effective learning environment. Relationships are very good. Pupils have many and equal opportunities to make rapid progress.

59. Statutory requirements are mostly met. There are no acts of worship. The school, including its Governing Body, has evolved its own policy for assemblies that are consonant with its aims. Assessment at Key Stage 3 is not always related to the National Curriculum. There is no provision for religious education in the Sixth Form. The coverage of IT skills is inadequate for some pupils at Key Stage 4 and the IT requirements of most subjects do not comply with the National Curriculum expectations. Assessment as required by the National Curriculum is not in place for several subjects, notably music. Appraisal of teaching staff, expected to follow national guidelines, is not taking place.

• **Staffing, accommodation and learning resources**

60. There are sufficient teachers with appropriate qualifications and experience to meet the requirements of the curriculum, with a good balance of experienced and younger staff. There is a significant proportion of part-time staff, which was a matter highlighted in the previous report, although the number has been reduced as far as conditions of tenure allow. This is so in design and technology and music, making it difficult for staff to attend departmental meetings. The number of part-time teachers still also leads to some sharing of tutor groups. One member of staff is unqualified; the school is taking steps to provide appropriate training for this person.

61. There is a satisfactory number of administrative and ancillary staff, overseen by the bursar. In design and technology there is a good match of expertise and experience of technicians to their support roles. In science there is insufficient time for technicians to fulfil the requirements placed upon them. This remains an issue from the previous report.

62. Arrangements for the professional development of teachers are satisfactory overall. Good procedures are in place to support teaching staff new to the school, including newly qualified teachers.

In English there are good procedures for the supervision of pupils, and evidence of the successful induction of new staff. A new staff appraisal system was attempted by two departments last year. Although due to be repeated, this has only resulted in a very small number of staff being appraised. As a formal system is not yet in place, this situation is unsatisfactory. There is no system for appraising non-teaching staff. The school has its own voluntary system of annual staff interviews which helps to identify school and individual training needs. Some staff training has been identified in the school development plan. The link with appraisal is an aspect for development. The school recognises the need for part-time teachers of music to have further training in the use of music technology.

63. The school is the result of several phases of building, designed over many years with a breadth of vision which has resulted in an effective and coherent campus. Its attractive site includes sufficient playing fields to accommodate both curricular needs and an active extra-curricular programme. To some extent, however, the site is also a limitation since it stands at the edge of green belt land. The neighbouring leisure centre, while used as a resource by the school, is similarly a limitation, effectively preventing any further major development.

64. With much of the building recently completed, most of the school is in a good state of repair and decoration. Problems remain with some flat roofs and in the older buildings, where some window frames are unsuitable for the appropriate toughened glass. Much maintenance work is carried out by an effective team of caretakers. Through their skills and energy, several areas of the school have been refurbished to a high standard, making an important contribution to the quality of the learning environment.

65. Most departments now have adequate teaching space, mainly fulfilling a long-held aim that each subject should have its own suite of rooms and base office. Most are stimulating learning areas with attractive wall displays which act as a resource as well as a celebration of pupils' work. Physical education is now the only department without an adequate base room.

66. A few problems remain. While the teaching blocks for modern languages and mathematics are significantly improved since the last inspection, it is still necessary to house some larger classes in non-specialist accommodation. Most departments have one or two rooms which are timetabled to full capacity while smaller rooms are considerably under-used. Science, in the older part of the school, suffers from difficulties of access to some laboratories and a general deterioration of facilities. The pupils' learning should be considerably enhanced by this year's planned refurbishment. In music, some limitations are imposed on coursework and A Level options by the lack of space for a recording studio. At the same time, imaginative refurbishment of existing space has extended pupils' opportunities, as in the drama studio and the photographic dark room.

67. Resources are generally adequate or good. Some, as in English, modern languages and particularly history, include good quality materials devised by staff. There is a shortage of textbooks in design and technology, physical education and religious education and of reference materials in Key Stage 3 art. Audio-visual equipment is present and used well in most departments. IT equipment has been greatly improved, but departments have yet to include sufficient use of IT in their programmes to ensure the full use of the new facilities.

68. The newly extended and refurbished library is a very good central resource, which is at present severely under-used. Sixth Formers work there in study periods and the careers library is visited by pupils from Year 9 onwards. Study skills courses are provided for Years 7 and 12 and the librarian hopes to find ways to reinforce good practice in the intervening years. Book and IT resources are reasonable but limited in some subjects. A range of books, however, is on loan from the Schools Library Service, and resources for specific projects are hired on request. The library has many good ideas to raise the profile of the resources centre but needs the help of departments, both to recommend

stock and to urge pupils to make use of the facilities on offer. A security system has been installed and parents are giving invaluable help in preparing new books for display.

69. A centralised reprographics unit efficiently provides a large proportion of the school's printing needs, from day-to-day requirements to programmes and booklets for special events. In achieving economies and saving teachers' time, this facility works well.

• **The efficiency of the school**

70. The school had a very low level of income per pupil in 1998-1999, about £300 per pupil less than the national average. The income per pupil last year was less than at the time of the previous OFSTED report in April 1995. There has been an increase in the current financial year, but not sufficient to bring the level per pupil up to the national average. The school has had a big increase in income from the government's fund for training and school improvement, largely as a result of an increase in the delegation of such funds to schools. It has also benefited from major capital grants for building. These have been well used to improve the quality of learning.

71. The number of pupils admitted to the school has varied greatly, as a result of the local arrangements for selection to grammar schools; for example, the school was expecting sufficient pupils in the current year to admit six forms, but the number arriving made up fewer than five forms. The school admits significant numbers of pupils to the Sixth Form and this is also a figure which fluctuates. The current variation in the number of pupils per year is between 133 in Year 11 and 181 in Year 8. This has created difficulties for financial planning since the school's roll is uncertain when budgets have to be decided.

72. The school has, with the agreement of the local education authority, operated a deficit budget for some years, reducing expenditure significantly in the current financial year with the prospect of eliminating the deficit by April 2001. This forecast is dependent on the local education authority's maintaining the improvement in school budgets achieved in 1999-2000 and on the school's having a full intake to Year 7. In the light of the budgetary deficit, the school has had little scope for imaginative financial planning. The expenditure on staffing takes a higher proportion of the total budget than is normal. At the same time there are fewer teachers for the number of pupils than is usual in secondary schools. Occasionally some finance-based decisions are having an adverse effect on important aspects of the school; for example, as a trade-off for increased teaching time, the short reports previously prepared by teachers for Year 9 parents before their consultation evening were withdrawn as a means of reducing the teachers' workloads. For similar reasons monitoring has developed more slowly than is desirable, as it has been regarded not as essential, but as an extra demand on teachers' time.

73. Financial planning is led strongly by the management team. The Governing Body scrutinises the draft budget thoroughly and sometimes changes important aspects. Financial information is good. Financial planning is good and controls are effective. The school uses its main resources well, although at the time of the inspection the IT facilities were being under-used. Specific grants are properly and efficiently used. The school has a relatively large administrative staff and is well administered.

74. The school is giving good value for money.

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

English

75. Standard Assessment Task (SAT) results in 1998 were very high compared to the national average for both Level 5 and higher and Level 6 and higher. They were similar to the other core subjects, although mathematics results were better overall than English. Boys outperformed girls in English in 1996 and 1997, but attainment was level in 1998. Comparison of 1998 English results with national benchmarks shows performance as well below the average for similar grammar schools at Level 6 and higher, and broadly in line with grammar schools at Level 7 and higher. SAT results in 1999 were similar to those of earlier years.

76. The proportion of A*-C grades at GCSE in English and English literature in 1998 was very high compared with national averages, and in line with national averages for grammar schools. The percentage of those attaining the highest grades A*-B in both subjects is also very high compared with national averages and close to national averages for grammar schools. In both subjects, girls outperformed boys at grades A*-B, although not at A*-C. 1999 results were a slight improvement on 1998. The English literature results in 1998 were above the national average, although below average for grammar schools. 1999 results were better than those of 1998.

77. Attainment in lessons and in the pupils' work at Key Stage 3 is mostly average. There are no discernible differences in attainment between girls and boys. The pupils' speech is clear and comments observant, as in a Year 9 lesson on annotating texts. Pupils can describe events competently and expand on their initial comments. They listen carefully to each other and to teachers. Throughout the key stage pupils have a positive attitude to learning which is reflected in their keenness to answer questions or to read aloud. They make sensible contributions in group work. Reading aloud is accurate, clear, sometimes expressive and enjoyed. Most pupils have a satisfactory grasp of what they have read. From Year 7 many can use inference and deduction successfully. The pupils' writing is always careful. Whilst lower-attainers in Year 7 cannot copy spelling accurately and confuse commas with full-stops, many by Year 9 have greater accuracy and can vary the form of their writing to suit the task and handle a range of sentence-structures appropriately. Higher-attainers write fluently and thoughtfully. Redrafting usually improves all writing.

78. Attainment at Key Stage 4 is mostly above average. Speaking skills develop appropriately, sometimes in advance of writing. Pupils remain on task well. Group discussions are purposeful and productive, as seen in a Year 10 lesson on poetry, where all worked hard and expressed their views confidently. Pupils use reference books well and can locate evidence to support their views. They have good understanding of word-meanings and some make perceptive responses to poetry. Writing develops well. Work is frequently well planned, and that of higher-attainers is confident and well sustained. Year 11 folders contained some comprehensive analyses of poems, well-constructed arguments and sometimes sensitive handling of emotions. The work of lower-attaining pupils lacks organisation and is often pedestrian. Wordprocessing usually improves presentation, structure and technical accuracy.

79. Attainment in the Sixth Form is high overall, but in some lessons it is only just at the appropriate level for the course; in one lesson it was below that level. The Sixth Formers' confidence and readiness to work leads them to collaborate well in group discussions, usually listening closely to each other. A few are sometimes readier to speak than to think carefully, but most offer hypotheses and opinions. Oral presentations in a Year 13 lesson on Chaucer showed that individuals had made good use of a range of sources. Writing varies in fluency, accuracy and the quality of analysis, and some is not yet at

the required standard for A Level. Better essays use evidence and quotation well, show appreciation of detail and provide sound analysis. Some pupils in Year 13 rely more on narrative than on response or argument.

80. Pupils in all years make at least satisfactory progress, which is helped in lessons by their willingness to work. In Key Stage 3 most are consolidating earlier language skills well. In a Year 8 lesson they appreciated the humour in a play being read while establishing how character emerges in dialogue. Year 7 pupils developing study skills showed familiarity with the library and its systems. In reading lessons most pupils showed an increasing knowledge and understanding of the narrative, and were frequently interested by their texts. By Year 9, pupils comparing the openings of novels were progressing well in analysing and responding to a variety of material. Progress over time for all ages of pupils as seen in writing is satisfactory for all but a few. Most pupils show an increasing confidence and adaptability of style, and by Key Stage 4 a growing maturity of approach and ideas together with a greater range of vocabulary. Research skills were developing well in a Year 11 lesson, while in Year 10 all pupils showed satisfactory progress in appreciating poetry. Written work in Year 13 showed that some pupils had made improvements in expression and style. Elsewhere, Year 13 pupils discussing *Hamlet* were beginning to appreciate the necessity of anchoring their opinions in the text.

81. Attitudes to learning are good overall, and better at Key Stage 3 and in the Sixth Form than at Key Stage 4. Levels of concentration at Key Stage 3 fluctuate, but are usually well sustained. Pupils are quiet and attentive and behave well. They are usually interested in the work and enjoy it. Key Stage 4 pupils usually work hard and can express their views confidently. A few in Year 10 occasionally do not make best use of time, and lose concentration. Attitudes in the Sixth Form are very good with pupils showing commitment and working independently with increasing confidence.

82. Teaching quality is at least satisfactory and often good. A Year 8 lesson on a drama text contained several good features. The teacher shared lesson objectives with the pupils at the start, and had a lively, enthusiastic manner. Pupils' reading aloud was commended, and several were encouraged to speak more clearly. Well-focused questions were used. Good pacing and variation of activities sustained the momentum and enjoyment of learning. All teachers plan lessons carefully and manage their classrooms well. They mark pupils' work carefully, systematically and accurately, although not always adhering to the marking scheme at Key Stage 3. Homework is set regularly, but, like most classroom teaching, it is not explicitly matched to differing levels of attainment. At Key Stage 4 and beyond, pupils are given some responsibility for the pace and extent of their work. Teacher expectations are mostly well pitched, but need sometimes to challenge the pupils more. Weaknesses include a little dull teaching and occasional lapses in timing.

83. The department has responded constructively to most of the points for development in the 1995 inspection report. Boys' under-attainment is being tackled; fresh reading initiatives have been introduced; study-skills and note-taking are being taught; and the quality of teaching has improved. Resources and accommodation are also much better.

Drama

84. Drama is taught as a discrete subject, currently only at Key Stage 3 and in the Sixth Form. Attainment at both levels is satisfactory. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A-E at A Level in theatre studies in 1998 was above the national average, although A-B grades were below. 1999 results were similar to 1998. Pupils at Key Stage 3 listen well, and from Year 7 onwards can harness their imagination constructively. They are quick to grasp what is required and try hard. Because of their enthusiasm pupils achieve much in a short lesson. In Year 8 they can adopt the precise and measured movement required by mime, and by Year 9 can create credible roles and spontaneous dialogue. Year 12 pupils are also highly committed and worked with energy and enthusiasm at voice production.

85. Progress in drama is consistently good, sometimes very good, because of the pupils' eagerness and enjoyment at what they can achieve, and also because of the high quality of teaching. At Key Stage 3, pupils learn that drama is to be taken seriously, that it needs discipline, control and the concentration that almost all give to it. Year 12 pupils explore for themselves the wide range of inflections and intonations that a simple sentence will bear, and the subsequent effect on meaning.

86. Teaching quality is very good and occasionally excellent. Lessons are thoroughly planned and structured, with clear objectives communicated to pupils. Class control is very good, and the teachers' knowledge of subject and techniques is extensive. Activities are well matched to the pupils' interests and capabilities and their variety sustains interest. New techniques are broken into small steps to aid learning. Relationships with pupils are very good. Expectations are high, and pupils respond well to the challenge. Their efforts are justly and warmly praised. Lessons are briskly paced and teaching combines dynamism with sensitivity towards pupils' views.

• **Mathematics**

87. Standards at Key Stages 3 and 4 are well above the national average, in accordance with the school's selective entry to Year 7, whilst those in the Sixth Form are in line with the average. This differs little from the position at the time of the previous inspection.

88. The results from the National Curriculum SATs at the end of Year 9 have been consistently well above the national average for both Level 5 and higher and Level 6 and higher, although they are below the average for similar grammar schools. This was again the case in 1998 and 1999. Between 1996 and 1998 the attainment of boys was higher than that of girls by a greater margin than occurred nationally. Attainment in mathematics has been generally a little higher than in the other core subjects of English and science.

89. The GCSE results over the past few years have been in line with the average for grammar schools and show no significant gender variation. The A Level results, whilst below the average for grammar schools, are in line with those for all maintained schools. In 1998 the boys' A Level results were well ahead of the girls' but this was reversed in 1999.

90. In all the pupils' work and lessons seen at Key Stages 3 and 4, the pupils' attainment was above average and in half the lessons it was well above. By the end of Key Stage 3 the pupils are able to use algebraic notation to express the general term of number sequences and are using fractions and decimals with increasing confidence. By the end of Key Stage 4 all are familiar with, for example, the mensuration of the circle and can apply Pythagoras' Theorem and trigonometry to solve problems. Most pupils have a confident grasp of number concepts such as percentages and their number skills, including mental arithmetic, are generally sufficient to support the rest of the mathematics curriculum. In the Sixth Form the pupils' overall attainment is in line with that expected for the A Level course but encompasses a considerable range. At one extremity, the pupils taking mathematics as a double subject at A Level are attaining satisfactorily in the demanding course of further mathematics while a Year 12 lesson was seen in which the algebraic competence of many pupils fell short of that normally expected at the start of the A Level course.

91. The skills of number are deployed by pupils beyond mathematics lessons to support learning in many other subjects. For example there is good use of graphs and charts in design technology and in economics while geography uses more advanced statistical tools particularly in the A Level course. Such cross-curricular application is satisfactorily developed throughout the school.

92. The pupils' progress over time is satisfactory at each stage. They were making at least satisfactory progress in all lessons seen in the Sixth Form and in a substantial majority of lessons at Key Stages 3 and 4. In more than half the lessons the progress was good or very good and notably so at Key Stage 4. The pupils' progress was unsatisfactory in one lesson in eight at Key Stages 3 and 4 and occurred when teachers' explanations and board work were not sufficiently clear. Most pupils in Year 7 are progressing satisfactorily but in each class there is a minority of higher-attaining pupils who are not being adequately challenged and consequently making little advance. This is because teachers are not taking proper account of pupils' prior attainment and the capacity of some to progress rapidly. These pupils markedly accelerate when classes are regrouped in Year 9.

93. The pupils are strongly motivated and are ready to work hard for success in the subject. In almost all the lessons observed their attitudes to learning were at least satisfactory and in half they were good or very good. This owes much to the teachers' efforts to foster good relationships in the classroom which encourage pupils readily to seek help when needed. This was evident in a Year 11 lesson where the pupils were starting to look at the angle properties of circles; the cordial relationships led to the pupils responding enthusiastically to the brisk and demanding pace set by the teacher. The pupils' attitudes were unsatisfactory in only one lesson and resulted from a teacher's failure adequately to check inattention and slacking, mostly from the boys.

94. The quality of teaching was at least satisfactory in all the Sixth Form lessons and this consistency represents an advance from the time of the previous inspection report. The teaching was satisfactory or better in a substantial majority of lessons at Key Stages 3 and 4. In more than a third of lessons the teaching was good, very good or excellent but in one in ten it was unsatisfactory. The most effective teaching featured clear explanations given in a lively manner that held the pupils' interest and attention. It often included a vigorous style of questioning that fostered pupils' thinking and understanding. These qualities were typified in an A Level lesson on mechanics where the teacher skilfully helped pupils towards a clearer understanding of the forces involved in vertical circular motion. The teaching was unsatisfactory when key teaching points were not clear or were not stated with sufficient force to have impact and when the teacher was not sufficiently demanding of the pupils' attention and effort. These weaknesses differ little from those reported in the previous inspection report. Homework is taken seriously by both teachers and pupils. Some marking of pupils' work is careful and thorough with helpful additional comments as was clearly evident in some A Level marking; however, the practice of some teachers falls well short of these high standards and does little to support pupils' learning. Some lessons are of 30 minutes' duration and the effective use now being made of them is a clear improvement on that reported in the previous inspection.

95. Mathematics is supported by a good programme of extra-curricular activities. The department is not yet geared, however, to capitalise on the resources for information technology that are now available within the school and in this respect it is not meeting a requirement of the National Curriculum. More assertive leadership is needed to attend to this matter, to rectify the unevenness in teachers' marking and to ensure that teaching in the early years more consistently covers the full range of the pupils' learning needs.

• **Science**

96. The proportion of pupils reaching Level 6 or higher in SATs at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1998 was well above the national average, but below that for grammar schools. The average level was also below that for grammar schools. In this regard, science was similar to the other core subjects. Results have been generally consistent over the past few years with small variations from year to year. The proportion of pupils achieving A*-C grades at GCSE in 1998 was also well above the national average, but below that for similar schools. The proportion of pupils awarded the highest grades of A* and A was above that in similar schools, but the average points score was below, with a relatively high proportion of D grades. Again, this level of results was broadly maintained in 1999. The average points score in all three A Level subjects in 1998 was above the national average, but below other

grammar schools. The proportion of pupils awarded the higher A and B grades was higher than the national average in biology, the same in physics, but lower in chemistry. The results in all three subjects were lower than those in other grammar schools. The average points score fell in all three subjects in 1999. The difference was very small in biology but large in physics.

97. The pupils' level of attainment in lessons is in line with examination and test results. At both Key Stages 3 and 4 the vast majority of pupils are working above the expected level. Most pupils in Year 10, for example, have a good grasp of photosynthesis and the factors that influence the rate at which it takes place. Higher-attaining pupils are able to use their ideas in a variety of complex situations to explain observations and results. They are also able to use their knowledge to explain some of the structure and function of leaves. Most pupils in Year 9 are familiar with the symbols of common elements and higher-attaining pupils are starting to follow symbol equations. They understand the process of dissolving, with higher-attaining pupils having a good knowledge of the behaviour of the particles involved. In the Sixth Form most pupils are working at or above the level expected for A Level courses. Attainment in lessons is similar across the range of sciences taught, as well as in experimental and investigative science. The pupils' practical skills are good. General learning skills, such as numeracy and literacy, are also good and are well used to support learning in science. There is a need to develop the pupils' skills in using information technology to collect and analyse data. A recent allocation of resources will assist this development.

98. The pupils, including those with special educational needs, make satisfactory progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and experimental skills. A combination of effective teaching and an interested and committed response from the pupils produces good progress in more than a third of lessons, as in a Year 8 lesson exploring the stretching of springs. More usually, in over half the lessons, progress is satisfactory, but it is unsatisfactory in a small number of lessons at Key Stage 4, such as the Year 11 lesson investigating the burning of fuels. In these lessons, a significant minority of pupils take time to settle into the lesson or get started with experimental work. They put little effort into their work and generally have negative attitudes to their learning in science. Consequently, despite sound interventions from the teacher, they make insufficient progress. Most pupils make good progress in developing an understanding of the finer points of the separate science subjects, such as how to sample the odour of a substance correctly, or the range of tests used to identify gases. The systems that the school uses to measure progress, both from Year 9 to Year 11 and from Year 11 to 13, show that the pupils make satisfactory progress overall. Over a three-year period, however, the data shows that at A Level those pupils taking biology made better progress than expected, those taking physics made the expected progress and those taking chemistry progressed less well than they should have done.

99. The pupils' attitudes to learning are good overall, although better at Key Stage 3 and in the Sixth Form than at Key Stage 4. Many pupils enjoy science and sometimes, particularly with younger pupils, this leads to a sense of excitement and, as in a Year 7 lesson classifying organisms, a sense of wonder at the complexity of the natural world. The pupils are courteous and polite. They collaborate and support each other well in small groups. Most pupils take responsibility for their own learning when given the opportunity and work well independently. More opportunities need to be provided for the pupils to work in this way. A minimum of supervision is required during practical work with the pupils working systematically and safely. Equipment is treated with care. The pupils take care with the presentation of their work and complete homework to a good standard. The pupils' behaviour is consistently good or very good. A small minority of pupils in Year 11 have become disenchanted with the subject and are not making the progress that they should. Some setting in Year 10 is resulting in more positive attitudes overall.

100. Teaching is satisfactory overall and never less than this in individual lessons. It is good in over one-third of lessons and occasionally, as in a Year 7 lesson on classification, very good. A range of factors contributes to good or very good teaching. A brisk delivery, with time targets set, as in a Year 10 lesson on the structure and function of leaves, leads to a good pace without rushing. High

expectations of effort and behaviour lead to good pupil management and a purposeful and committed atmosphere, as in a Year 10 lesson on stretching materials. A balance of open and closed questions, such as in a Year 8 lesson looking at heat loss in penguins, builds on what pupils already know and extends their understanding. Clear, confident and accurate exposition and demonstrations, as with Year 13 investigating electrical and magnetic fields, provide a sound knowledge base and insights into the finer points of the subject. The pupils often receive effective feedback on their work in lessons. The teachers' own knowledge and understanding are key factors in supporting good progress. Sometimes, however, teachers are over-prescriptive and encourage insufficient independence in pupils. Reluctant pupils could sometimes be encouraged to participate in the lesson more vigorously. Homework is regularly set and is often well used to extend the ideas covered in lessons and to prepare the pupils for future lessons, as well as providing the opportunity to complete work. There are examples of the pupils' work being well marked, with a balance of praise, corrections and diagnostic comment. The overall quality of marking, however, is unsatisfactory and has insufficient impact on the pupils' progress.

OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES

Art

101. GCSE and A Level results are well above national averages. Compared with grammar schools, the proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades at GCSE was below average in 1997 and 1998 and above average in 1999. The proportion gaining A* and A grades was in line with similar schools in 1997 and 1998 and above in 1999. In recent years A Level results have been above the average for grammar schools. Pupils taking photography at GCSE and A Level also achieve good results.

102. At Key Stage 3 attainment is mostly satisfactory, although there is great variety in the pupils' skills, understanding and knowledge across and within year groups, and attainment is unsatisfactory for more than a quarter of pupils. There is evidence of good quality work in some classes, particularly when pupils are excited by a project and respond imaginatively to a well-chosen stimulus. Good work sometimes comes about when the pupils are required to draw from direct observation. This was the case in one Year 8 class where pupils had been successful at drawing their partner and themselves. In several classes, however, the pupils' work is below expectations. Their drawings are immature, their painting skills are weak and their understanding of such things as design and composition is underdeveloped. Many projects rely on pupils working solely from their imagination. They are not given sufficient points of reference, their ideas are limited and as a consequence the outcomes are below what is expected for the key stage. A wide range of potentially exciting projects is planned but not all of these are precise in determining which aspects of the National Curriculum are to be learned. Attainment is also depressed because the projects do not always promote pupils' knowledge of artists and artistic style. Pupils are not helped sufficiently to evaluate art and understand the influences that affect the outcomes. Unlike Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form, research and experimental work is somewhat superficial and pupils are not learning to use sketchbooks as well as they should. Three-dimensional work is under-represented, although where pupils have taken ceramics their work is at the appropriate level. The progress made by most pupils at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory, but there are many individuals who could achieve more.103. Pupils currently undertaking the examination courses are working to a high standard. Their strengths are in painting and drawing; they have very good technical skills and their work is often visually exciting. Much of their work is enhanced by extensive research, experimentation and preparation, and their studies of artists and art movements are used well to inform their own personal styles. The structure of both the GCSE and A Level art courses is an influential factor in pupils making good progress and attaining high standards. A series of carefully selected projects is followed by a second phase where pupils develop their ideas and increase their independence. The pupils can deal successfully with conventional aspects of the subject, such as portraiture or still life drawing, and they can also manipulate images and respond in an abstract way. Those taking the photography course also make good progress; they steadily increase their technical skills and use them effectively to produce imaginative studies.104. Key Stage 3 pupils' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory. With the exception of a few boys who do not concentrate, pupils are attentive and they

attempt to act upon the advice given by their teachers. Generally, they are able to get on with the task when not directly supervised and they work at a reasonable pace. The pupils involved in examination work have a good and often very good attitude. They show keen interest and most are developing as serious artists. Most take great care with their preparatory and finished work, and they are able and willing to be self-critical. Many devote additional time to the subject, finishing work at home and researching independently.¹⁰⁵ Teaching is satisfactory overall. It is strongest in the Sixth Form where teachers' interventions are very focused, quietly supporting and prompting individual pupils to refine their work. When whole class teaching occurs the teachers' expertise is used well to enlighten and provoke thought. This was the case in a Year 12 lesson where the teacher commented on video material which discussed the different approaches of fashion photographers. Key Stage 4 teaching is satisfactory. Criteria for the GCSE examination are promoted successfully. Discussions with pupils assess progress and advise on how work might develop or improvements be made. Year 10 pupils in the very early stages of the course benefited from this; they had produced some very strong pencil drawings with exceptionally good tonal quality and were being advised how the different techniques of the Impressionists might be used in their future paintings. Lessons at Key Stage 3 are also satisfactory overall. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and their explanations and instructions are clear; however, sometimes expectations are not high enough, particularly for the more able pupils. Such shortcomings occurred in Year 9 lessons where the current projects promote certain key skills but they do not present an intellectual challenge. Teachers use pupils' work successfully as a resource to stimulate ideas; however, they do not always supplement this by showing work of a similar kind by established artists.¹⁰⁶ There are good systems for assessing pupils' progress through the examination courses, but at Key Stage 3 where the criteria are set by the National Curriculum, assessment is unsatisfactory. Planning needs to be extended to ensure full coverage of National Curriculum skills and understanding, as well as providing a framework for judging pupils' attainment and progress. Reference material to support historical and contextual studies needs to be increased and made widely available, particularly at Key Stage 3. Currently the department lacks a rigorous approach to monitoring teaching, learning and the curriculum. The strong features of the department noted in the last report have been maintained and some multi-cultural studies have been added to improve the curriculum.

Business studies and economics

107. Attainment in GCSE economics has shown some variation over recent years, with the proportion of pupils achieving A*-C grades in 1998 below that achieved in all schools and well below that achieved in grammar schools. In the 1999 examination there was an encouraging increase in the percentage of A*-C grades and all candidates achieved grade E or above. This was below the national figure for grammar schools but significantly above that for all schools. In combined A Level business and economics the percentage of A*-B grades was below that achieved in the previous year when the subjects were offered separately. The department has implemented a new and detailed programme of close monitoring including self-evaluation and target-setting to ensure that more pupils are able to achieve the higher grades in future.

108. At Key Stage 4 attainment in lessons is mostly above average and never less than average. In Year 11 pupils have a good understanding of economic concepts, are able to use correct terminology and are often able to relate these accurately to real current economic topics. In both Years 10 and 11 good use of number enables pupils to analyse data and construct appropriate graphs, although more use should be made of IT for analysing economic models and data. Pupils are usually confident and keen to make oral responses, many of which include a pleasing amount of detail. Attainment in the Sixth Form in lessons is mostly good, although in some classes there are a few pupils who find some of the more difficult concepts and tasks rather challenging. In both Years 12 and 13 verbal communication skills are often well developed with some pupils providing extended, well thought-out and fluent responses in class. There is a pleasing awareness of current business and economic topics, enabling pupils to cite relevant examples in response to questions or to illustrate their points. The most able pupils demonstrate very good ability in applying their knowledge and understanding to complex matters, making links between many aspects of the course. Well-prepared and convincingly argued group presentations were made by a Year 12 class which was given a challenging task and a tight deadline.

109. Progress at Key Stage 4 is never less than sound, usually good and sometimes very good. In one Year 10 lesson pupils were quickly beginning to understand some of the more complex controversies about the allocation of scarce resources and the notion of Gross Domestic Product. By Year 11 many pupils are able to demonstrate a good breadth and depth of understanding in the subject, hypothesising and making reasoned judgements. There was a wide range of grades in summer A Level modules for the current Year 13, but for the majority in both Years 12 and 13 progress is usually good and for some, very good. The rate of progress reflects the current rigorous approach to departmental management with detailed planning, evaluation and target-setting. This process is also undertaken with all pupils who, by the end of Years 10 and 12, have a clear idea of their achievements, shortcomings and strategies for improvement.

110. The pupils' attitudes to learning in lessons are good and often very good. Pupils are co-operative, diligent and well motivated with good levels of concentration and perseverance. The pupils work well in pairs or groups, many with a high degree of confidence. Sixth Formers demonstrate a pleasing interest in topical business and economic affairs, being able to cite current examples and relate theory to practice. In all years there are good examples of effective co-operation on group tasks. Pupils are able to organise themselves, analyse data and formulate appropriate responses.

111. The current staff of this department have tackled the weaknesses identified in the last inspection report. Teaching in Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form is never less than satisfactory, more often good and sometimes very good. It is based upon schemes of work that are thorough and detailed. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives which are shared with pupils. Classroom management is almost always good or very good, engendering a very positive, supportive working environment, and pace was usually brisk. Expositions are clear with emphasis upon correct terminology. Question and answer sessions are handled well, with teachers including the more reticent pupils as often as possible. There is much appropriate praise and encouragement. Lessons, particularly doubles and trebles, include a variety of tasks which help to maintain interest and motivation. Group work, with mixed gender groups and appropriately challenging tasks, is a regular feature of both GCSE and A Level courses. The department should ensure consistency of approach between members of staff teaching parallel classes through greater use of common resources. More IT should be incorporated into schemes of work, in particular the use of spreadsheets for modelling and analysing data. Appropriate homework is regularly set, assessment procedures are adhered to and marking is thorough. Teacher-produced resources are of a good standard. The department's resource bank should be used more by all teachers to ensure a more uniform experience for pupils. Textbooks, although plentiful at both GCSE and A Level, are dated. Some are ten years old, thus limiting the relevance of many examples and all statistics. A list of appropriate Internet sites is provided to give A Level pupils access to current information. The lecture theatre, which is timetabled for some of the department's lessons, is not suitable for the styles of teaching appropriate for and used by staff in this subject.

Design and technology

112. In the GCSE examinations there has been a rising trend in the percentage of pupils attaining grades A*-C from 1997 to 1998, with results for resistant materials showing a significant improvement.

In 1998 results were above the national average for grammar schools. Unconfirmed results for 1999 are similar to those for 1998. In the three subjects offered to GCE A Level there has been a rising trend from 1997 to 1998. In fashion and fabrics and in food and nutrition the percentage of pupils obtaining A*-E grades was above the average for grammar schools in 1998; the percentage of A and B grades in food and nutrition well above, in fashion & fabrics above, and in design and technology well below. Unconfirmed results for 1999 show a slight decline from 1998.

113. At the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' attainment is in line with national expectations. In textiles it is above, where the quality and quantity of research and practical work when producing a garment is good.

In food technology pupils have a good understanding of the need for a balanced diet and are able to select and modify recipes to produce a suitable dish. Using resistant materials, pupils apply satisfactory practical skills, using tools and machines with confidence and with due regard to safety. Attainment in electronics is satisfactory, although levels of understanding here are limited as pupils use kits which are too complex for an introduction to this topic. Pupils have an understanding of appropriate technical language, for example, in textiles they understand the meaning of warp, weft and selvedge. Higher attainment is restricted where course planning does not take into account the levels of pupils' previous work.

114. Pupils' work from last year's Year 11 indicates attainment to be above expectations in resistant materials and well above in textiles and food technology. In the lessons observed pupils' attainment was in line with expectations. This was because some work, which was being done during the inspection week, was revision of topics covered in previous lessons. In food technology pupils understand methods of testing food and the differences between production methods for different quantities of an item. Some pupils have good graphic skills, but in the graphics option in Year 11 pupils do not have the background knowledge of drawing methods, for example, of three-dimensional systems, expected of pupils of this age.

115. By the end of the Sixth Form courses, attainment is above expectations overall but is only average for design work in the design and technology option, where some pupils' work from last year indicates a lack of expertise in graphic skills. Work in current classes indicates an improvement here. In fashion and fabrics and in design and technology some high quality practical work is produced.

116. Pupils have equality of access to the curriculum at all stages, but there is a gender imbalance in some of the option groups at both Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form. The great majority of pupils make good use of number skills when measuring, interpreting data and representing this in the form of graphs. The level of literacy is high, evident, for example, from some coursework folders in food studies in the Sixth Form.

117. Pupils following A Level courses make good progress overall. This is not so in design and technology where work from the previous year indicates that some pupils present incomplete design folders. At Key Stage 4 progress in lessons is satisfactory. The pupils' work indicates that overall progress is good, especially so in textiles and food technology. Some pupils make unsatisfactory progress in the resistant materials course, when they repeat work done in another option, although improvements from Year 10 to Year 11 are evident in the quality of design folder work. At Key Stage 3 pupils make satisfactory progress. In Year 7 good progress is made, for example in food technology when pupils have first-hand experience of the effects of mixing and heating ingredients and in a Year 9 lesson when designing and modelling wind chimes.

118. Pupils are well motivated; for example, in Year 13 design and technology pupils have chosen topics related to their own interests and have used initiative in obtaining their own research materials. Pupils in all age groups freely discuss their ideas with others, which leads to valuable exchanges.

119. In all lessons teaching is at least satisfactory. It is good in about half the lessons. This is an improvement since the last inspection. The teachers have good subject knowledge, as evident where a clear explanation of the content of the lesson also establishes the teacher's high expectations. They make very good use of questioning, enabling pupils to give developed answers and to reinforce their understanding. Homework is set regularly and is directly linked to current work. Time is well used, for example in a Year 7 food technology lesson, enabling pupils to make good progress. Good use is made of written comments to help pupils with their future work as in Year 9 textiles. Insufficient account is sometimes taken of pupils' previous levels of attainment when they start on new units of work at Key Stage 3. In one Year 10 lesson pupils covered work identical to that of the previous lesson.

120. At Key Stage 3 the assessment system does not relate directly to the National Curriculum levels of attainment. The system used does not inform curriculum planning. The division of design and

technology into three departments, and the number of part-time teachers, identified in the previous inspection report, although now reduced, have an adverse effect on the subject's efficient functioning; for example, there are difficulties in holding departmental meetings for all staff. There have been significant improvements in accommodation and resources since the last inspection. One of the textiles rooms in particular presents a stimulating learning environment. There is still inadequate provision for information technology, particularly for graphics, information retrieval and computer numeric controlled (CNC) machinery. There are insufficient textbooks at Key Stage 4. There has been much improvement with regard to health and safety in the resistant materials areas.

Geography

121. Examination results have improved over the last three years. GCSE results were well above the national average in 1998 and 1999, and also above the average for grammar schools. 64% of candidates gained A or A* in the 1999 examination. This represents a marked improvement on the 1997 results. Much of this is due to improved coursework by the pupils.

122. A Level results improved significantly from 23% A-B in 1997 to 35% A-B in 1998 and 39% in 1999, with all pupils passing in 1999; however these results remain below the average for grammar schools. There is evidence to show that pupils who enter the school in the Sixth Form with lower GCSE grades achieve lower grades at A Level or leave the course early.

123. At the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is much higher than average and broadly in line with national standards for grammar school pupils. Standards observed during the inspection were satisfactory or better in all Key Stage 3 and 4 lessons observed and often good or very good. Year 9 pupils had grasped the difficult concept of dependency ratios in their population studies, for example, and Year 11 pupils competently analysed Ordnance Survey maps of Manchester to identify urban structure. Standards at A Level were always high. Year 13 pupils were, for example, able to explain complex aspects of plate tectonic theory.

124. Pupils make satisfactory, good or very good progress in all lessons, with good or very good progress always made at A Level. Teachers have a very good subject knowledge which they draw upon to make clear and simple explanations within well-planned lessons. Pupils listen attentively and are not afraid to ask questions if they do not understand. They also ask thoughtful questions and most are quick and able to answer the teachers' questions. Relationships between pupils and teachers show mutual respect, and effective use of question and answer sessions reinforce the work and allow teachers to assess understanding. In one Year 8 lesson the teacher drew upon the pupils' existing knowledge and a range of statistics to explain the concept of the natural greenhouse effect. One teacher used three different types of map to show the ways differences in density and distribution could be shown and encouraged Year 9 pupils to analyse, ask and answer questions about each method.

125. Systematic use of examination questions and regular testing throughout the whole key stage allows GCSE and A Level pupils to make the maximum progress. This, together with high quality teaching and careful monitoring of coursework, enables pupils to make good progress and achieve well in external examinations.

126. The least progress is made during lessons when a teacher talks for too long or maintains one activity, usually question and answer sessions, for a large part of the lesson. In one Year 8 lesson on measuring and recording the weather, pupils listened to the teacher explaining how the instruments worked for twenty-five minutes and were visibly losing interest as the lesson continued. A minority of pupils need extra support from teachers and further tasks to apply their understanding so that their learning is secure. A greater range of active learning and practical activities would raise the pupils' progress and attainment.

127. The pupils' presentation of their work is variable, although it is usually up to date and complete. Work in many books in Years 7 and 8 is better presented than those of pupils in Year 9. There are too many loose worksheets, too much untidy handwriting and poor quality shading. At Key Stage 4, when folders of classwork are not routinely marked, some pupils adopt a sloppy attitude to diagrams and notes. Teachers mark all work at Key Stage 3 and all tests and practice examination questions at Key Stage 4 and A Level with care, and they give constructive comments that move the pupils' work forward. This practice has been a factor in raising the examination grades.

128. The pupils' language and number skills are highly developed. They explain geographical concepts well. Year 9 pupils could explain clearly terms such as density, distribution and economic wealth, while Year 13 pupils, after watching a video, could summarise and articulate the causes and effects of changing economic land use around the Aral Sea and the complex impact it had on people's lives. Pupils regularly use statistical and graphical methods within lessons. Year 11 coursework shows a full range of graphs and charts, often computer-generated, which the pupils are able to analyse effectively. Year 13 pupils were able to explain Lorenz distribution curves and how they vary through time.

129. Fieldwork is a strength of the department with carefully planned and resourced field days at Key Stage 3 showing progressively challenging work well met by the majority of pupils. Pupils in Year 7 visit a local farm, in Year 8 they study the physical geography of part of the local area and in Year 9, with growing autonomy, they conduct settlement studies in Marlow. GCSE and A Level coursework is of a high quality overall with the best pieces being awarded full marks.

130. Since the last inspection report examination results have improved, particularly for pupils achieving at the highest levels. There are still insufficient opportunities for pupils to participate fully within lessons or to engage in personal research and find out for themselves. Although there is now a greater variety of teaching methods, most teachers continue to use one dominant teaching style where the teacher talks and asks pupils questions. Though this is a very effective strategy it should be supplemented with a greater range of teaching methods to suit the full range of learners within the classroom. Opportunities to use IT, seen as 'very limited' within the last inspection report, have now been included in the schemes of work for each year. For example, Year 9 pupils use IT skills to construct a database and analyse their data from fieldwork in Marlow. The IT skills of pupils is increasing rapidly. The department must ensure that pupils use these skills in planned geographical enquiries to enhance the quality of geographical learning, rather than as an opportunity to repeat existing learning and skills.

History

131. The 1998 GCSE results in history were above average for all schools, but below average for grammar schools. Compared to the progress made by pupils overall at Key Stage 4 at the school, the progress of pupils in history was unsatisfactory in 1998. This year's results show a big improvement in the percentage of pupils gaining higher grades and particularly in the number of A* and A grades. No comparative data is yet available for 1999. At A Level, pupils have been underachieving in history over the past three years. Results are below the national average, both in the overall pass rate and in the percentage of A-B grades. The pupils do not make the progress from GCSE to A Level that they should make, and which pupils in most other subjects in the school do make. This is clearly unsatisfactory.

132. At Key Stage 3, attainment is above average. The pupils have good note-taking skills and are able to express themselves well in writing, as in the Year 9 displays on the holocaust and current work expressing German reactions to the treaty of Versailles. Pupils studying the rise of Hitler are able to use sources to explain the appeal of the Nazis. They are also able to use case studies, such as the assassination of President Kennedy, in an investigative manner, to challenge accepted interpretations of

events. There are fewer opportunities for them to investigate independently aspects of the periods studied and produce lengthier reports.

133. At Key Stage 4, more structured guidance on source analysis and examination techniques, and a thorough revision programme, have produced a marked improvement in the pupils' work. The present Year 11 pupils are achieving a good standard in their coursework, evaluating sources effectively and reaching substantiated judgements. Some of the fieldwork produced at the sites of the First World War battlefields is particularly good. In lessons on the Vietnam War, pupils demonstrated a good grasp of information and the ability to weigh the usefulness of sources by reference to their authors. Better feedback on A Level essays is helping pupils to produce work of a satisfactory quality. The level of discussion in lessons is good. For example, Year 13 pupils were able to hypothesise about the problems awaiting Henry VIII's successor from their knowledge of his reign.

134. Progress is satisfactory at Key Stage 3, where pupils are developing the skills of source analysis right from the start, looking at evidence of civilised and brutal practices in ancient Rome. By Year 8 they are comparing sources and selecting those that support their side of the argument in the class debate over Henry VIII's divorce. Whilst the general level of work allows academic pupils to make satisfactory progress, clearer identification of progression in historical skills for this key stage would promote greater progress. On the GCSE course, pupils are making good progress in lessons. Year 10 pupils have started well and show good understanding of the causes of the First World War and the tactics of trench warfare. Year 11 pupils have amassed notes and exercises in their files, showing thorough coverage of topics and a high standard of coursework. In the Sixth Form over recent years, progress has been unsatisfactory for a significant number of pupils who have failed to achieve the grades expected of them. Pupils starting courses in Year 12 are making good progress, helped by a sound induction programme on study skills at A Level. Good progress is also evident in Year 13 lessons and the work in the pupils' files shows a growing maturity of style and thoroughness of approach.

135. History is a popular subject that has increased its numbers at GCSE and A Level this year. Pupils approach their work seriously and concentrate well in lessons, though the long triple lesson in Years 10 and 11 can be a strain if pupil activity is not sufficiently varied, as proved the case in a lesson devoted to exercises on source analysis. Involvement was particularly enthusiastic in the Year 10 lesson on trench warfare, in preparation for the well-supported residential visits to Flanders in October. Across the school, pupils are well behaved in class and work well together in pairs and in groups. Discussion flowed freely in an A Level class, indicative of the positive nature of pupil collaboration.

136. The quality of teaching is good in many lessons and satisfactory in all. Lessons are well planned and pitched at the right level to challenge the pupils. Teachers make effective use of resources, sometimes mixing text, video and duplicated materials to good effect. They present their lessons in a clear and interesting way, giving opportunities for pupil discussion. Teachers manage their pupils in a firm and friendly manner, and give appropriate help to individuals whilst the class is working. Their marking of pupils' assessed work is good in the upper school but notes are not checked. Marking is unsatisfactory at Key Stage 3 and lacks sufficient diagnostic comment. It is not informed by the level descriptors in the history attainment target. An area for development is the Key Stage 3 curriculum, to ensure coverage and systematic progression in all five of its key elements. Homework had not been set in some classes in the first few weeks of the new term.

137. Since the last inspection, teachers have responded to criticism about the narrow range of teaching methods used and have broadened the scope of learning activities for pupils. Results at A Level are still the problem. The strategies in place will need rigorous implementation to ensure that pupils in difficulty are identified at an early stage and supported through the course.

Information technology (IT)

138. There has been a significant improvement in the provision of IT equipment recently, which has already had an impact upon attainment. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is of a very high standard. The current Year 11 is the first cohort to be following an examination course in IT at Key Stage 4 and there are no external results to report. Attainment in A and AS Level computer studies has shown some variation in recent years, but because of the small numbers involved national comparative data is not available. The latest figures, while generally satisfactory, do include some unclassified results which are a reflection upon the lack of appropriate entrance criteria for the course.

139. There are timetabled lessons in IT throughout Key Stage 3 in which attainment was never less than satisfactory, more often good or very good. The course focuses upon communicating, handling information and modelling. Control and measuring are covered in design and technology and science respectively. In the first half term of Year 8 pupils are able to manipulate and interrogate a database, customise the appearance of the files and use macros to create special buttons and toolbars for a specific user of the program. Many are achieving at Level 7, well above the national expectation for this age group. In music, keyboards and mixing equipment are being used to good effect to produce a variety of electronic sounds and sequences.

140. At Key Stage 4 half the year group follow a half GCSE in IT. The standard of coursework already produced is high. Attainment in IT lessons is usually good. Matching work to the different attainment of pupils is built into the scheme of work. Challenging tasks are provided for the most able allowing them to achieve the highest levels, for example, designing spreadsheet applications to be used by others such as a wedding financial planner and a booking/recording/billing system for a car hire company.

141. Progress in Key Stage 3 IT lessons is good or very good. The progress made in Years 7 and 8 is noteworthy. Progress by pupils following the GCSE IT course is good. The pupils are building upon their previous IT experiences to good effect in the areas of communicating, handling information and modelling. At least satisfactory, often good progress is made in the control aspect of IT in design and technology; however the options which are followed determine to what extent progress is made in developing IT capability at Key Stage 4. Opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their IT skills across the curriculum should be increased. This is of particular importance at Key Stage 4 because half of the year group do not have timetabled IT lessons and are therefore not guaranteed coverage of the National Curriculum programme of study. Mathematics fails to fulfil the statutory obligation to include IT in its scheme of work at Key Stages 3 and 4. Careful curriculum planning, with implementation of plans monitored by senior managers, and a commitment by more subject departments are required to ensure equality of opportunity and compliance with National Curriculum requirements.

142. Equipment has recently been purchased to enable pupils to use IT to monitor events in both science and geography. Progress in the Sixth Form results largely from the pupils' own use of IT, from teaching of IT or its use by subject teachers, although guidance is available from IT staff. Many pupils have begun to use the Internet to good effect for classwork and coursework. Pupils from all years have access to IT rooms outside timetabled lessons and they are used well. IT facilities in the school library are good: eleven machines have Internet access, a range of appropriate CD ROMs is available, a scanner can be used and printing facilities are good. All of this helps to promote the use of IT particularly among those who do not have access at home. The computer rooms are not used sufficiently during lesson times and are unused for long periods. The failure of several departments to use IT sufficiently is not caused by inadequate resources.

143. Throughout the school the pupils' attitude when using IT is good. Pupils are attentive, willing to answer questions and work effectively in pairs or groups. The majority of pupils are highly motivated

by the use of IT, respond well to challenging tasks and are keen to produce a high standard of work.

144. Teaching in discrete IT lessons at both Key Stages 3 and 4 is good or very good. Lessons are well planned and activities are referenced to National Curriculum levels of attainment. Explanations are clear with references to other curriculum areas when appropriate. An activity related to proof-reading made a valuable contribution in the field of literacy. Appropriate and challenging work is supported by on-screen resources. Prepared data files, spreadsheets and documents make learning fast, while specially-prepared, electronically-annotated demonstration exemplars provide valuable and immediately accessible support for pupils. Assessment procedures are in place and end of Key Stage 3 levels are carefully compiled using appropriate sources. Written comments on printed work tend to be brief but verbal diagnostic comments are made throughout practical sessions. In other subject lessons where IT is a feature, teaching is at least satisfactory and usually good. In most cases the use of IT enhances learning in the subject.

145. Although the number of computers remains below the national average for secondary schools, the new IT facilities have been well chosen and are well managed. Teachers have the opportunity to take control of pupils' screens for demonstration purposes and the range of software is broad. Half of the computer screens in the largest IT room suffer badly from direct sunlight through the large glass roof area and the room also becomes uncomfortably hot. This defect needs to be remedied.

146. To raise standards the school should ensure that all National Curriculum subjects comply with statutory requirements to include IT in schemes of work. All pupils at Key Stage 4, not just those on specific IT courses, must be enabled to improve their IT skills. Greater use of IT is needed in many subjects. The school must ensure that IT rooms comply with health and safety regulations.

Modern languages

147. GCSE examination results in modern languages have remained close to the levels at the last inspection. They have been well above the national average for A*-C grades in both languages. When compared to grammar schools, the results have been well below average in Italian. In French, they were a little above the average for grammar schools in 1997 and 1999 and a little below average in 1998. Results in Italian at A Level for the higher A-B grades were below the national average and well below the average for grammar schools in 1998 and 1999, but good in 1997. In French at A Level, results were above the national average in 1998 and 1999, but poor in 1997, with less than half the national average of higher grades. They were below the average for grammar schools in all three years. The pupils entered for A Level French over the three-year period 1996-1998 did worse in this subject than in the average of all their other subjects, although there was an improvement in results in 1998.

148. Attainment in lessons and in the pupils' books is mainly above average at all stages, but with a very wide spread at Key Stage 4 from well above to below average in different groups of mixed-ability pupils. Attainment is affected to an extent by the fact that pupils in some groups at Key Stages 3 and 4 are at the beginning of new topics and at that early stage of learning are working at average levels. At A Level attainment is above average overall, but with considerable variations both between and within the Italian and French groups.

149. The pupils' listening skills are very good, both in response to the teacher's language and to work on cassette or video, as in a Year 10 Italian lesson on daily activities where most pupils demonstrated persistence and confidence in their ability to understand some difficult conversations recorded by Italian exchange pupils who were in school for part of the inspection week. Most pupils at all stages clearly benefit from the departmental policy of providing homework cassettes to develop their listening skills. Many pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 can understand extracts from their textbooks and sometimes reach higher levels in reading through reading schemes. This is an improvement since the last inspection, although all pupils do not yet read widely as the National Curriculum expects. A wide variety of

material is used to develop reading skills at A Level.

150. At Key Stage 3 written work is mainly consolidation or grammar practice, but from Year 9 onwards many pupils are able to write dialogues, letters and short descriptions with improving accuracy. Much of the written and oral work in Years 10 and 11 is based on GCSE examination tasks, as in one Year 10 French group where the pupils were able to answer some of the GCSE basic oral questions giving personal details rapidly, confidently and with good pronunciation. While good examination practice is vital for success, this does limit the range and complexity of the language used, particularly for the more gifted linguists who may go on to study a language at A Level.

151. In the A Level lessons seen there were no opportunities for pupils to speak at any length in French, but many were able to answer questions on the topic of the cinema in Year 12 and on the environment in Year 13. In a good mixed-skill Italian lesson all of the Year 12 pupils were able to discuss at a simple level the questions raised in a cassette, also on the environment, and to speak well and at some length about their lives from notes prepared for homework.

152. At Key Stage 3 progress in individual lessons and over time is mainly satisfactory and occasionally good. In one Year 8 Italian lesson on the topic 'At the Tourist Office' the pupils' progress was adversely affected by the over-long triple lesson of ninety minutes, despite a well taught, well varied lesson and good pupil attitudes. At Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form progress in lessons is mainly satisfactory and occasionally good or very good. It is also occasionally unsatisfactory or poor because of tasks which are insufficiently prepared and exploited or where there is little or no pupil involvement in the lesson. In two Year 11 French lessons taught by different teachers most pupils reinforced earlier learning and made good and very good progress. Most pupils responded well to opportunities to work at their own speed, using listening sets and other equipment, on different skills, and at various levels within the framework of GCSE basic tasks. These lessons cater well for the different levels of attainment within the groups, but this is an important area for development at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form if the pupils continue to be taught in mixed groups, often with quite a wide range of attainment by that stage. Schemes of work at all stages provide an overview but need to be expanded and to include different tasks matched to different attainment levels to help teachers with their planning. This is urgent in the Sixth Form where there is very little guidance in the current documentation. There has been some progress on assessment, criticised at the last inspection. The department must ensure that end of key stage judgements are securely based, feed into planning and lead to reports which are more clearly focused.

153. Most pupils are well behaved, cooperative and work steadily in lessons. Many pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 are able to work productively in pairs and small groups and there are more opportunities to do so than at the last inspection. Homework is often substantial, particularly at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form and is conscientiously done by the majority. Many pupils make a substantial contribution to their own learning.

154. Teaching is mainly satisfactory. It is good and occasionally very good in more than one-third of lessons, and unsatisfactory or poor in a small number of lessons at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form for the reasons already noted. Classroom relationships are very positive. Lessons are conducted mainly or entirely in the foreign language, although pupils rarely use the foreign language for anything other than responses to the teachers. They do not use it in classroom conversations between each other below the Sixth Form. Teachers all follow the departmental policy on marking which is satisfactory overall, with some good, helpful marking by individual teachers at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form.

German

155. Since the last inspection, the school's GCSE examination results in German have been well above the national average for the higher A*-C grades. A*-C grades were just below the average for grammar schools in 1997 and well below average in 1998 and 1999. A Level results have been very varied. They were well above the average for A-B grades in 1997 and 1999, but poor in 1998 with no A or B

grades. They have been below or well below the average for grammar schools in all three years. Attainment in lessons and the pupils' books ranges from well above to below average at Key Stages 3 and 4 and from average to above average in the Sixth Form. Most pupils are attaining above the average at all key stages.

156. As in French and Italian, pupils in many groups during the inspection were at the beginning of topics and using their listening, reading and speaking skills to acquire and practise new language. Pupils were often close to national averages at this very early stage of learning and making satisfactory progress. Pupils in one Year 9 group, in their second year of German, needed the consolidation of the present tense of three common irregular verbs provided in the lesson and, although the pupils were working below the average for a Year 9 group, they made satisfactory progress over the lesson. Pupils' writing skills develop over the key stages and accuracy improves, with pupils using the past tense from Year 8. Due attention is paid to grammar as in one Year 10 lesson which provided specific practice in separable verbs. By the end of Key Stage 4 many pupils write regularly and at some length, mainly on GCSE-style tasks. No imaginative writing was seen. Listening skills are good at all stages, as in a Year 12 lesson on the family where most pupils showed good understanding of work on cassette, and in a Year 13 lesson on the media where again many pupils showed ready understanding of the teacher's language in the discussion part of the lesson. The best pupils in this group were confident orally and keen to contribute to the discussion, but about half the group did not speak at all and were much happier with the reading task which followed.

157. Progress in lessons and over time is usually satisfactory at all stages. Progress in lessons is occasionally unsatisfactory at Key Stage 4 as in a lesson where pupils did not respond well to low-level tasks and the teacher was unable to influence their attitudes and behaviour sufficiently. The homework set for this group of pupils was at a substantially higher level than the work in the lesson, although pupils would have found considerable help in their textbooks. An examination of the same pupils' written work showed satisfactory progress over time, with homework tasks consistently at a good level.

Progress is occasionally very good at Key Stage 3 as in a Year 8 lesson on travel where high teacher expectations and a very well chosen sequence of activities built new language for pupils at a rapid pace and with very thorough oral practice.

158. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are mainly satisfactory and occasionally good or very good at Key Stages 3 and 4. In these lessons pupils are actively involved in their learning and respond well to good and very good teaching. They are occasionally unsatisfactory, as already outlined. In the Sixth Form most pupils are well motivated and relationships are good.

159. Teaching too, is mainly satisfactory at all stages, occasionally very good at Key Stage 3 and occasionally unsatisfactory at Key Stage 4 for the reasons already noted. The weaknesses in German are similar to those identified in detail in the modern languages report. Lessons which often contain good features such as good use of resources and of the foreign language are not often planned to meet the range of needs particularly in the mixed-ability groups at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form. Assessment needs further development and schemes of work need to be expanded, particularly in the Sixth Form.

Music

160. Attainment continues to exceed national expectations at Key Stages 3 and 4. A Level results are poor, but the low number of entries makes it unrealistic to compare these results with national statistics. GCSE results continue to be above the national average. It is also noteworthy that group sizes have increased this year at Key Stage 4 and this is a step forward in the growth of the department.

161. At Key Stage 3 pupils are engaging in a range of activities, many of which are inter-relating the attainment targets of composing and performing and of listening and appraising. One lively and exciting Year 7 lesson showed pupils working effectively on African polyrhythms, using the voice as a percussive sound source, then progressing to more complex three-part singing. A Year 8 class was

successfully experimenting with music technology in order to compose a multi-faceted piece, drawing on all the sound resources of the electronic keyboard, mixing and layering sound with an aim finally to record their outcomes. Many pupils still have to develop a good keyboard playing technique rather than relying on a one-finger style. This weakness has already been identified and targeted for future development.

162. At Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form many of the pupils are talented instrumental performers and these skills are supporting their GCSE or A Level coursework. Folders of work in Year 11 show evidence of the completion of some good or satisfactory aural appreciation work, but there is limited evidence of written or taped composition. The Year 11 class is showing considerable ability in sight reading, resulting in some excellent unprepared duet and trio performances from some groups.

163. Most pupils in Years 7 to 11 respond well in lessons with a high level of positive interaction in group or paired work. They join in discussion or answer questions eagerly and are also confident to ask questions when necessary. One or two of the Year 12 pupils are still a little casual in their approach to A Level work but once they gain the necessary sense of urgency and are able to take a greater responsibility for their own learning they have the musical capacity to succeed. Pupil-teacher relationships are good and there is an air of enthusiasm in the classroom with much of the learning taking place through challenging practical activities.

164. The quality of the teaching is at least satisfactory in almost all lessons, with a very high proportion of good or very good teaching. Most lessons are well planned, taught at a lively pace through a range of teaching styles which vary appropriately according to the nature of the activity. Teacher expectations are generally high both in the classroom and in the peripatetic instrumental lessons. One singing lesson demonstrated vocal tuition at its best with a young voice being both nurtured and developed through a variety of excellent vocal exercises. The most successful class lessons seen were those in which practical music making was made the basis for learning. The department, which has recently undergone a change of leadership, must now improve the assessment of pupils' work as a matter of urgency in accordance with statutory requirements. This can then be used effectively to inform future planning as well as meeting the needs of individual pupils.

165. In the recent past there has been a limited amount of extra-curricular music. This has now been changed and a chamber orchestra has been formed with plans afoot for both a stage band and a choir to be set up within the next few weeks. There is also to be a joint music and drama production of the musical *Bugsy Malone* at the end of this term. The school, to its credit, is actively supporting instrumental tuition by subsidising the lessons. About 12% of the pupils receive instrumental or vocal tuition. All these events augur well for the future of the music department.

Physical education

166. Pupils did very well in the 1998 GCSE examination. All pupils entered gained a grade in the A*-C range, placing the school well above the average for all schools and also for grammar schools. The percentage of A* and A grades was also well above the average for grammar schools. Although the most recent results were not quite as good, they were still above the average for grammar schools. The A Level results have fluctuated. Until 1998 the pupils were taught elsewhere. The first cohort taught at Chesham High was entered in 1999 when all passed with an above-average proportion gaining the two highest grades.

167. Pupils currently taking the A Level course are well taught and are attaining a standard which indicates that the good results can be maintained. They understand key principles and can relate theory to practice; their written work shows that they have secure knowledge about a range of topics. GCSE pupils have good physical skills and in the theoretical elements of the course they can usually express their views on such things as sponsorship in sport. The teaching of such topics needs development to ensure that the subject matter is not perceived by pupils to be dry and uninteresting. In both

examination courses, pupils' learning is adversely affected by a shortage of textbooks.

168. There is a wide range of attainment among the Key Stage 4 pupils who are not involved in examination work, but standards in various practical activities are broadly in line with course expectations. Good work was observed in a Year 10 rugby lesson where pupils responded to good teaching and were able to apply a range of skills in different competitive situations. In contrast, lower-attaining pupils in the same year group were below the standard expected in basketball.

169. Standards vary at Key Stage 3 but are they are also broadly in line with national expectations. Attainment is highest in relation to age in Year 7 where pupils perform well and learn quickly in swimming, netball and hockey. In a hockey lesson, very good teaching, coupled with an equally good response from pupils, resulted in excellent progress. Pupils demonstrated a firm grasp of some basic techniques and were able to apply their skills to a range of different competitive situations. Progress in lessons is generally satisfactory, although this is not the case when tasks are insufficiently challenging or pupils are not provided with strategies to overcome difficulties in aspects of gymnastics. Attainment in dance is not high enough in Year 9. Although pupils made satisfactory progress in a lesson when required to respond to a musical stimulus, their movements were constrained and their choreography was below the standard expected for their age.

170. Pupils have a good attitude towards the subject. They usually arrive at lessons eager to start work, they are well equipped and some put in a great deal of physical effort. Additionally, their participation in the wide range of extra-curricular activities demonstrates their enjoyment and eagerness to extend their learning. They collaborate in lessons, enabling group practices to work well. The majority of pupils see the purpose of practice and persevere when asked to repeat a particular skill. They are almost always attentive, trying hard to apply the points made by their teachers. Boys were seen to deal successfully with physically demanding activities and girls were noted as particularly good at organising their own groups and taking decisions independently of the teacher. In some lessons, boys and girls work together, competing and co-operating successfully. In a few lessons Sixth Form pupils work alongside teachers, taking responsibility for small groups.

171. The quality of teaching is variable but good overall, with a little that is unsatisfactory. The staff have secure subject knowledge and use it effectively to teach well-structured lessons. They allow sufficient time for pupils to practise, and they usually ensure that opportunities are given for skills to be applied in a range of situations. Demonstrations are often precise and explanations clear. Lessons are usually conducted at a brisk pace, with teachers' enthusiasm and sense of urgency contributing to their success; mutual respect is a consistent feature of lessons. Teachers usually require pupils to make evaluative comments and analyse technique, although they do not always allow sufficient time for actions to be improved. When time is given, such as in a Year 7 netball lesson, pupils make good progress. There are, however, too few opportunities for pupils to plan their work, a shortcoming noted in the last inspection report.

172. Some significant improvements have taken place since the last inspection. The working relationships are now very good and sufficient time is now allocated to lessons. The curriculum is no longer dominated by games activities. Dance is still not taught to boys, thus denying them access to the expressive elements of the subject. Appropriate activities are now taught in sufficient depth to pupils at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form. Units of work supported by lesson plans have been written recently. They are, however, under review and future planning will need to include more precise learning objectives. There is a recently adopted system for recording pupils' attainment in all the activities taught. This needs to be linked more closely to the planning so that assessment opportunities are provided in lessons and judgements on pupils' attainment and progress are more secure. In addition to the school's facilities pupils have access to a first class sports centre on the same campus which enhances pupils' learning considerably.

Religious education

173. A small number of pupils have studied religious education to GCSE in recent years. In 1998 their attainment was below the national average for pupils in grammar schools and the amount of progress they made between Years 10 and 11 was less than it should have been, at a time when the year group as a whole was making good progress. This year's results from the same number of candidates show a big improvement, the majority gaining A*-A grades, to bring them into line with other grammar schools and well above the national average for all schools. Only a few pupils pursue their studies to A or AS Level and their results in the past two years have been in line with the national average for grammar schools.

174. Attainment at Key Stage 3 is in line with national expectations, although limited by the allocation of only thirty minutes a week to the subject, and unsatisfactory given the general level of attainment of the pupils. By the end of Year 9, pupils have a good knowledge of some aspects of four major world religions and a deeper understanding of Christianity and Sikhism. This is an improvement since the last inspection. In the process, they gain insights into the nature of religious experience. For example, in a Year 9 lesson on Celtic religion, pupils had a sense of druidic belief through a simple experiment in 'dowsing'. Their language skills are well developed, as their comprehension homework on the history of religion shows.

175. Attainment on the statutory course in Key Stage 4 is also up to the standard expected nationally, allowing for the small amount of time allowed and the higher than average general attainment of the pupils. Elements of philosophy stretch the pupils' thinking, as in a Year 11 lesson where pupils were thinking critically about the nature of truths put forward by religion and science. They are able to see both sides of the argument on such issues as the problem of suffering and are forming their own views on moral and religious questions. Sixth Formers are still not receiving their statutory entitlement to religious education, as was the case at the time of the last inspection.

176. Pupils are making satisfactory progress in the subject at Key Stage 3, allowing for the inadequacy of time. Their progress is good in lessons where their understanding is helped by practical learning, as in a Year 8 demonstration of a Buddhist tea ceremony. Progress is unsatisfactory when pupils are having to listen to the teacher for most of the lesson without any change of activity. Effective use of homework sheets to consolidate learning extends the progress possible in the short lesson. The criteria for assessing pupils' work are not specific to the subject but do allow some measure of progress over the key stage.

177. Progress in lessons is satisfactory at Key Stage 4. Where discussion is focused by a clear agenda in the thirty minutes, pupils make good progress from familiarising themselves with a topic, adopting a position and then arguing their case, as happened in a Year 10 debate on the existence of God. As no assessments are made and no records kept, it is not possible to determine pupils' progress over time, but the limited time available prevents them covering the Agreed Syllabus in any real depth. The few pupils taking the AS course on the philosophy of religion in Year 12 have made a satisfactory start, grappling with theories about the origins of life on earth.

178. Pupils show interest in the lessons at Key Stage 3. Year 7 pupils were curious about the religious artefacts in their introduction to the course and pupils in Years 8 and 9 enjoyed the practical demonstrations in their lessons. Year 8 pupils maintained a serious attitude to the Buddhist meditation exercise. Pupils show respect for other faiths and an open-minded attitude to learning about them. They are well behaved, although some are content to remain passive. Few pupils opt to study the subject at GCSE and it is no longer viable as an examination subject. Despite a degree of scepticism on the statutory course at Key Stage 4, motivation in lessons is quite good. Pupils concentrate on the teacher's presentation and become involved in class discussion. They respond well to such stimuli and

the opportunity to express their views. Behaviour in lessons is good.

179. The quality of teaching is variable but satisfactory overall. It is good or better in about 40% of lessons. In a lesson where it was unsatisfactory, teacher talk dominated. Occasionally the level is pitched too high, and complex ideas only serve to confuse. More often, in stimulating class and group discussion, teachers pose questions at the right level to challenge pupils to think critically. There is a tendency, even in a double lesson, for the teacher to go on talking to the whole class for too long, crowding out time for planned pupil activities. Sometimes, miscalculation over timing in the short lessons results in lessons not being properly rounded off. Teachers are prepared to experiment with activities that actively engage pupils and give them insight into religious experience. They maintain good discipline in their classes, which enables serious discussion to take place. Homework is used effectively to extend lesson content and books are marked regularly. Printed information is usually on worksheets, to the detriment of using more attractive textbooks at Key Stage 3.

180. Since the last inspection, attempts have been made to involve pupils more in their learning. The result is some learning from experience at Key Stage 3 and discussion methods at Key Stage 4. There is still a tendency for the balance between teaching and learning to be weighted in favour of the former. The curriculum is now in line with the Buckinghamshire Agreed Syllabus, although much less time is allowed than coverage of that syllabus requires. Other documentation is still sketchy, there being no proper handbook of departmental policies and procedures. Examination courses are on offer but the numbers opting in the last two years have not made them viable.

• **PART C: INSPECTION DATA**

• **SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

181. Twelve inspectors spent 149 hours observing 252 lessons, covering all National Curriculum subjects and other subjects. Business education and economics and German were inspected as additional OFSTED requirements. The lessons observed were chosen to ensure a spread across subjects, year groups and ability levels and to embrace all teachers. Much data provided by the school in advance of the inspection was analysed and a commentary was prepared for all inspectors on the basis of this data. Much work by pupils was examined, both during lessons and at other times. The work of representative pupils from all years was examined, in order to establish their standards and progress over time. The school helpfully made available substantial amounts of pupils' work from the previous academic year. Pupils were formally interviewed in year groups. Brief conversations were held with many pupils in lessons and around the school. Forms were observed during registrations and tutor periods. Inspectors observed assemblies and extra-curricular activities. A meeting was held with chairs of the Governors' committees. Three representative governors were interviewed individually. Many formal and informal conversations were held between inspectors and staff. The headteacher and the registered inspector met at least once a day. The views of parents were sought at a meeting, by a questionnaire and by interviews. Their views were analysed, made available to all inspectors and discussed with the chair of Governors and the headteacher.

• **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
1086	2	57	9

• **Teachers and classes**

• **Qualified teachers**

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent):	58.46
Number of pupils per qualified teacher:	19.4

• **Education support staff**

Total number of education support staff:	15
Total aggregate hours worked each week:	276.5

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:	77.2%
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KS3	27
KS4	24

• **Financial data**

Financial year:	1999
	£
Total Income	2,186,607
Total Expenditure	2,212,078
Expenditure per pupil	2,035.03
Balance brought forward from previous year	-168,036
Balance carried forward to next year	-193,507

PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out: 1076

Number of questionnaires returned: 276

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	11.3	62.5	18.5	6.5	1.1
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	34.5	56.0	6.5	1.8	1.1
The school handles complaints from parents well	21.5	40.5	33.1	4.1	0.8
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	14.1	46.0	26.1	12.3	1.4
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	27.9	58.0	8.0	5.8	0.4
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	37.0	57.6	4.7	0.7	0
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	29.6	55.1	9.1	5.8	0.4
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	24.5	62.5	5.8	6.9	0.4
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	30.2	53.8	12.7	2.2	1.1
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	29.0	56.2	12.7	1.8	0.4
My child(ren) like(s) school	48.5	44.2	4.4	2.2	0.7

Other issues raised by parents

Although little dissatisfaction (7.3%) was expressed about homework by parents responding to the questionnaire, more varied views were expressed at the meeting for parents. Concerns were about the differences in practice between subjects and year groups, and the inconsistency in the amounts set. The inspectors found these concerns to be justified in some subjects.