

# INSPECTION REPORT

The King John School

LEA area : Essex

Unique Reference Number : 115319

Headteacher : Mr F I Yeomans

Reporting inspector : Mr T A Browne

Dates of inspection : 15 to 19 November 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 708109

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

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school :	Comprehensive
Type of control :	Foundation
Age range of pupils :	11 to 18
Gender of pupils :	Mixed
School address :	Shipwrights Drive Thundersley Benfleet Essex SS7 1RQ
Telephone number :	01702 558284
Fax number :	01702 555636
Appropriate authority :	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors :	Mr B Belcher
Date of previous inspection :	13 to 17 March 1995

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
T Browne Registered inspector		Attainment and progress Attitudes, behaviour and personal development Teaching Efficiency
V Phillips Lay Inspector		Attendance Social, cultural development Support, guidance and pupils' welfare Partnership with parents and the community
C Childs		Special Educational Needs
R Green	Design and technology	
B Johnson	Music	
L Jones	GNVQ	Leadership and management
S Jordan	History	
J Lovgreen	English	
M Milton	Geography	Equality of opportunity
D Moynihan	Information Technology	
T O'Sullivan	Modern Languages	Curriculum and assessment
J Thompson	Religious education	Spiritual, moral, development

The inspection contractor was:

Qualitas Education Consultants Limited  
Wickham Court  
Layhams Road  
West Wickham  
Kent BR4 9HH

Telephone number 0181 777 1103

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## REPORT CONTENTS

Paragraph

### MAIN FINDINGS

What the school does well  
Where the school has weaknesses  
How the school has improved since the last inspection  
Standards in subjects  
Quality of teaching  
Other aspects of the school  
The parents' views of the school

### KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

### INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the school 1  
Key indicators 5

### PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Educational standards achieved by pupils at the school

Attainment and progress 6  
Attitudes, behaviour and personal development 18  
Attendance 24

Quality of education provided

Teaching 25  
The curriculum and assessment 33  
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development 47  
Support, guidance and pupils' welfare 52  
Partnership with parents and the community 57

The management and efficiency of the school

Leadership and management 60  
Staffing, accommodation and learning resources 67  
The efficiency of the school 75

### PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

English, mathematics and science 80  
Other subjects or courses 110

### PART C: INSPECTION DATA

Summary of inspection evidence 202  
Data and indicators 203

## Main Findings

### What the school does well

- pupils behave very well and have very positive attitudes to their work
- the personal and social development of pupils is good
- the school has a positive ethos with a strong commitment to high standards
- test results in English, mathematics and science at age 14 are well above average
- GCSE and A-level results are high in most subjects
- careers guidance and work experience are well organised and effective
- the outdoor education programme is very good
- the school provides a wide range of extra-curricular activity
- achievement in extra-curricular sport is outstanding
- links with the community are strong

### Where the school has weaknesses

- provision and standards in information technology across subjects need improving
- teaching insufficiently uses or develops pupils' speaking skills
- the school's monitoring and evaluation of its work are under-developed
- provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory, with no daily act of collective worship.

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

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

Standards of achievement at all key stages have improved since the last inspection in 1995. In relation to the key issues which were identified at that time:

- statutory requirements have generally been addressed but collective worship remains an issue
- provision for aesthetic development has improved; but spiritual development remains a weakness
- sixth form provision has developed well, with better opportunities for students' independent learning
- assessment, recording and reporting practices have been improved
- accommodation has been improved overall, but much continues to need refurbishment

The school has clear targets to maintain high standards and is well placed to sustain its development.

### Standards in subjects

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

Key Stage 3	A	A	<i>well above average</i> A
GCSE Examinations	A	A	<i>above average</i> B
A/AS-levels (1998)	A		<i>average</i> C
			<i>below average</i> D
			<i>well below average</i> E

Results in the 1999 Key Stage 3 tests in English and mathematics were well above the national

averages for all schools and for similar schools. In science the results were above average for all schools and in line with the national average for similar schools.

The strongest subjects at GCSE are English language, English literature, mathematics, science, economics and geography. Art and history are the weakest subjects. GCSE results overall have been well above the average both for all schools and for similar schools in each of the last two years.

A-level results were well above average in 1998 and the results were similar in 1999. The average points per student has been above the national average and has been rising. Sixth formers who have taken advanced GNVQ in the last two years achieved very good results. The majority of sixth formers went on to higher education.

### Quality of teaching

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 7-9	good	English	IT across subjects, Art
Years 10-11	good	English, Drama, Economics, Geography	
Sixth Form	very good	Sciences, Geography, Psychology, Sociology, Economics, GNVQ	
English	very good		
Mathematics	satisfactory		

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

Teaching was at least satisfactory in 96 per cent of lessons; in 21 per cent of lessons it was very good or excellent. The 4 per cent of lessons in which teaching was unsatisfactory was spread across a variety of subjects. A high proportion of sixth form teaching was good.

### Other aspects of the school

Aspect	Comment
Behaviour	very good; both in and out of lessons;
Attendance	good; punctuality is satisfactory given the difficulties imposed by the layout of the building;
Ethos*	very good; with a strong commitment to high standards;
Leadership and management	good; strong and effective leadership of the headteacher, deputies and governors; but monitoring and evaluation are relatively weak;
Curriculum	satisfactory; broad and generally balanced in Key Stages 3 and 4; good courses in the sixth form; very good extra-curricular provision;
Pupils with special educational needs	very good help from a well-managed learning support department
Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development	provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory; there are significant strengths in the good moral and very good social aspects; cultural development is satisfactory overall;
Staffing, resources and accommodation	satisfactory overall; there are sufficient staff but teacher appraisal is not in place; the school has adequate books and equipment; much of the accommodation is badly worn, but the new sixth form block is excellent;
Value for money	good.

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

## The parents' views of the school

What most parents like about the school	What some parents are not happy about
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●. The school enables their children to achieve good standards, particularly in examinations</li> <li>●. The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons</li> <li>●. The school is approachable</li> <li>●. The school gives parents a clear understanding about what is taught</li> <li>●. The school achieves high standards of good behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●. Few negative comments were received</li> </ul>

Inspectors' judgements support the parents' positive views.

### KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

In order to further improve the standards of achievement and the quality of education, the governors, headteacher and staff should:

- Improve provision and standards in information technology across subjects by
  - producing a clear plan of how the skills are to be taught and assessed
  - providing the necessary staff training for information technology
  - planning the long-term resource needs for information technology
  - establishing effective monitoring, evaluation and review of the provision

*see paragraphs 145 - 153*
- Improve the teaching and use of pupils' speaking skills by
  - identifying and sharing the more effective teaching in the school
  - incorporating planned opportunities to develop and use pupils' speaking skills in lessons
  - establishing effective monitoring, evaluation and review of speaking skills across the school

*see paragraphs 82, 86, 90*
- Improve monitoring and evaluation, as recognised, across all levels of management by
  - involving all staff in training in the purpose and practices of school self-evaluation
  - implementing a manageable programme of classroom observation and feedback

*see paragraphs 61 - 64*
- Improve provision for spiritual development by
  - finding ways to meet the statutory requirements for collective worship
  - ensuring the time for religious education meets the locally agreed syllabus requirements
  - using opportunities in subject teaching to enhance provision.

*see paragraphs 47 - 48*

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

Standards in art	<i>see paragraphs 110 to 116</i>
Overall standards in design and technology	<i>see paragraphs 117 to 126</i>
Teacher appraisal	<i>see paragraphs 63, 68</i>
Subject time allocations and split classes	<i>see paragraphs 34, 37, 38</i>

Efficiency of some sixth form courses  
Ongoing accommodation issues

see paragraphs 76  
see paragraphs 71, 77, 109, 125, 179

## INTRODUCTION

### Characteristics of the school

1. The King John School is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive school on an extensive site. The majority of pupils come from Benfleet, but about 14 per cent travel from further afield, such as the western side of Southend. The school has 1810 pupils on roll, including about 240 in the sixth form, and with slightly more boys than girls overall. The sixth form has been established in the last five years, during which time the school roll for 11 to 16 year olds has risen from about 1200 to about 1500.
2. A high proportion of pupils come from owner occupied homes. Almost all the school population is white. At around 6 per cent, the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The number of pupils with statements of special educational need is very low. The percentage of pupils speaking English as an additional language is very low. The achievement of pupils when they start at The King John School is around the national average overall, although the school takes pupils from the full ability range and has admitted up to 15 per cent of pupils by selection for the last three intakes.
3. The current priorities outlined in the School's Strategic Plan are
  - the re-structuring of the curriculum and timetable for September 2000
  - the restructuring of the senior management team of the school
  - the further development of self-review of the school with a much greater involvement of all those with management responsibility
4. The senior management have set targets for summer 2000 of
  - 70 per cent of Year 11 pupils gaining 5 or more A\* to C
  - an average of 47 points per Year 11 student
  - 20 points per student taking two or more subjects at A-level GCE.

### Key Indicators

#### 5. Attainment at Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for latest reporting year (1998 figures in brackets):

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	170(172)	140(129)	313(301)

National Curriculum Test Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	117 (139)	130 (133)	116 (122)
	Girls	122 (118)	107 (101)	95 (91)
	Total	239 (257)	237 (234)	211 (213)
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	75 (86)	76 (79)	67 (72)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	38 (51)	48 (53)	25 (31)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teacher Assessments	English	Mathematics	Science
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Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	142 (131)	138 (133)	119 (139)
	Girls	131 (117)	108 (115)	101 (107)
	Total	273 (248)	246 (248)	220 (246)
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	87 (84)	78 (85)	71 (83)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	60 (46)	53 (60)	33 (50)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	28 (31)

#### Attainment at Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year (1998 figures in brackets):

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	149(144)	143(148)	292(292)

GCSE Results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A* to G	1 or more grades A* to G
Number of pupils achieving standard specified	Boys	74 (84)	148 (140)	149 (141)
	Girls	100 (99)	139 (144)	143 (146)
	Total	174 (183)	287 (284)	292 (287)
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	60 (63)	99 (98)	100 (99)
	National	47.8 (44.6)	88.4 (89.8)	93.9 (95.2)

#### Attainment in the Sixth Form

Number of students aged 16,17 or 18 who were entered for GCE A/AS examinations in the latest reporting year

Year	Male	Female	Total
1998	35	26	61

Average A/AS

For candidates entered for

For candidates entered for fewer than

points score

2 or more A-levels or equivalent

2 A-levels or equivalent

per candidate

Male Female All

Male Female All

School

19.7 18.0 18.9

1.0 n/a 1.0

National

n/a n/a 17.6

n/a n/a 2.8

## Attendance

Percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year :		%
Authorised Absence	School	6.4
	National comparative data	7.9
Unauthorised Absence	School	0.3
	National comparative data	1.1

## Exclusions

Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school age) during the previous year :		Number
Fixed period		84
	Permanent	2

## Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is :		%
Very good or better		21
	Satisfactory or better	96
	Less than satisfactory	4

## PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

### EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

#### Attainment and progress

1. Pupils make good progress at The King John School and achieve standards that are well above average. This matches the strong view expressed by parents that the school enables their children to achieve high standards in their work. It also suggests an improvement since the last inspection when standards were judged to be generally in line with national expectations.
2. At the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' performance in 1999 in English, mathematics and science was well above the national average. Across all three subjects pupils' performance was also well above average in comparison with similar schools. Attainment has shown a rising trend over the last four years, at a faster rate than that seen nationally. Over the same period the relative performance of boys and girls has matched the national picture. Pupils with special educational needs are helped to make good progress. Given that most pupils start the school with average levels of attainment, their overall progress is good across Key Stage 3.
3. GCSE results in 1999 were well above the national average compared both with all schools and with similar schools. Over the last four years the average GCSE points score per pupil has been well above average and has shown a rising trend, at a faster rate than that seen nationally. The relative performance of boys and girls has matched the national picture overall, with some known variations within individual subjects. Taking account of their prior attainment, indicated by previous Key Stage 3 results, pupils make good progress in Key Stage 4.
4. In the sixth form, the A-level results have shown a rising trend. This has been at the same time as student numbers have increased substantially and as courses have become established. The average points score in 1998 for students entered for two or more A-levels was well above the national average. The numbers of students taking GNVQ courses have been small and fairly static but the results on these courses have been very good. The sixth form does not provide courses for lower-attaining pupils.
5. Attainment in English is well above average at Key Stages 3 and 4, and in line with the national average at A-level. There has been a notable improvement in GCSE English literature. Overall, girls have tended to outperform boys at GCSE. Pupils' progress is very good at Key Stage 3,

good at Key Stage 4 and satisfactory in the sixth form. The high standards in written work are not matched by those in reading and speaking, which are at best average. Listening skills are well developed, but teachers or pupils do not use discussion to explore, develop and refine ideas. In subjects other than English the standards of literacy are good, with pupils being expected to write accurately and use skills such as note-taking.

6. Attainment in mathematics is well above average at Key Stages 3 and 4, and generally in line with the national average at A-level. High-attaining pupils achieve well, for example where a group of pupils took GCSE a year early and are extending their study of mathematics in Year 11. Sixth form students show good understanding of a range of mathematics including applications of statistics. Progress in mathematics lessons in Key Stages 3 and 4 varies according to the quality of teaching, a high proportion of which is sound. Opportunities for pupils to use and apply mathematics are not well enough embedded in the curriculum, although pupils' numeracy skills are used effectively in other subjects.
7. Attainment in science is above average at Key Stages 3 and 4. Performance in science has improved, leading to the above-average results at GCSE in 1999 and overall good results at A-level. Pupils' experimental and investigative skills are good. Their ability to recall scientific facts is better than their application of knowledge. Progress in lessons seen was always at least satisfactory and better where there was good teaching.
8. Attainment in information technology varies significantly between pupils. For those who take the various courses the GCSE and A-level results have been around the national averages. However, the standards expected by the National Curriculum for all pupils are not being achieved because the school does not fully cover all the skills required. There is some appropriate information technology work in English, mathematics, geography and modern languages for example, but the overall provision and standards across Key Stages 3 and 4 are patchy.
9. Attainment in religious education at the end of Key Stage 3 is broadly in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. Pupils are better in the knowledge and understanding of religions than in relating what they have learnt to their own experiences. Overall pupils make unsatisfactory progress up to the end of Key Stage 4 although insufficient time is allocated to meet the syllabus requirements. For those taking GCSE, results in religious education have been below average.
10. In Key Stage 3, pupils make good progress in geography, history, music and physical education, but unsatisfactory progress in art and in design and technology. In Key Stage 4 overall progress in art, design and technology and in history is unsatisfactory, but progress in drama, geography and music is good. In the sixth form the students make good progress in most subjects, particularly in the GNVQ courses, sociology and psychology. Across the whole school the weakest progress is made in art and information technology, but the picture overall is one of good progress leading to above average attainment.
11. In almost all the lessons observed during the inspection pupils made satisfactory or better progress. Progress was judged to be very good in about one in five lessons and good in a further two in five lessons. Progress was more consistently good in the sixth form.
12. Pupils on the special educational register make good progress overall. The learning support department provides very good help for pupils in terms of Individual Education Plan targets. Some teachers use the targets when planning lessons. However, such an approach is inconsistent and the progress made by pupils with special educational needs varies between subject lessons. Where support is provided, and in withdrawal lessons, individuals and small groups make good progress.

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

13. Pupils have very good attitudes, and this makes a major contribution to their progress and to the standards they achieve. Pupils are very well motivated and share in the school's positive ethos. In almost all lessons they listen very well, respond sensibly to questions, and settle quickly to written tasks. Pupils take pride in their work and value the praise they receive for good work and effort.
14. Pupils can work collaboratively and do so without any fuss. In too many lessons however pupils are attentive but passive, and are not given the opportunity to develop and use skills of discussion and debate. In English lessons pupils often show impressive attitudes to written work and are well organised, and in A-level sociology for example, the students show real interest and initiative. There is scope in Key Stages 3 and 4 for pupils to take more responsibility for their learning, to develop their communication and thinking skills, building on their very positive attitudes. The school is generally successful in enabling the sixth formers to become independent learners. This was key issue from the last inspection
15. Boys and girls work effectively together in groups, and the small number of pupils from ethnic minority groups are fully involved in the life of the school. Pupils with special educational needs have positive attitudes to learning. They want to do well, and generally work hard to achieve their agreed targets. They are well behaved and work co-operatively with other pupils and with their teachers. They respond best in those lessons where work is well matched to their needs.
16. As at the last inspection, behaviour and self-discipline make a strong contribution to pupils' learning. Behaviour is very good in and out of lessons. Pupils understand what is expected of them and comply with school codes of behaviour. This contributes to the very strong work ethic, which supports learning very well. Behaviour outside lessons can be lively but is very civilised. Exclusions are used appropriately when necessary. There were two permanent exclusions in the year before the inspection.
17. Pupils are polite, helpful and friendly. They take good care of their own and other people's property, including resources belonging to the school. No unruly behaviour was observed in the outside or inside areas. Pupils move about the building between lessons very sensibly. Very large numbers of pupils have to move along stairs and corridors, which are narrow, and these features to the building could potentially create difficulties.
18. The quality of relationships is very good and this is a significant strength of the school. Pupils' relationships with each other and with adults are based on mutual respect and courtesy, and this helps to foster an environment where pupils feel trusted and valued. They are open and friendly, and appreciate the support they receive from the teaching staff. If any incidents of bullying are notified, pupils report that they are investigated promptly and dealt with effectively.

## **Attendance**

19. Attendance levels have been maintained well since the last inspection and remain above the national average. Unauthorised absence is below average. Attendance is good across the school. A few pupils arrive late in the morning, but this rarely disrupts lessons. Movement around the school is brisk and purposeful, but difficult in narrow corridors with queues forming outside classrooms. Occasionally this leads to some loss of teaching time and opportunities are missed to ensure that pupils of all abilities have grasped the key points of a lesson which is cut short.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED**

### **Teaching**

20. The overall quality of teaching is good and this is a major contributory factor to the standards achieved. In 21 per cent of lessons observed the teaching was judged to be very good or excellent, in 38 per cent it was good, in 37 per cent it was satisfactory, and in only 4 per cent was the teaching less than satisfactory. There were similar distributions in the quality of teaching at Key Stages 3 and 4, with more consistently good teaching in the sixth form. Teaching is strongest overall in English and there is effective teaching across many subjects in the sixth form. Teachers give sufficient attention in their teaching to the important skills of literacy and numeracy but the development and use of information technology skills is weak across the majority of subjects.
21. Teachers have good subject expertise to provide a secure basis for their teaching, and this contributes positively to pupils' learning. Subject expertise stands out in English, history and modern languages. In the very good teaching of French, German and Spanish the extensive use of the target language provides a good model for pupils. There are very wide variations in teachers' length of service at the school and also in their years of experience. However, evidence suggests that these factors do not correlate particularly with the quality of teaching.
22. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are high in most subjects. For example in a Year 13 geography lesson, the work on glaciation was demanding and carefully planned. In all Key Stage 4 teaching, expectations are appropriate as the classes work towards examinations. However in some Key Stages 3 and 4 lessons, expectations could be raised further in science, art and in design and technology. Throughout the school, the best teaching involves the setting of timed targets for completion of work and attention to rigour. Most lessons get off to a brisk start and the best lessons had clear objectives that were purposefully shared with pupils. Some excellent, well-paced Year 10 English teaching stimulated a range of ideas about a fiction extract, but gave pupils time for reflection and to appreciate its spiritual content.
23. The planning and organisation of lessons are at least sound throughout the school and are often good. The better teaching used approaches to capture interest and achieve effective learning. For example a Year 10 religious education session skilfully built on the striking introduction of "what would you do given 10 minutes before an asteroid hit the earth?" An excellent GNVQ leisure and tourism lesson drew on the expertise of the teacher and a video recorded by a student to generate in-depth understanding of tennis coaching.
24. Time and resources are mostly used very well. For example a well-paced Year 8 netball lesson made effective use of space and teaching methods to develop pupils' skills. In a well-managed Year 8 science lesson the pupils extended their knowledge about the action of heat on substances by carrying out a practical experiment and responding to skilful questioning. Although the computers are generally underused across most other subjects, they are well used in business and information technology lessons. Such lessons involved careful organisation of tasks at the computers.
25. The effectiveness in managing pupils' behaviour is good throughout the school. Nearly all pupils have very positive attitudes towards work, but teachers use effective classroom routines and use touches of humour to good effect. Some good teaching during tutor time was well planned, with a variety of whole-class and group work within which the rules were reinforced so that pupils listened and collaborated well.
26. The use of day-to-day assessment is good overall. It is weak in art, and in both design and technology and information technology at Key Stage 3. Where it is weak, assessment is insufficiently linked to the National Curriculum and teachers do not use assessment information to plan the next stage of learning. Marking is generally good and at its best focuses on what the pupils need to do to improve their work. English teaching incorporates much very good marking and in A-level history the marking is outstanding.

27. The use of homework is at least sound and often good. Pupils are set increasing amounts of work as they move through the school. Most parents are satisfied with the arrangements and appreciate the contribution of homework to their children's achievement. However, some parents and pupils from most years feel the homework load is excessive, particularly when teachers do not follow the homework timetables. The inspectors' view is that the homework does significantly contribute to the standards achieved, but provision should be monitored and reviewed.

## The curriculum and assessment

28. The school offers a broad and generally balanced curriculum. Extra-curricular provision is very good. The curriculum is relevant to the needs of pupils up to the age of 16 and for those pupils who continue into the sixth form. Assessment is satisfactory, with detailed individual monitoring and good practice in the sixth form, and increasing evaluation of school achievement.
29. At **Key Stage 3** all the National Curriculum subjects and religious education are taught. Personal and social education is provided as well as pastoral care within tutorial lessons. The allocations of time for each subject are generally sound. The time allocation is low for religious education particularly in Year 9 and for science in Year 7. Teaching groups are organised with some setting, for example in mathematics, being introduced from Year 7 onwards. Setting contributes effectively to the quality of education. The school's large number of pupils provides useful flexibility for grouping arrangements. However, there is a weakness in some areas such as English and science where split teaching of classes affects the efficiency of teaching. The design and technology curriculum has not previously been sufficiently co-ordinated across material areas to ensure the best progress, especially in terms of the different skills. Curriculum planning in art is weak.
30. A key issue for the school is to secure a comprehensive programme for the full range of information technology skills across Key Stage 3. All pupils benefit from a good taught course on their Year 7 timetable, but their information technology experience in Year 8 and 9 is very patchy. Pupils in both Key Stage 3 and 4 reported that they felt they did not have the skills they needed to support other work. The lack of a documented overview of how information technology is delivered through subjects and the lack of evidence relating to end of Key Stage 3 teacher assessment reflect this weakness.
31. The learning support department provides very good support for pupils with special educational needs, although the quality of help in subject areas is not consistently good. In some subjects the work is prepared carefully to match pupils' needs, for example with attention to levels of difficulty and language. Liaison between subjects and learning support is developing in most departments. The learning support department has good procedures for identifying needs, working constructively with parents and previous schools, and assessing and monitoring the progress of pupils with special educational needs. Individual education plans are provided for subject staff, although the direct use of these varies between teachers. The school meets the statutory requirements for statements, and for assessment and review. Individual education plans are of good quality. The targets are clear, and it is easy for pupils and teachers to monitor progress towards them. The Code of Practice continues to be implemented well, as at the last inspection.
32. The **Key Stage 4 curriculum** is broad-based and generally meets the needs of a wide-ability pupil population. The combination of a large core of subjects and three options provides reasonable balance. There are, however, several issues which have not been resolved since the last inspection. Religious education is allocated insufficient time to cover the Locally Agreed Syllabus. It is still possible for pupils to omit creative and expressive subjects from their curriculum. Pupils studying three sciences do not receive their entitlement to design and technology.
33. Key Stage 4 curriculum planning is satisfactory overall. However there are weaknesses in planning for progression of learning in information technology, history, art and for pupils in lower mathematics sets. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory overall and good in English. The current timetable structure, which is under review, does not enable pupils to spend sufficient time studying double science and physical education.
34. The careers and work experience programmes are of high quality at Key Stages 3 and 4, and

these are a strength of the school. From Year 9, pupils receive very good support and guidance from school and local authority staff, who work closely as a team. The work experience programme, which is very popular with pupils, recently received a Recognition of Quality award from the local authority. There are also strengths in the sixth form programme, particularly in enabling pupils to gain admission to their chosen higher education courses.

35. Arrangements for assessment are satisfactory with some good features in both Key Stages 3 and 4. This includes the good use of a range of data in analysing and predicting pupils' performance and in setting targets for individuals and the school in general. The outcomes of regular assessment are effectively used in planning the next steps in pupils' learning in most subjects. Pupils' academic development at Key Stage 4 is closely monitored by senior staff who provide individual pupils with support and guidance. The effectiveness of this is analysed in terms of the eventual standards achieved.
36. At the time of the last inspection, the **sixth form curriculum** was in its first year of development, but already offering a good range of A-level courses, with lessons in physical education, personal and social education and general studies for all. A sound foundation for a sixth form curriculum had been laid. However, the requirement to teach religious education was not being met. This continues to be the case.
37. Since the last inspection, the sixth form curriculum has been broadened to include a range of vocational courses at A-level. There are no access and progression routes for lower-attaining students and those with special educational needs. While some Year 11 pupils may not progress into the sixth form although wanting places, the school careers service provides good guidance to enable them to find places in other local institutions.
38. There is a good range of A-level, GNVQ and BTEC subjects from which to choose. A sixth form brochure, induction booklet and student planner are all attractive and well presented. New students valued highly their induction day. A staff handbook sets out the clear expectations of students, details of monitoring arrangements and the role of the sixth form personal tutor.
39. There is a culture of high expectations and high standards of work in the sixth form. Students know exactly what grades or point scores are needed for higher education courses applied for. A-level students are set targets. GNVQ and BTEC students have modular assessments at regular intervals throughout their courses. The monitoring procedure is designed to track students who are under-achieving, for whatever reason. Teachers produce carefully targeted specifications for assignments and offer specific guidance on re-drafting and improving work in progress. The school encourages sixth formers to take responsibility for themselves during study periods and in initiating extra-curricular activities such as the film club, sixth form council and Samaritans. Students value the high-quality careers guidance and work experience. All students are required to undertake either physical education or community service. They appreciate the off-site arrangements for swimming and aerobics.
40. Overall, the sixth form curriculum and assessment arrangements are well managed. They effectively provide students with the opportunities to succeed in their studies and progress to higher education and worthwhile careers.
41. The extensive extra-curricular programme offers pupils of all ages a wide range of activities for example in sport, music and the expressive arts. Extensive outdoor education opportunities are available and individual achievement is recognised through a wide range of awards. During the inspection a group took part in a 10-mile night-time navigation trip and a special educational needs group enjoyed a timetabled outdoor practical session which contributed to their self esteem. There are ski trips, educational exchanges and various expeditions locally and abroad. Pupils can take part in music, dance and drama productions, together with concerts by the schools various choirs and music groups. Visits and visitors add to the success of creative and

performing arts. During the inspection a series of lunchtime “talent contests” not only displayed the performers’ abilities but also demonstrated the excellent responses of the large audiences. Competitive sport for individuals and teams is strong. Large numbers of pupils take part in many different sports clubs and activities at lunchtime and after school. Overall, the rich variety of extra-curricular opportunities is a major strength of the school.

### **Pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

42. At the last inspection, spiritual development was reported to be generally under-represented in the curriculum and in the life of the school as a whole. This situation has not improved and the school’s provision for spiritual development remains unsatisfactory. There are some assemblies, but these are not intended to be acts of worship and do not take place daily, as required by law. Religious education contributes to the school’s provision for spiritual development, but there is very little time for this subject at Key Stage 4 and none in the sixth form. However, the last inspection also judged that moral and social development were good and provision for cultural development was satisfactory. There has been some improvement resulting in very good provision for social development, although little change overall in provision for cultural development.
43. Religious education helps pupils to explore questions and beliefs, and to see the affect of their beliefs on the way they live. A special ‘Millennium Day’ for Year 7 pupils emphasised the significance of Christianity for the Millennium. It included a modern dance performed to poetry which enthralled the pupils and encouraged them to think about the meaning of life and death. In the dance workshop that followed, pupils explored their emotions and the idea of transforming negative feelings into positive ones. There are some other opportunities for spiritual development within the curriculum, such as music, art and dance, and pupils are encouraged to respond to the wonder of science. However, there is little planning for this across subjects and many opportunities are missed. Pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to reflect on their feelings and ideas.
44. The school’s provision for moral development has remained good since the last inspection, resulting in a well-ordered community where pupils are honest and trustworthy. At Key Stage 3, moral education is part of the pastoral programme in tutorial time, where personal and social issues such as drug prevention, relationships and bullying are dealt with. At Key Stage 4, moral education is part of the Diploma for Vocational Education taken by all pupils. This includes moral issues such as responsibility for the environment, as well as units on drugs and relationships. Opportunities for moral development are taken by some teachers in some subjects, such as religious education, geography and design and technology. But this is not planned systematically nor identified in all curriculum areas. Much moral education takes place in response to situations. For example, new pupils are helped to adapt to the school’s ethos which respects the right of others to get on with their work. The school also raises money for charity, for example during its Charities Week which encourages pupils to do something to help people less fortunate than themselves.
45. The school promotes social development very well in its everyday routines and by direct teaching in some tutor periods and in the valuable vocational education programme. Pupils are given every encouragement to follow school codes of conduct and relate constructively to others. They have a lot of opportunity to take part in activities involving self-discipline, competition, rules and fair play. They are given responsibilities as sports captains, school council members and charity representatives from Year 7 onwards and as prefects in Year 11. There are many opportunities for community service in the sixth form. Sixth formers can also set up and run clubs.
46. The school supports some aspects of cultural development better than others. Extra-curricular activities in the performing arts, such as music and drama are very popular, with the drama club regularly oversubscribed. Opportunities for pupils to appreciate their own heritage are generally

good. Much less attention is given to helping pupils to appreciate the diversity and richness of other cultural traditions. They do not have enough opportunities to reflect on and develop openness towards the artistic heritage of other cultures. They are rarely encouraged to recognise the contribution of many different societies and cultures to mathematical, scientific, technological and intellectual development. This constrains their patterns of thinking and wider perspectives on subjects of the curriculum.

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

47. The school was reported to provide sound support overall at the last inspection. It was suggested that provision would benefit from keeping people better informed and a more clearly defined monitoring strategy. Improvements have been made. There is a wealth of information about pupils in pastoral monitoring files. Current systems for monitoring progress and personal development are good. All are designed to provide support that is clearly focused on academic achievement. The progress of pupils with English as an additional language is also, for example, monitored by heads of year.
48. There is a strong contribution to support and guidance from the programme for vocational education (DVE), which includes effective work on careers and health education and confronting bullying for example. Pupils can turn to tutors or subject teachers for advice and they appreciate a support network that allows some choice about whom to consult, given that some relationships are more effective than others are. The use of the timetabled tutorial time observed was very mixed. For example, sixth formers took no part in their tutor time, a Year 8 class sat and read in silence, yet a Year 11 class had a purposeful session on preparing for examinations. Planning indicates there is a suitable programme of necessary support and guidance for Key Stages 3 and 4, but actual practice needs careful monitoring to ensure effective use of time.
49. Discipline and good behaviour are fostered very well through clear codes of conduct and a consistent focus on creating a climate where pupils learn self-discipline and expect to work hard. The rewards system works very well and pupils value each sign that they have achieved something through good behaviour or effort with their work.
50. Attendance is monitored carefully and outside agencies involved where necessary to minimise the effects of absences on progress. Arrangements for child protection meet local requirements and are familiar to staff. The school takes care to ensure that matters of health and safety are addressed as required. In general, the school makes good provision for pupils' educational and personal support.
51. The bursar is designated as health and safety officer in the school, and usefully works closely with caretaking staff. Any concerns can be reported and acted on as necessary but other issues can be raised at regular meetings that involve representatives from subject areas. Overall, the school is successful in promoting the health, safety and general well being of its pupils.

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

52. The last inspection described the school's links with its wider community as strong and effective. Parents wanted greater opportunity to be involved in the life and work of the school. Progress has been in line with what could reasonably be expected. Links with the wider community remain very strong. Parents are kept well informed about the school's life and work. Their involvement is mainly through fund-raising, support for their children's hard work and watching their performance in school productions.
53. Information provided for parents is generally of good quality, particularly the prospectus and annual report from governors. The best reports give a clear idea of what pupils have learned in different subjects and match grades carefully to what is written, which parents find helpful. Sometimes, reports are descriptive and do not give adequate explanations of attainment. It is not always clear when teachers use the effort grade to indicate motivation and when they really mean rate of progress. There is some evidence to support the views of a few parents that reports do not always indicate clearly how much progress has been made. However, parents are keen to see their children doing well and encourage them to work hard.

54. Community links extend well beyond the local area. There is a wide range of day trips to France, for example, to support work in several subjects. Extra-curricular activities, including those in outdoor education in conjunction with Trident, enable pupils to visit places such as Iceland and Belize, undertake work experience in Europe and take part in sports such as sailing in Spain and skiing in North America. Charities week gives everyone the chance to work to support national and international projects as well as local ones such as a children's hospice. All these links are invaluable in extending pupils' learning opportunities and contributing to the standards they reach.

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

### **Leadership and management**

55. Overall, the leadership and management of the school are good. The strong leadership of the headteacher has ensured that the school is continuing to achieve its aims. The senior management team, comprising the headteacher and three deputies, has worked effectively together since the last inspection to raise overall standards and to manage developments as the school roll has increased considerably. There has been effective implementation of a well-designed action plan to tackle the key issues for action. The school has the capacity to maintain its high standards. However, the school does not meet statutory requirements yet for the provision of a daily act of collective worship or in relation to teacher appraisal.
56. A clear and wide-ranging strategic plan has been agreed by the governing body for taking the school forward in the current year. Effective coverage is given to the aims of the school, the curriculum and its development, organisation and performance. The strategic plan is supported by operational planning documents from thirty or so "departments". These are presented in a common format and they review and prioritise developments. However, it is not clear how they link with priorities in the strategic plan nor how progress can be monitored and evaluated.
57. Three of the issues for senior management outlined in the strategic plan are given particular significance and are currently being addressed. Firstly, a curriculum review is in progress with the intention of restructuring the curriculum and timetable for September 2000; secondly, consideration is being given to the restructuring of the senior management of the school; thirdly, the further development of self-review of the school is being planned to give a much greater involvement of those with management responsibility. All three issues are very important but are at an early stage of development.
58. The senior management team has set students and staff challenging targets for Key Stage 4 and A-level performance next summer, which they are expected to achieve. However, staff appraisal and the formal review of the work of each department have been put on hold. No structures are in place for the formal observation of teaching and learning in lessons and feedback to teachers, although there are a variety of informal departmental arrangements. Some subject leaders' evaluations of examination results are thorough but some are limited. The senior management team recognises that the arrangements for monitoring, evaluation and review of teaching and learning are key areas for development to support further improvement.
59. At the last inspection, weaknesses were identified in the roles of middle managers. These related to the need for a formal systematic evaluation of the work in their areas, especially with regard to the effectiveness of teaching and learning, and playing a more strategic role in school development. This continues to need attention, within a line management structure which is not fully used. Despite the lack of formality in some of the day-to-day management arrangements, the experience and commitment of managers within the school have contributed effectively to the school's positive ethos and high achievement. The management of provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good with exemplary administration and organisation.

60. The school has a sound policy for equality of opportunity and the headteacher monitors the few incidents of discrimination that occur. The school monitors examination results by gender and some other criteria, such as prior attainment and teaching group. There are instances of departments that have identified slight differences in attainment by gender and are starting to take steps to reduce this difference.
61. The governors monitor closely both the curriculum and the outcomes of school and national assessment. Their curriculum committee is well informed on pupils' performance and on issues relating to the structure of the curriculum. However, governors are not as well informed on the content of the curriculum and, during the current period of major review, have not yet been involved in the strategic thinking and planning in relation to the curriculum

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

62. Overall there are sufficient numbers of teachers with appropriate qualifications and experience. The match of their expertise to the subjects of the curriculum is good. In most subjects the organisation of the timetable and the deployment of staff is satisfactory. However the splitting of the teaching of classes adversely affects pupils' quality of education, particularly in English, mathematics, science and history. Since the last inspection the staffing issues for music have been addressed. Staffing in the sixth form is generous for some courses and for other courses the classes are large. The overall number of support staff and their qualifications and experience are satisfactory. There is a shortage of technical support in food technology. In the design technology workshops the staff do not carry the necessary certification to meet health and safety requirements.
63. There are weaknesses in the arrangements for professional development. For the past four years there has been no system of teacher appraisal, nor a formal system of professional review to help teachers evaluate their performance and receive appropriate training. A few subject leaders carry out formal classroom observations and use the information to plan relevant training, but the practice is not widely established. To address these weaknesses and begin measuring the impact of training, the headteacher and governors have appropriately identified appraisal, and the monitoring of teaching, as areas for development in the coming year.
64. The accommodation is adequate and well used, although it continues to have significant shortcomings and inhibit the quality of pupils' learning experience. The school buildings are sited on a spacious site which includes grass playing fields, a large all-weather surface and a small heated outdoor swimming pool. However, the main part of the school was built in 1930's and is in need of constant repair and maintenance. The corridors, which are very long and narrow, become congested during break times and at the change of lessons.
65. Teachers do well to overcome some of the problems. Some areas of the school, such as English, are enhanced by informative displays but others are dowdy and less conducive to learning. The accommodation for music is unsatisfactory and the lack of a designated area for history is a hindrance. Several subjects lack appropriate storage areas and offices, and the changing rooms for physical education are inadequate.
66. Since the last inspection the school has improved several areas of its accommodation through bids for additional funding: a new block has been built to address the needs of the sixth form, although the school recognises that it will be unable to accommodate the predicted increase in numbers; a large, enclosed all-weather sports surface has been installed; and new block of classrooms is being added. However, the school fully recognises the continuing shortcomings in its accommodation into which it has channelled significant funding over recent years.
67. The school has adequate learning resources to meet the overall needs of the curriculum.

However, in some subjects there are shortages and in others there are weaknesses in organisation and management. There are shortages of books in some subjects, a concern voiced by some parents and pupils. In English there are too few A-level texts to support wider reading, an issue that was raised in the last inspection, and whilst the range of reading material is good the sets contain too few books and pupils have to share. However, resources are good in some areas such as art, modern foreign languages and physical education.

68. Part of the school's aims for improved staff development and training relates to the whole-school use of information technology. The school is aware of the need for a long-term plan to gradually replace out-dated computers and software. Computer resources in design and technology, for example, are inadequate to meet current and future curriculum requirements. In science the resources for data capture are limited.
69. The library facilities in the school contribute positively to standards. There is a good range of fiction and reference books. Pupils have access to the lower school library in lessons and during the lunch hour. The provision and cataloguing of books is being improved. The quality and use of the books is good although pupils increasingly want computer access to the internet for research tasks. The sixth form library is in regular use as a study area with good access to computers.

### **The efficiency of the school**

70. The school makes efficient use of its available resources to ensure pupils receive a good quality of education and achieve high standards. An issue at the last inspection involved the strategic management of improvements to the school's accommodation. This has been tackled well although the school has had to cope with limited capital funding, increasing pupil numbers and budget cuts. Sound use is made of grants including the money provided for pupils with special educational needs. The governing body, through its finance and general purposes committee and well supported by the bursar, keeps a careful oversight of the school's income and expenditure.
71. The pupil-teacher ratio is slightly above average and the teachers' contact time with pupils is above average. This contributes to overall group sizes that are reasonable in Key Stages 3 and 4. The school is aware of the inefficiencies of the small group sizes of some A-level classes. This is particularly the case in Year 13, although this has been redressed in Year 12, and generally in the vocational courses. The latter not only have small group sizes but also consume large amounts of senior teaching staff time. Governors are usefully keeping this efficiency matter under review.
72. In general, staffing, learning resources and accommodation are managed and used effectively. The use of staff is less effective in some subjects where classes are split between teachers. There are inefficiencies because the building has science areas apart and equipment has to be moved between them. The school makes sound use of available time. The structure of the school day is intended to minimise the loss of time through the movement of pupils. Punctuality of both pupils and staff is good, although time is lost from some lessons because time is taken for pupils to move about the building. Teaching makes sound use of time within lessons.
73. The day-to-day administration in the school is good. A staff handbook and subject documentation clarify school routines. These contribute to the efficient organisation of the large number of pupils and staff. The bursar has oversight of the personnel and premises, and has been able to make economies and contribute to achieving value for money, for example in relation to ancillary staff and building maintenance. The procedures for financial control are good. The bursar has a weekly meeting with the senior management, and provides regular financial monitoring reports both within the school and for the governors. The school has previously undergone annual financial audits that have not raised major issues.

74. The school provides a good quality of education and pupils achieve high standards. In relation to its context and income, the school provides good value for money.

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

### **ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE**

#### **English**

75. Attainment in English is well above national average at the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4, and in line with the national average in the sixth form. The end of Key Stage 3 results have improved significantly over the last four years. They were well above the national average for all schools, and for similar schools in both 1998 and 1999. Work seen in lessons and through scrutiny confirmed that the attainment of current Year 9 pupils is, likewise, well above the standard expected nationally.
76. Since the last inspection there has been an improvement at the end of Key Stage 4, most notably in GCSE English literature. Entering almost every Year 11 pupil, the school achieved results which were well above average in 1998 and 1999 respectively. Almost every pupil gained a pass grade, half at the very highest grades A and B and more girls than boys achieved grade A\* or A. GCSE English language results have remained well above the national average, despite a fall in 1999. Girls outperformed boys in 1999, slightly more than is seen nationally. The attainment of the present Year 11 pupils is well above the standard expected nationally. At A-level, students choose from one of three courses. Whilst the numbers taking English literature have dwindled, results remain above average. Results in English language were close to the national average in each of the last two years.
77. The high standards of written work are not matched by those in reading and speaking, which are at best average. Pupils are not encouraged to read aloud enough, nor sufficiently widely. As a result they are aware of the skill of literature, but they are not sufficiently responsive to its power and beauty. Listening skills are very well developed, but discussion is not consistently used by teachers or pupils to explore, develop and refine ideas and impressions. Thus speaking has a low status in lessons, being too often used in a superficial way. Many pupils are too easily satisfied with casual and imprecise expression and are insufficiently taught the importance of Standard English in class or group discussion. Paradoxically, lower attaining pupils show some skill: in a Year 10 class pupils gave accurate and thoughtful answers which expressed a point of view about poverty, and the relative responsibility of the individual and society. In contrast a top set studying 'Wuthering Heights' were asked for their impressions about a chapter. A comment from a bright child typified some of the lazy expression from some pupils who were too eager to get on with written work.
78. The progress which pupils make in English is very good at Key Stage 3, good at Key Stage 4, and satisfactory in the sixth form. The attainment of pupils in English on entry to the school is close to the national average. Pupils made good progress in lessons during the inspection. Test results and exercise books show that, over time, most pupils make very good progress, particularly with written work. The very positive attitudes to English which pupils show and use have a major impact on their rate of progress. They quickly learn a range of techniques and skills which help them to analyse writing, and structure their own work. They realise that the purpose of a written piece will strongly influence the choice of form, style and tone. They study a good range of literature which they gradually come to see in a social and historical context. Reading, discussion and video helped a mixed ability Year 7 class to appreciate such themes as loyalty and misunderstanding in 'Romeo and Juliet'. Progress in grammar is good; that in spelling and punctuation only satisfactory as pupils do not sufficiently relate what they learn to their own work.
79. The progress of many pupils in lessons in Key Stage 4 is very good. The focus on written work, and on literature, motivates them and gives a strong sense of purpose and direction. This can be detrimental to progress with oral skills. As a result, some pupils of average ability and a

number of boys do not develop the level of thinking and understanding which enables them to become confident and interesting users of English. Very good progress is made by higher and lower attaining pupils, and those with special needs. The former become adept at integrating new ideas into their own thinking, and are very skilled at illustrating opinion with exact quotation and reference. When studying literature they see that just as there is a sequence to a plot, there is also a sequence to the relationships between characters, and the ebb and flow of their emotions. Pupils with special educational needs produce lengthy and lively work which often interests the reader, and always has something of value to express. The satisfactory progress in the sixth form reflects the well organised and diligent approach of students who, however, rarely have unorthodox or challenging views, or dynamic written expression.

80. Pupils' attitudes during lessons in both key stages and in the sixth form are good. They have a very mature approach to study and a willingness to work very hard. The last inspection commented that girls' written work was particularly well presented and this has now extended to pupils of both sexes and all abilities. In contrast there is insufficient pride and care in many situations requiring more formal speech. All pupils are courteous and good humoured, respecting both teacher and subject and accepting that they have a responsibility to involve themselves in their own learning. When teaching is mediocre or undemanding, older pupils can occasionally become over-confident, flippant and casual, but the quality of most relationships is very high. All pupils are interested in English, but too few feel comfortable responding to the emotional power of language. They prefer to think rather than to respond; to write rather than reflect. Analysis takes precedence over awe.
81. Teaching, judged satisfactory to good in the last inspection, is now very good in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, and good in the sixth form. The quality of teaching is at least good in two out of three lessons. Teachers expect hard work and achievement. Their commitment provides pupils with a good role model. Planning is good and thorough but can rely too much on the scheme of work, with insufficient thought being given as to how best to adapt ideas and approaches to meet pupils' learning needs. This weakness also applies to some sixth form lessons. Marking is a strength; it is detailed, encouraging, personalised and accurate. There is, however, too much inconsistency both in the style of marking and the use of grading systems. Targets for improvement are set but pupils of average ability, especially boys, would benefit from more specific advice with concrete examples. The quality of display is unusually good. Most teachers manage and organise classes very well. They are very skilled in teaching specialist terms, and in giving pupils the techniques to analyse English, and use what they learn in their own writing. In a number of successful lessons, pupils were asked to visualise or 'feel' or even draw what the writer was trying to convey, and then to justify their response by close reference to the text. Whilst some good oral work was seen, too much was shallow. Over-lengthy and superficial class discussion often did not involve enough pupils, and those who did participate were not challenged to extend or justify their thinking, or make expression more precise. Emotion, too, is pointed out rather than examined and reflected upon. In a Year 11 lesson where this was not the case, the teacher asked a range of demanding questions of the pupils on the last chapter of 'Of Mice and Men'. They watched a video version, and were given time to take in its emotional impact before being encouraged to explain differences between the two, and to talk about what they found impressive or moving.
82. The department has been well led and well organised. A comprehensive scheme of work and a focus on written work have been central to the raising of standards in both literature and language. The newly-appointed subject leader has a clear and intelligent vision of how to build on this tradition of achievement, and is successfully involving colleagues in the process. There are sufficient English classrooms, but they look tired and in need of decoration. The department has a good range of books, but careless administration has resulted in many incomplete sets: too many pupils have to share books as a consequence. In too many cases the responsibility for teaching English to a class falls to two teachers. The school does not monitor or evaluate the impact of this. In practice it adds to the marking burden on teachers, poses logistical resource

problems, can inhibit teacher relationships, and causes many pupils to see grammar and language lessons as unrelated to other work.

83. There has been good progress since the last inspection. Examination results have improved. The quality of written work, and its presentation, has improved. The department is aware that it has the capacity to improve further and has the self-awareness and determination to do so.

Literacy across the curriculum:

84. In subjects other than English, standards of literacy are good. Key words and specialist terms are taught and insisted upon. Pupils are expected to write frequently and at length, and much marking stresses the need for neatness and accuracy. However in geography there are few opportunities for extended writing, or for varied styles. In contrast, in history teachers plan how to enable pupils to feel confident with structuring longer pieces of work. All subjects teach pupils the value of proof reading and redrafting work. Study skills such as note taking from the teacher or from text books is a strength in most subjects. As a result pupils are good at reading for research purposes, but few teachers encourage wide ranging research using class libraries, the library, or the internet.
85. The majority of pupils have very good listening skills, but they are too receptive. This, allied with some over-prescriptive teaching, limits the quality and confidence of their speaking. Thus in mathematics and physical education, many able pupils do not express themselves well in talking about the subjects. Few schemes of work give any regard to the importance of discussion, and the general culture of the school undervalues it in lessons. There are no school strategies to make sure that the spoken skills of pupils are developed, and few teachers realise the potential which high quality oral work has to improve critical and independent thinking. Indeed many compound the issue by allowing too much vague language use and non-Standard English in question and answer sessions.

## **Mathematics**

1. Attainment at Key Stage 3 is well above the national average. The end of Key Stage 3 test results have been well above the national averages for all schools and similar schools nationally. Attainment by the majority of pupils in the current Year 9 is above or well above national expectations.
2. Overall attainment at GCSE is well above the national average. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, the percentage of pupils attaining high grades was well above the national average, and better than similar schools. The attainment of current Year 11 pupils is well above the national average. The 1999 A-level results were in line with the national average overall. The attainment of students currently in Year 13 is above expectations. Standards have improved since the last inspection.
3. At Key Stage 3, very high attaining pupils in Year 9 investigate number patterns confidently. They recognise sequences and can formulate the general rule which describes them. Average attaining pupils in Year 7 correctly identify which process to use when solving arithmetic problems. They estimate results and use these effectively to check their calculations. In Year 8 and Year 9, teachers make sound use of available information technology to support pupils' learning. In Year 8, for example, higher attaining pupils use spreadsheets competently to investigate volume in cuboids. Throughout the key stage many pupils use only a limited mathematics vocabulary. In Year 8, for example, lower attaining pupils do not know the correct terms to describe data presented in diagrams and charts.
4. At Key Stage 4, a group of very high attaining pupils took GCSE examinations early, at the end of Year 10, and achieved very high grades. These pupils are now studying an additional GCSE in statistics, and have started the A-level course in mathematics. They correctly calculate 'moving averages' and plot graphs to display trends. They assimilate more advanced statistical notation very quickly and make effective use of this in their work. Other high attaining pupils at this key stage show competence in a broad range of more-demanding mathematics. They know the techniques of manipulating number and algebra. In Year 10, for example, they solve quadratic equations by factors and by formula, and use trigonometric ratios when solving problems. In Year 11, average attaining pupils showed good understanding of when to use each of the different measures of average. Lower attaining pupils calculate the perimeter of simple and more complex mathematical shapes correctly.
5. Sixth form students show good understanding of a broad variety of A-level mathematics. In Year 13, for example, they demonstrate high attainment in a wide range of statistical topics, such as determining the confidence one could have in an estimate of the mean height in a population of men.
6. At Key Stage 3, overall progress is good. Most pupils make progress which is good, or better in most aspects of mathematics; a small minority of below average attaining pupils make poor progress. The progress of lower attaining pupils across a wide range of mathematics is inhibited through repetition of work on a limited range of topics. Pupils' progress in most lessons ranges from satisfactory to good. Although there is a strong commitment to high attainment, some teachers

do not use the department programmes of study to support pupils' learning in a systematic, balanced and rigorous way. In Year 7, for example, average attaining pupils learn the order in which mathematical processes are carried out but become confused when required to use negative numbers. Pupils have some opportunities to develop their understanding of mathematics by using and applying the techniques they learn, but these opportunities are not well embedded in the curriculum.

7. Progress at Key Stage 4 is sound and is very well supported by exceptionally good subject management. Most pupils achieve results that are consistent with, or better than, their previous attainment would indicate. High-attaining and most average-attaining pupils make progress that is good or better. Progress in individual lessons ranges from very good to poor. Some of these lessons are stimulating and teachers encourage pupils to talk about the real life contexts in which they experience the mathematics they study. Many pupils apply their mathematics skills well: average-attaining pupils solve simultaneous equations by elimination and higher attaining pupils calculate the volume of cones and spheres. However, the progress of some average and lower attaining pupils is often less than satisfactory. Their knowledge base is insecure, and, on occasion, their progress is inhibited by repetition of low level work. For example, Year 10 low-attaining pupils were drawing lines of symmetry on simple mathematical figures.
8. Sixth form students make good progress in the well-supported A-level and further mathematics classes. The sixth form students are diligent, and respond well when teaching is lively and interesting. In Year 12, they are required to revise previous work thoroughly before embarking upon higher level study.
9. The progress of pupils identified as having special educational needs is satisfactory overall. Teachers know their pupils well. They provide sound individual help in lessons, and make effective use of special needs support assistants where these are available.
10. At both key stages, and in the sixth form, most pupils' attitudes to learning are very good. Pupils want to do well and are dedicated to high achievement. They sustain concentration without direct supervision and, even when lessons are dull and repetitive, most are diligent about completing their work. Pupils appreciate the extensive extra support provided by some of their teachers, and recognise the contribution this makes to the standards they achieve. They show great initiative in making use of these extra classes. Behaviour is very good, and relationships among pupils are very good. Teachers and pupils show respect and liking for each other.
11. The quality of teaching at both key stages and in the sixth form is satisfactory overall, with only a minority that is very good or excellent and a similar proportion that is less than satisfactory. Much of the teaching needs to be improved to match the best. In the best lessons teachers have very high expectations. They have a very good understanding of how pupils learn mathematics. They lead lively discussions about the work, which allows them to assess pupils' knowledge,

and stimulate their thinking about mathematics. They use a variety of activities to help pupils maintain interest and sustain concentration, and involve pupils purposefully in demonstrating work in progress. These lessons are brisk, engaging and interesting. In lessons where teaching is least effective, pupils are left to get on with repetitive time-filling exercises, such as colouring in shapes. In such lessons, the weak planning does not take account of how pupils learn mathematics.

12. Excellent leadership has made a very positive contribution to the significant improvements since the last inspection. This has provided clear aims and policies for development, and built a very positive team spirit. Assessment data is analysed to inform and guide future development. The head of department monitors the work of colleagues effectively, and has identified the variability in quality of teaching as an area for development. The school is providing some training to support change, but recognises the need for more extensive training to improve performance further.

#### Numeracy across the curriculum

13. Standards of numeracy across the curriculum are good throughout the school and in the sixth form. Subjects, such as science and geography make a good contribution to helping pupils develop this key skill. Numeracy skills are well integrated in the science curriculum. Pupils used appropriate units of measurement and substitute accurately when using formulae in a wide variety of contexts. The Key Stage 3 introductory course on geography skills, reinforces graph drawing and interpretation. In Year 8, pupils make good use of their number skills to support study in music. In the sixth form, students use advanced statistical techniques well when interpreting data in geography and biology projects. In the child development course students used ratio competently in a project on genetics. Scientific and graphical calculators are used appropriately throughout the school.

#### Science

14. Attainment is above national expectations at the end of both key stages. The 1999 end of Key Stage 3 results were above the national average for all schools and in line with the national average for similar schools. From 1996 to 1998 the school science results improved at a better rate than the national rate, although there was a slight decline in 1999. The school science results were below those in mathematics but in line with those in English. At GCSE in 1999 the percentage of pupils gaining higher grades in science was well above that in all schools and that in similar schools. This was an improvement on the 1998 results. Attainment in biology and physics was slightly better than in chemistry. School results in science are similar to those in English and mathematics. The A-Level examination entries in biology, chemistry and physics are too few to indicate trends or to make meaningful comparisons with national standards. However, in 1998 average point scores in biology and chemistry were above the national average scores and physics was below. Results in all three A-level sciences improved in 1999.

15. The work seen during the inspection is consistent with the attainment shown in the national tests and examinations. Pupils' experimental and investigative skills are good. Their ability to plan and carry out an investigation is better than their ability to evaluate the results. The capacity of pupils in both key stages to recall scientific facts is better than their capacity to apply their knowledge. Literacy skills are good, although pupils have few opportunities for extended writing in science. Oracy skills are not developed in science because pupils are not given enough opportunities for discussion and debate. Numeracy skills are good and well developed in graphical work and in the analysis of numerical scientific data.
16. Overall, pupils' progress over time is satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. The pupils' exercise books show continuity of learning and sustained progress over time in Key Stage 4. In Key Stage 3, progress is limited because the work done over the key stage is not sufficiently demanding, and there is some repetition of topics covered in Key Stage 2. Progress in the lessons seen was always at least satisfactory, and good in lessons where there was good teaching. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. The higher-attaining pupils make least progress in many lessons because they are not sufficiently challenged in their thinking. Pupils made good progress in lessons where their interest was effectively engaged, where teacher explanations were clear and related to everyday life and where they were made to think about their work. For example, in a Year 10 lesson on digestion, in which imaginative visual aids were used to illustrate what happens as food moves along the gut, the teacher skilfully used questioning to build on pupil answers to further their understanding and pupils made very good progress.
17. Pupils' response to their work is good throughout the subject. They are very well behaved, courteous and considerate. In practical work they perform safely and sensibly and take care of the equipment. They work co-operatively in groups. Pupils have good listening skills and can sustain concentration well. The presentation of written work is of a high standard, showing care and pride in their work. This positive attitude to learning contributes to the good progress made. However, pupils do not readily volunteer answers to questions posed by the teacher, or indeed ask many questions themselves. They are acceptors rather than searchers for information and their capacity for independent thinking is underdeveloped in both key stages. Sixth form students are committed and eager to learn. They demonstrate competent practical skills and a confident and reflective approach to their learning.
18. Overall, teaching is good throughout the school. In all the lessons seen the teaching was at least satisfactory, with strengths seen more in the lessons in Key Stage 3 than in Key Stage 4. All the teaching seen in the sixth form was good or very good, showing an improvement since the last inspection. A strength of the teaching is good specialist knowledge, shown in the teachers' skill in asking relevant questions and in their ability to draw on a range of contexts to make the work comprehensible. Management of pupils is very good. Good behaviour is demanded and achieved and teachers maintain a good working environment. Lessons are well planned and objectives are made clear to pupils at the beginning of the lesson. The organisation of lessons is satisfactory, but a narrow

range of teaching and learning styles is used in science. In the good lessons the organisation took account of the individual needs of pupils of different prior attainment and used different resources and activities. In some lessons whole class teaching did not meet pupils' individual learning needs and in many lessons not enough was demanded of the high attainers. Science teaching makes insufficient use of activities such as problem solving, practice in the application of knowledge, pupil presentations of research topics, or class debates on scientific issues, to challenge pupils' scientific thinking and develop their intellectual curiosity. Marking is not analytical or detailed enough to motivate pupils to make further progress and homework set is often insufficiently demanding. However, in a very good lesson on reproduction the teaching aims were clear, pupil management was excellent and the lesson progressed at a lively pace. After teacher explanation and a video, pupils used different worksheets to record their work. The teacher constantly checked that all pupils were working and questioned individuals to extend their understanding and to make them think for themselves. At the end of the lesson question and answer was used very effectively to review what the pupils had learnt and to help them recall the main facts.

19. The subject is managed effectively. There is, however, insufficient monitoring and evaluation of the work of the department to provide consistency. The proportion of curriculum time allocated to science is lower than that recommended, both in Year 7 and in Key Stage 4 for the double award science course. This restricts the time available to cover the programme of study and has a resultant effect on pupil learning. In many classes in Key Stage 3 the teaching is shared between different teachers. This hinders continuity of learning and pupil progress. Since the last inspection experimental and investigative work has been integrated into the scheme of work and skills are developed throughout the key stages. The use of information technology is underdeveloped. Pupils need to be given more opportunities to collect, handle and investigate scientific information. Improvement of continuity and progression of the curriculum between Key Stages 2 and 3 are needed so that pupils make more progress in Key Stage 3. Assessment has improved since the last inspection. Procedures for assessment are good and assessment is used effectively to inform curriculum planning. Accommodation and resources are adequate but there are inefficiencies because of the siting of laboratories in three different areas of the school, and the consequent need to transport equipment from one end of the school to the other. Since the last inspection results in science have improved and the department has the capacity to improve further.

## **OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES**

### **Art**

20. The percentage of pupils who attain high grades in GCSE examinations has for several years been well below the average. Performance in art is significantly below that of other subjects, although a high proportion of the pupils who opt for art attain standards that are below average in their other examinations. In current classes the standards across the range of courses offered is below those that should be expected. Independent work, arrived at through personal investigation

and experimentation, is weak. Some pupils lack confidence in their abilities and wait to be told what to do next. This reflects some of the weaknesses in examination results where standards of the coursework element of the examination have been higher than the timed test where pupils work in examination conditions. The work of a high proportion of pupils in current Year 11 classes has insufficient depth. The use and quality of work in sketchbooks is better in some classes than others.

21. Attainment of the small number of students taking courses in sixth form was broadly average. There was a 100 per cent pass rate in A-level examinations and in 1999 most of those entered attained the highest grades. In the GNVQ course equal numbers gained merit and distinction. The attainment of students in current classes is too small to make valid judgements about standards overall. However whilst there is evidence of high quality work, that of some students is below the expected standard. Much of the work is lacking depth and intellectual rigour, particularly in relation to standards of drawing and painting.
22. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 suggest most pupils attain standards in line with expectations, with significant numbers attaining higher standards. However, the school was unable to provide a representative sample of pupils' work to support these assessments. Attainment in the lessons seen was overall in line with expectation although standards in different classes in the same year group vary. In some classes a high proportion of pupils underachieve whilst in others pupils attain standards above those expected for their age. The work of some Year 9 pupils showed secure knowledge and understanding of how artists use colour and images to convey ideas and meanings. These pupils were able to use this to good effect in their own work. In one class pupils could begin to explain similarities and differences in the way Byzantine and Renaissance artists painted the Virgin and Child. In another class pupils could use a digital camera and computer generated imagery as the basis for their paintings and mixed media work. Other pupils noted how some landscape artists used colour to create an illusion of depth and distance and that the Fauvist artists used colour in more expressive and imaginative ways.
23. Overall progress in art is unsatisfactory. Although pupils made some progress in all but a few lessons seen, the rate of progress and the progress made by pupils over time is unsatisfactory. There are weaknesses in long and short term curriculum planning and assessment. In Key Stage 3 the emphasis has been on activities rather than on learning. Whilst the activities that teachers plan provide a range of opportunities, to work in graphics, printmaking and with three-dimensional materials, they have not been planned in a way that progressively builds on pupils' prior knowledge and skills. Those who opt for art in Year 10 have experience of different materials and ways of working, but few have acquired the secure foundation of skills and work habits necessary at the start of an examination course. In the A-level course, the benefits to students of working with different teachers is limited because teachers rarely meet together to plan or to review students' progress. The progress of students on the GNVQ course is variable. The work of some is barely above the standard of their GCSE grade but others make rapid and sustained progress.

24. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning overall, although in a small number of classes a minority of pupils appear disinterested, both in the opportunities provided and in their own progress. Behaviour is very good. Pupils have good literacy skills enabling them to make notes, read extensively and carry out research in books and through computers. However, many lack the confidence and skills to sustain a discussion about their own work and explore complex ideas and meanings in the work of others.
25. The quality of teaching is sound overall. Collectively teachers offer a high level of subject expertise. However, their expertise in curriculum planning and assessment is weaker and, at Key Stage 3, has not kept pace with developments nationally. Teachers have mixed expectations of what pupils can achieve by the end of the key stage. In Years 7 to 9 insufficient use is made of the assessments of pupils' work to plan the next stage of their learning. In the lessons where teaching was most effective pupils were asked open questions and helped to reflect and respond in depth. Teachers used a technically accurate vocabulary and encouraged pupils to do the same. Where teaching was weaker pupils were lectured or told what to think and do next and few strategies were used to actively involve them in the learning process. In a minority of lessons pupils received only negative feedback, resulting in a lack of confidence and a hardening of attitudes, but in most classes pupils received instructive and helpful comments on their progress. Good use was made of time and resources, for example, in the use of computers to explore the potential for drawing and image making and through visits to galleries in this country and abroad. Although not consistent, teaching in some lessons made a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, cultural and language development.
26. The management of the subject and its improvement since the last inspection have been unsatisfactory. The monitoring of teaching and arrangements for staff development are unsatisfactory. Many of the weaknesses that were identified in the last inspection remain.

### **Design and technology**

27. Teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 indicate that pupils' attainment is slightly below national averages with fewer pupils achieving the higher levels of performance. GCSE results have gradually improved from well below national averages at the time of the last inspection to just below the national averages when compared to both all and similar schools in 1999. However, this overall performance masks wide variations in the performance of boys and girls and in the different material areas that make up the subject. In 1998 the performance of boys and girls reflected the national averages but in 1999 girls achieved above the national average whilst boys were well below. Results from pupils taking the Design and Technology: Food syllabus were well above national averages, but results in Resistant Materials and Graphic Products were below, and in Textiles well below, these figures. The numbers of students taking A-level design and technology in previous years have been too small to make comparisons with national averages although the overall trend of results is

improving. Current Year 13 students have produced some good design work, with some very good textiles designs where the work of other designers has been used as stimulus material. However, there is insufficient practical work completed for this stage of the course and overall attainment is below that to be expected.

28. In Key Stage 3 strengths and weaknesses are variable across the different material areas. In food and textiles work pupils are guided through the design process by the use of printed booklets. Pupils find this very supportive. As a result all the key aspects are addressed and Year 8 pupils making textile bags, for example, analyse existing bags, brainstorm ideas, develop their ideas with detailed and annotated drawings and plan the sequence for manufacturing before going on to actually make their design. However, pupils' evaluations of their work tend to concentrate on the process they have been through rather than on the finished object and how well it performs. In resistant materials work, pupils concentrate on developing practical skills in working with wood, metal and plastic. Consequently designing skills are under-developed. Pupils are unclear about the need to consider the user of their designs and are unable to communicate design ideas quickly and effectively by sketching.
29. In Key Stage 4 coursework folders, pupils write in detail about how they have gathered information to help them with their designing and they can use information technology to produce graphs and to word process text. Practical work includes well-made working models of full suspension bicycle frames, food trays and perfume bottles and packaging. However, there is still an inability to use freehand drawing to help generate and develop ideas. This hinders the speed at which pupils can work and the originality and range of ideas they can produce. In food work, pupils are confident when cooking, are knowledgeable about the ingredients they are using and are able to design and make food products for a variety of consumers.
30. Observation of work in Year 7 suggests that design and technology attainment on entry to the school is below national expectations, although the school does not confirm this with primary school records or their own assessments. From this low starting point the overall progress made by students in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory both in lessons and over time. By the end of the key stage pupils are confident in practical work in food, textiles, wood, metal and plastic and have developed appropriate knowledge of these materials and the ways in which they can be worked. There is considerable variation in the way design and written work is presented, for example pupils complete booklets in food and textiles but work on separate lined and plain paper in resistant materials. This does not present a coordinated and coherent view of the subject to the pupils. Progress in designing skills is slower because there is not a clear view across the whole department about what skills need to be taught or in what sequence. However, these issues have been identified and are beginning to be addressed.
31. In Key Stage 4 progress of all pupils is satisfactory in lessons, although over time girls make better progress than boys. The coursework design folders of girls are generally better completed and presented than those of boys. The department has already changed the way in which coursework is taught and assessed to try

and overcome some of these problems. Shorter intermediate deadlines for the completion of sections of design work are intended to help pupils, and boys in particular, meet the requirements of the mark scheme. Progress on the A-level course is mixed. Year 12 students are making sound progress in developing a range of basic designing and making skills, including the use of AutoCAD software. However, in Year 13 progress is unsatisfactory. Students are behind schedule with their major coursework projects, partly as a result of the resignation of the member of staff responsible for the organisation of this course in the summer term 1999.

32. Pupils' attitudes to learning were satisfactory or better in all the lessons observed and good or better in nearly two thirds. They were quiet and attentive during demonstrations, keen to get on with their practical work and behaved very sensibly in lessons where space for this type of activity was limited. Pupils also worked well with each other when they needed to share equipment.
33. The quality of teaching seen in Key Stage 3 was satisfactory or better in nearly all lessons. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form all the teaching was at least satisfactory. Overall about a quarter of the teaching was good or very good. Teachers achieve and maintain good discipline, have good subject knowledge and are able to present this to pupils in easily understandable ways. In the most effective lessons pupils were involved in a number of activities, there was a good balance between talk and action and the high expectations and enthusiasm of the teacher for the subject were clearly communicated. Pace was maintained by individual interactions with pupils and by the effective use of questioning. Food and textiles rooms are well organised and pupils know where resources are and how they are meant to use them. This level of organisation makes effective teaching easier to achieve as pupils start to take responsibility for organising their own learning. Assessment in GCSE Food Technology is thorough and provides pupils with good feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of their work and what they need to do in the future to move their work forward. Where teaching was less than satisfactory the lesson planning lacked precise objectives and consequently both teacher and pupils were unclear about what needed to be achieved. In addition the pace of the lesson was too slow with insufficient teacher direction to keep pupils on task and working effectively. Progress as a result was unsatisfactory.
34. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is well documented but is not sufficiently co-ordinated across the different material areas to ensure pupils make the best progress possible. There is only limited consensus on the knowledge and skills that need to be taught, through which activities and in which sequence. Too much time in resistant materials work is spent on developing making skills at the expense of designing skills. In Key Stage 4 about 10 per cent of pupils follow a triple science option and this prevents them taking a design and technology course; so the statutory requirements are not being met. The loss of these higher-attaining pupils also means that GCSE results in design and technology are lower than they would otherwise be.
35. The level of technician support, particularly in food and textiles, is inadequate. An

inappropriate amount of teachers' time is being spent on preparation and organisation of materials and resources. This has a negative impact on pupils' progress in lessons. Some of the workshops are untidy, cluttered and have worn or damaged work-surfaces. They do not present a welcoming environment or one that is conducive to quality designing and making activities.

36. Since the last inspection standards of attainment have improved and the department is aware of what further developments are needed. Overall the department has made satisfactory progress and is improving under new leadership.

## **Geography**

37. The results of the 1999 teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 were well above the national average. The attainment of the pupils currently in Year 9 is above the national expectations. Pupils make good progress during Key Stage 3 in the knowledge and understanding of geography. For example, higher-attaining pupils have a detailed knowledge of migrations of people and the factors influencing these migrations. Lower-attaining pupils identify the key characteristics of developing and developed countries. However pupils' progress with their enquiry skills is less well developed. Their work involves them in enquiries structured by their teachers but they have insufficient opportunities to identify their own geographical questions, select evidence and decide how to present their data.
38. The GCSE results are well above the national average and have improved since the last inspection. Geography results are often higher than results for other subjects. The attainment of the current Year 11 pupils is well above expectations. Pupils make very good progress in their knowledge and understanding of geographical ideas and case studies, and in their coursework. For example, higher-attaining pupils have a detailed knowledge of the tropical rain forest ecosystem and lower attainers can explain advantages and disadvantages of the Aswan dam. In their coursework, pupils use a wide range of material and structure this carefully, for example to test hypotheses about a tropical rain forest or the horse racing industry at Newmarket.
39. A-level results in 1999 were also well above the national average with a large proportion of students obtaining higher grades. These results were significantly better than the average A-level results for the school. The attainment of the current A-level students is well above expectations. They have a good knowledge and understanding of a wide range of human and physical geography including, for example, counter urbanisation and different types of meltwater channel. Personal investigative studies are well structured, focus on hypotheses or questions, and tackle interesting topics such as the distribution of car parks in Southend and the relationship between residential quality and the incidence of fires.
40. Pupils' attainment has improved since the last inspection. The attainment of boys and girls is similar. Geography provides good opportunities for pupils to use their

numeracy skills, particularly in the sixth form. Only occasionally do pupils engage in the sort of discussions which help them to analyse, explain and reason. As the department has identified, most writing is relatively short and factual and pupils have few opportunities for extended writing. To help remedy this, a start has been made providing pupils with frameworks to help them extend and structure their work.

41. During the inspection, teaching was good at Key Stages 3 and 4, and pupils made good progress. Strengths of the teaching include enthusiastic approaches from geography specialists, good relationships, calm but firm classroom management, active support for individual pupils, a brisk pace of work, and clear explanations. Much of the marking includes personal comments that help pupils understand how to improve. Occasional weaknesses include tasks that are too easy and the use of inappropriate resources. Learning objectives are not routinely shared with pupils at the start of lessons, and although lessons have brief plenaries at the end, these are not normally used to review progress against the objectives.
42. The A-level teaching was very good and enabled the students to make very good progress. Strengths of the teaching are an effective combination of direct teaching combined with tasks requiring the students to apply what they had learnt and to carry out small pieces of research. This is based on very good resource and information sheets, and a brisk pace of teaching ensures that much is achieved during the lessons.
43. As at the time of the last inspection, pupils' attitudes to learning are very good. They are attentive, well behaved and tackle their work assiduously. For example, large numbers of Year 11 pupils attend the good after-school revision programme. A weaker aspect of the pupils' response is that they have insufficient opportunities to use their initiative in their studies at Key Stages 3 and 4. However, A-level students have greater opportunities to use their initiative through their personal studies and the many tasks which require them to apply their knowledge.
44. There are outline schemes of work for each course, and teachers then plan their lessons based on the schemes. This planning is effective but has some weaknesses. Teachers' plans do not always show clear learning objectives. Teachers interpret the outline scheme in different ways so that, for example, there are some differences in what some Year 7 classes are taught. Assessment is sound for GCSE and A-level but, as the department is aware, there is not a consistent approach to teacher assessment at the end of Key Stage 3. Steps have been taken to improve this assessment by introducing a specific assessment each half term. A good feature is the use of two versions of each assessment matched to pupils' differing levels of attainment. A start has been made to compiling a portfolio of pupils' work which will demonstrate the department's understanding of attainment at each National Curriculum level. It will be important to check that the scheme of work includes objectives and activities that enable pupils to reach the highest levels.

45. The management of geography is very good and promotes high standards and good teaching. Although standards are high, there is a desire for further improvement. The team of teachers work effectively together. Within the department in the last school year, there has been effective monitoring of teaching and of pupils' written work. The department has made good progress since the last inspection, and has the capacity to continue improving.

## History

46. The results of the 1999 teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 were well above the national average. The proportion of girls gaining these levels was higher than that of boys. Over the last three years the results have exceeded national averages. The attainment of the pupils currently in Year 9 is above the national expectations. Appropriate emphasis is placed on each of the key elements and pupils produce work which is accurate, indicates good knowledge and understanding and shows proficiency in the required skills.
47. In 1999, GCSE history results were significantly lower than other subjects in the school and below the national average. Attainment by girls was well below the expected level and that of the boys in the school. Pupils' current attainment is similar to expectations in some of the topics but not all.
48. Results at A-level in 1999 were good although the number of students involved was relatively small. Current attainment is at the level expected at this stage; levels of knowledge and understanding are at least satisfactory and students are able to apply this in developing sound arguments in response to both written and oral questions. Students make good progress.
49. Though the department makes a substantial contribution to the development of literacy, little contribution is made to the development of pupils' numeracy or information technology skills.
50. Key Stage 3 pupils make good progress over all key elements. Year 9 pupils studying ways of achieving political change were able to assess the significance of events, people and changes and recognise that these can be interpreted in different ways. In a lesson on 'The Gunpowder Plot' Year 8 pupils showed a developing ability to evaluate sources of information and to select those relevant to a particular task. Progress in all lessons was at least sound, in half it was good.
51. Progress across Key Stage 4 is unsatisfactory overall; it is patchy and varies from topic to topic. Pupils' previously completed work showed progress was unsatisfactory when the teaching was mainly concerned with covering all aspects of the topic at a superficial level and where little attention was given to the understanding of the links between events, people and change, as in the topic 'China 1911 - 70'. Pupils made better progress where there was variety in the teaching, a range of methods and resources were used and pupils were required to respond in different forms utilising the skills acquired earlier. Progress is least satisfactory amongst the average attainers and particularly girls. In all the lessons seen, pupils made satisfactory and often good progress. In a Year 10 lesson

where pupils were studying the 'The Cuban Crisis and Detente' excellent progress was made as a result of the quality of the planning, subject knowledge of the teacher, the methods used and the high expectations of the pupils.

52. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good. They are willing and tractable. In almost all lessons they were able to sustain their concentration and listened carefully. In the best lessons they are enthusiastic and show a real interest, as when pupils in Year 9, studying 'Political Change 1750-1900', who had researched a topic were asked to report back to the other members of their group. The response to certain topics by pupils in Years 10 and 11, as seen in their previously completed work, was inconsistent and reflected the variable quality of planning at this stage.
53. The quality of teaching observed ranged between excellent and satisfactory and was mostly good or better. Pupils' work is marked regularly and comprehensive records are kept. There is some good practice where full and helpful comments are written into the books. The marking of A-level work is exemplary. Pupils are encouraged to develop and use appropriate historical terms throughout the school. Homework is set regularly and completed. The planning of lessons is good. Teachers' knowledge of the subject is a strength as shown in the quality of their exposition and expert questioning. In an 'Introduction to the Slave Trade' Year 9 pupils benefited from thorough planning, a choice of task that was both imaginative and appropriate and the opportunity to play an active part in their learning to make good progress. The range of methods and resources used in teaching was limited, as were the opportunities for pupils to show initiative in their learning. Overall, the teaching at Key Stage 3 is good and in the sixth form very good. However, teaching at Key Stage 4 has to be unsatisfactory because pupils do not make the progress expected.
54. Strategies are being developed to bring about improvement and provide effective support. There is the capacity to improve and in-service training has been matched to priorities. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. Resources for A-level are now much improved and the specialist rooms have attractive and informative displays. However, teaching in non-specialist areas has had a detrimental effect, although the school is about to address this issue.

### **Information technology**

55. Results in the 1999 information technology end of Key Stage 3 teacher assessments were well above the national average. However, there was no marked work available to support the teacher assessments reported. Moreover, evidence from pupils' work and curriculum planning suggests that the full National Curriculum was not covered. The 1999 GCSE results in Information Technology were below national averages, although the 1997 and 1998 results were above the national average. In 1999 a small group of pupils took a GCSE short course in Information Technology and achieved results matching the national average. At A-Level, small numbers of students took Computer Studies and Information Technology but the 1998 and 1999 examination results were above the national

averages. Standards of work seen in those aspects of Information technology covered in the taught course in Year 7 were in line with expectations for pupils ages. Pupils show good skills in the use of the keyboard and mouse and have the ability to move around within Microsoft Windows with ease. In sixth form GNVQ courses, students have good skills in using computers and are able to select appropriate computer packages for particular purposes and to use them confidently. For example, students were making full use of the internet for research into the Children's Act.

56. The school does not fully teach the range of information technology skills that make up the National Curriculum. Therefore attainment in information technology at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 are below expectations. Evidence of the use of computers in pupils' work is patchy, with some good examples of Desk Top Publishing in English and some database work in Geography. However, coverage of control technology is largely confined to Year 7. Pupils' work across Key Stage 3 does not suggest there is systematic development in their experiences
57. Pupils make sound progress in lessons in the taught Year 7 course and in GCSE information technology lessons. Pupils in Year 7 were seen making sound progress in understanding how to use the Access database, whilst GCSE pupils were able to select appropriate computer packages for their coursework. Pupils in Years 8 and 9 and those pupils in Years 10 and 11 who do not study GCSE courses with a computing component make unsatisfactory progress over time in the development of their information technology skills. This is because there is not a comprehensive programme for the development of the full range of information technology skills in these year groups. Pupils' opportunities for using computers depends too much on which teachers they have. The school does not have a documented overview as to which subjects are delivering which aspects of National Curriculum information technology. This impedes the progress pupils make. In those subjects where information technology is systematically taught, pupils make sound progress over time. For example, pupils effectively develop skills in communication in English lessons where desk-top publishing is used for producing newspapers. But some subjects such as art, history, physical education and design technology do not contribute to the information technology assessments at the end of Year 9.
58. Pupils' attitudes to learning in information technology are very good. They are very well behaved and highly motivated. They enjoy using computers and always behave in a mature fashion. Pupils work well co-operatively and display good social and interpersonal skills when in computer rooms. Relationships between pupils and teachers were a real strength in the lessons seen.
59. The quality of the teaching of information technology seen was sound. Teachers have a good knowledge of different software packages and are able to communicate this effectively to pupils. Lessons are well planned with good quality worksheets. For example, pupils in Year 10 were being effectively taught how to select from a wide range of different software packages in order to use computers to run a leisure centre. Teaching could be further improved by providing greater structure for lower attainers in GCSE courses in order to reduce the time spent on

lower level tasks such as importing and positioning of graphics.

60. The school offers a broad range of courses with a strong information technology component at Key Stage 4, including GCSE Business Studies, Office Studies and Information Technology. Over half of Key Stage 4 pupils take a taught course with a computer component. However, just under half receive little planned experience in the use of computers and so are poorly prepared for this important aspect of adult life.
61. The taught courses in information technology are led and organised well. However, leadership in information technology across the curriculum is less effective. The school does not clearly identify which aspects of information technology subjects need to teach in order for the school to cover the National Curriculum. The teaching of information technology across subjects is not monitored effectively enough. There is no evidence of a formal system for moderating standards of work so that the levels reported are reliable.
62. The main school has four computer rooms. The library is well equipped with computers and there are two well-equipped computers rooms for the sixth form. A number of the computers are older 486 machines and these are becoming increasingly slow and unreliable. The school does not have a clear plan to address this. There is the equipment to teach control technology, but this is held by the information technology department and used only for teaching Year 7, rather than being used in design and technology to teach control work across Years 7 to 11.
63. Improvement since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory because the school does not teach the full range of National Curriculum information technology. The last inspection reported that the development of formal strategies for moderation of National Curriculum levels across subjects had not yet been achieved. Although a method of standardisation has been adopted, this is not based on pupils' actual information technology work, instead it relies on a paper-based test. This issue has not been effectively addressed. The last inspection also indicated the need for a formal system to monitor the quality of provision for information technology in the contributory subjects. This has not yet happened. At present the school does not have the strategies and systems in place to bring about improvements

### **Modern Foreign Languages**

64. Standards have risen steadily since the last inspection. Pupils' results in teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 were well above the national average for both boys and girls. This was a significant improvement on 1998. Although boys achieved less well than girls, the gap between them was narrower than that found nationally. In the current Year 9, pupils' attainment is in line with national expectation in French. In German and Spanish, attainment is in line with and sometimes above the national expectation, despite pupils having studied these languages for a much shorter time.

65. Results in French in the 1999 GCSE examination were above the national average for similar schools, though boys again performed less well than girls. Results in German were well above the national average for all schools. Boys obtained significantly better results than girls. In the current Year 11, attainment in French is in line with course expectations for this stage of the school year. In Spanish and German, it is above course expectations. Pupils' skills in listening, speaking and writing are particularly well developed.
66. In the 1999 GCE A-level examinations, results in French were below national averages, though the proportion of pupils in the small teaching groups who achieved pass grades has remained constant. In German, all pupils obtained pass grades, with the proportion achieving higher grades in line with national averages. In the current Year 13, attainment in French and German is above course expectations.
67. Attainment at all levels has risen steadily and standards are comparable to those of 1999 in French and higher in German and Spanish. However, boys continue to attain lower standards than girls at Key Stage 3, consistent with the issue raised at the last inspection. In the best work seen, Year 9 German pupils confidently exchanged information on finding their way round a town, Year 11 Spanish pupils performed fluent role-plays and Year 13 French students competently discussed aspects of popular music and culture based on their reading of authentic and up-to-date texts. Language courses make an effective contribution to the development of pupils' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills and, at Key Stage 3, to their skills in using information technology.
68. At Key Stage 3, pupils make good progress, showing an ability to use language for their own purposes in speaking and writing, including word-processing and, in a good example seen in French in Year 8, carrying out a survey of their opinions on school subjects. However, boys progress less well than girls from Year 7, which leads to the higher-ability sets studying German and Spanish, in addition to French sets, being dominated by girls. The department is addressing this issue. At Key Stage 4, pupils make satisfactory progress, though it is better in German and Spanish than in French. Year 10 German pupils, for example, used listening, reading, speaking and writing skills in combination in developing the ability to arrange social engagements. By contrast, pupils in a Year 11 French set lacked confidence in speaking on routine topics as they had not consolidated enough basic knowledge over time. In the sixth form, progress is good. Year 12 French students performed significantly above GCSE standards in discussing tobacco addiction and Year 13 German students showed good awareness of underlying issues in a mature discussion of the effects of German reunification.
69. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in relation to their prior attainment. Their written work is of satisfactory quality, as illustrated by the progress of pupils in a low-ability Year 9 set working on computers.
70. Pupils' attitudes to language learning and their response in lessons are good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in the sixth form. From Year 7, pupils concentrate well and show an ability to work independently. In Year 9 Spanish

and German, there are good examples of pupils working together, sharing ideas. Key Stage 4 pupils are well-motivated, showing good powers of concentration, well-developed study skills and, in a Year 11 French set, good participation across the group in speaking work. Sixth formers contribute willingly to discussions, supporting each other, working intensively and showing a mature approach to language study.

71. The quality of teaching is good overall. It is very good in just over four out of ten lessons, with examples seen in all Key Stages. Teachers are skilled in the languages they teach and provide very good models for their pupils. The best lessons are characterised by high expectations of pupils, notably in Spanish and German and in the sixth form. There is a strong emphasis on teaching through the target language - a Year 8 lesson on word-processing was taught entirely in French, for example. The long lessons feature good variety and are conducted at a good pace with lively interaction with pupils. Pupils' work is regularly assessed and there is good, supportive marking. Good quality assessment is used to inform the planning of lessons and reflects National Curriculum levels of attainment. Relationships with pupils are good and their behaviour and learning are well managed. Occasionally teaching is less effective because of low expectations, slow pace and lack of support for pupils.
72. Planning of the modern languages curriculum is satisfactory, though schemes of work are too dependent on published material and are insufficiently linked to the full National Curriculum. There is a good management structure in the department and language teachers work as a close-knit team. There is, however, insufficient monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. Accommodation was an issue in the last inspection, but this is no longer the case - though one language classroom is still in need of refurbishment. Since the last inspection standards have been raised and the quality of teaching, assessment and resourcing have improved. The attainment of boys and their access to languages other than French remains the key challenge. The department has the capacity to improve further.

## **Music**

73. The GCSE results were above the national average in 1997 and 1998 and although the course was taken by fewer pupils, the 1999 results were well above the national average. There is a good take-up rate for the subject currently in Key Stage 4. No students entered for the A-level examination in the two previous years, but in 1999 the results of the four students were in line with course-related expectations.
74. At the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 attainment is above national expectations and at A-level attainment is in line with course-related expectations. Pupils make good progress throughout the school and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in relation to their prior attainment. Pupils who take part in extra-curricular activities achieve standards of performance which are well above those expected from pupils of a similar age. They make very good progress in developing secure performing skills. Since the last inspection the attainment and

progress of pupils in both key stages has shown good improvement. Pupils in Key Stage 3 take part in a range of musical activities which enable them to develop their understanding of the structure of music and a knowledge of some of the musical repertoire. Year 7 pupils used keyboards in their short composition to illustrate a fairy story. They understood how a chord could be changed by altering some of the notes and the way the keyboard could be used to create an effect. Some pupils gave secure group performances of their work. Year 8 pupils made up their own short piece to represent the way that aleatoric or chance music is evolved. They made good use of musical vocabulary in describing their work. Sixth form students made good progress when analysing the chords used in a short extract of the Berg Violin Concerto and showed a good understanding of the periods of musical history. Year 11 pupils compared and contrasted different versions of the same music. They showed secure knowledge of different instrumentation and styles and the way that rhythmic patterns can be varied. Their compositions show skill in using music notation.

75. Pupils in both key stages have good attitudes towards the ~~subject~~ subject. They are well-behaved and listen attentively to music. They co-operate well in group work. Sixth form students have very good attitudes. They are well-motivated and have a committed approach to work. They work collaboratively, when required. Pupils are enthusiastic in responding to extra-curricular provision.
76. Teaching is good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form. In one A-level lesson seen the teaching was very good. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and make effective use of musical demonstrations to re-inforce pupils' understanding. This has a positive impact on standards. Good emphasis is placed on teaching the subject's vocabulary. Good teaching was seen in a Year 9 lessons when pupils were studying programme music. Pupils made good progress in understanding how to create atmosphere in music with the use of a motif, different instrumental sounds and the effect of silence.
77. Over 180 pupils are involved in extra-curricular activities of which the teaching is very good. There is a choir open to all years, a chamber choir, a string group, a flute and clarinet choir, a swing band and a jazz improvisation group. Pupils have taken part in concerts both inside and outside school. These have included the Celebration of Youth at Canvey, a Victorian Christmas event at Benfleet and the service of Nine Lessons and Carols at a local church. There are summer and Christmas concerts in school and the chamber choir has performed at the Salvation Army, and for Hadleigh and Southend Hospital Volunteers Support group. High standards of performance have been achieved at these concerts.
78. Leadership and management of music are effective. Schemes of work and assessment procedures are satisfactory. Although overall resources are satisfactory, there is a limited number of keyboards for practical work. Lessons are provided by peripatetic staff in a range of instruments and the teaching in the two lessons observed was good.
79. However, the accommodation for music is unsatisfactory. One of the two teaching rooms can only be entered by going through the other, which disturbs lessons.

There is only one practice room near to the main teaching area. This has no soundproofing and pupils are unable to use it when peripatetic staff are teaching. There is no separate area for music technology and no subject office.

80. The school has been successful in addressing the weaknesses highlighted in the last inspection report. The attainment and progress of pupils has improved, teaching has improved and the requirements of the National Curriculum at Key Stage 3 are sufficiently met.

### **Physical Education**

81. Results in the 1999 end of KeyStage 3 teacher assessments were above the national average. The 1999 GCSE results were also above the national average in physical education; standards achieved by boys and girls were similar. The pupils' performance was significantly better than that reported in the last inspection. The results of the girls who took the GCSE examinations in dance were well above average. Pupils appear to perform better in these subjects than they do in most other examinations.
82. The 1999 A-level results were average and the standards reached by pupils in the community sports leaders award were high. The extra-curricular programme provides pupils with an exceptional range of opportunities to develop their skills and interests further in clubs and competitions in which the school is very successful. These experiences have a positive influence on standards in lessons.
83. The attainment of the current Year 9 pupils matches the previous teacher assessments. Girls use some imaginative ideas in dance and gymnastics, although their refined movements are under developed. In netball, girls are able to pass the ball with accuracy and make effective use of space. In soccer and rugby, the boys use good ball skills and are developing a sound awareness of games' principles. In most lessons, pupils are just beginning to identify weaknesses in their performances and refine their own work, though they have yet to support each other effectively when working in small groups. The attainment of the current Year 11 pupils matches expectations. Higher-attaining girls are confident and skilful when hitting and receiving the ball in hockey. They are developing well their knowledge and understanding of the tactics and rules in netball. Girls are developing accomplished routines in dance. The boys are confident in their passing and receiving skills in rugby and soccer, although their movement in badminton is under developed. Pupils understand the importance of preparation for physical activity and, when given the opportunity, they can suggest a modest range of warm-up activities.
84. For those pupils studying the GCSE course, standards in the practical work seen met the course objectives and pupils showed a sound understanding in written work that was well presented. Students studying for A-level were able to discuss the historical background to current sport.
85. Pupils made good progress in lessons because they were interested and wanted to improve their skills and understanding. They make good progress through Key

Stage 3, but only satisfactory progress in Key Stage 4 because the subject is allocated a once-weekly session. In both key stages, higher attaining pupils are not sufficiently stretched by the tasks. All but a few pupils are keen to participate in the practical activities. Pupils show an interest in the subject and the large majority approach the practical activities in a mature manner and with a sense of enjoyment.

86. The quality of teaching is consistently good and similar to that reported in the last inspection. Significant strengths include: good subject knowledge; consistent and effective pupil management; a brisk pace: good use of accurate demonstrations; and the skilful use of incisive questioning to help pupils evaluate and improve their performances. Weaknesses in the teaching seen included a small number of common features such as, inconsistencies in preparing the body for exercise and the lack of challenge for the most skilful performers.
87. Pupils are given a range of conventional activities within single gender groups. The curriculum is enhanced with a very good range of extra-curricular activities, and school teams and individuals are very successful in local, regional and national competitions.
88. The subject continues to be well managed, despite the difficulties caused by the layout of the indoor accommodation. The strength of the department is its emphasis on the effectiveness of teaching and the high quality of the extra-curricular provision. The schemes of work are being reviewed within a common format. Assessment procedures are in the early stage of development. The action plan is weak and does not contain enough information to be a useful working document.
89. The school has an adequate range of outdoor sports facilities, which include hard court and grass areas, a recently installed all-weather surface area, and a small, heated, outdoor swimming pool. The indoor accommodation includes a moderate sized but poorly heated sports hall, and two small gymnasiums with limited storage facilities. The changing rooms are small and inadequate.

### **Religious education**

90. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is broadly in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education. Pupils are attaining average levels across the seven 'categories' of religion, when measured against the end of key stage statements. Pupils are better in the knowledge and understanding of religions than in relating what they have learnt to their own experiences. They can grasp the reasons for religious practices and explain religious symbolism, as in their work on the 5 K's worn by many Sikhs; but their evaluative skills are underdeveloped.
91. The 1999 GCSE Religious Studies results were below the national average. The current Year 11 pupils can handle the factual information adequately, but do not yet explain and evaluate the religious ideas in sufficient depth to gain the highest grades.

92. At Key Stage 3, progress in lessons observed ranged from satisfactory to very good. Pupils make progress in the knowledge and understanding of religious beliefs and practices, such as those connected with Easter. They develop an understanding of religious symbolism, and they learn religious vocabulary, such as Torah, Halal and meditate. Pupils' progress over time is good in Year 9 when they develop more critical skills and deal with abstract ideas such as arguments for the existence of God.
93. Religious education is incorporated into a vocational course for all Key Stage 4 pupils. Time given to it is extremely limited, but pupils made very good progress in a lesson observed. They wrestled with some difficult quotations about the environment and then matched each quotation to a belief. In a GCSE lesson pupils made very good progress in which they assimilated information and viewpoints on Christian attitudes to divorce. The pupils make good progress over time to cover the course content, but not enough progress in writing full explanations and evaluations.
94. Pupils behave well and work hard. They are responsive to the teachers, concentrate on the lessons and make a good effort with homework.
95. The quality of teaching is good overall throughout the school, ranging from satisfactory to very good. Specialists teach most lessons, and confidently draw on a depth of knowledge and understanding. Lessons are carefully planned and structured to cover a lot of material in interesting ways. Teachers are particularly good at engaging pupils' interest at the beginning of lessons. Teachers use a wide range of resources, including religious artefacts, visitors to school, and visits to places of worship. Homework is used well, either to research for the next lesson or to consolidate understanding by using the information from the lesson in a new way. For example, after the lesson on Jewish food laws, pupils were asked to write about the problems Jewish teenagers might have in keeping kosher. Homework is marked regularly, but few comments are given to help pupils to improve.
96. The department is well organised: its syllabus has been rewritten in the light of the new Essex agreed syllabus for religious education. Clear assessment procedures are in place. However, the school is not complying with statutory requirements with regard to religious education, and this is seriously affecting standards in the subject. Only a fraction of the agreed syllabus can be taught in the time allowed at Key Stage 4, and religious education is not taught at all in the sixth form. This situation has not improved since the last inspection. Religious education is effective in the time allowed, and is making a significant contribution to the pupils' spiritual and moral education.

#### **Other courses in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form**

97. The **performing arts department** incorporates the three art forms of dance, drama and music. These subjects are offered at GCSE and there are A-level courses in music and performing arts. In the A-level performing arts examinations

for 1998 and 1999 all students achieved the higher A-C grades. There is a good take-up rate for the subject in the current Years 12 and 13. The 1998 GCSE results for dance were above the national average and the 1999 results were well above the national average.

98. Younger pupils' drama experience relies on the individual interests and approaches of teachers as there is no formal drama provision at Key Stage 3. There is developing work in English and history, and a very good range of extra-curricular opportunities which, regrettably, cannot be offered to all those who wish to take part. Drama is offered as an option at Key Stage 4 and numbers of pupils involved are growing. The standard of work seen in lessons was well above that to be expected. GCSE drama results are outstanding. Pupils are enthusiastic. They are self-disciplined but creative and imaginative. Teaching is very good, some of it being of the highest quality. Whilst there is weakness in oral work in other parts of the school, in an outstanding GCSE drama lesson the teacher used group and class discussion to help pupils generate ideas, convey them with precision, and perform them with great insight and sensitivity. Drama also has an excellent assessment scheme that both informs and encourages pupils whilst highlighting areas for development.
99. The A-level performing arts course is designed to give students experience in the three art forms and the opportunity to specialise in two of them. Emphasis is placed on understanding the processes leading to a performance and on acquiring the necessary skills to make the performance effective. The work of key practitioners is studied and students are required to evaluate their own performances using appropriate technical language. Students in Year 12 spoke about their enjoyment of the course and the opportunity it gave them to develop skills and to work together as a team, both in preparation and performance.
100. Performing arts is very well led. Schemes of work and assessment procedures for each art form are in place. Extra-curricular provision is very good and includes dance clubs, drama clubs and a range of musical activities. Pupils have performed in school productions including Zigger Zagger and Laying Out the King. The dance production In My Life was based on the music of the Beatles. Pupils are also involved in a number of charitable enterprises. There have been artists-in-residence and pupils have performed at a local primary school. Visits to professional productions have included Saturday Night Fever, the English National Ballet and Rent.
101. **Social Studies** embraces the three subjects of sociology, psychology and economics. These are managed by a co-ordinator but each enjoys considerable autonomy. There are courses at A-level for all three subjects with GCSE courses for sociology and economics.
102. Sociology is a popular option at Key Stage 4. The 1999 results were above average, although attainment by girls is significantly higher than that of boys. Pupils' current attainment is at the level expected at this stage. Key Stage 4 pupils are making sound progress. In a lesson on 'Socially Constructed Statistics' pupils made good progress, consolidating previous knowledge and developing

the critical skills necessary to inform decision making. They showed a good understanding of terms and were able to apply these in appropriate contexts. The numbers of A-level students have increased over recent years. A-level students make good progress. They secure the skills necessary for individual study and are able to express their views clearly and accurately. The courses are taught by specialists and are well resourced. The teaching observed was good. Since the last inspection the lack of independent learning has been addressed. Both examinations include a substantial coursework element and a 'Study Skills' course has usefully been introduced in Year 12. The subject makes a considerable contribution to the moral, social and cultural development of the pupils involved

103. Psychology is a successful subject at A-level. The 1999 results were very good with a large proportion of high grades. In the lessons seen the students showed secure knowledge of facts and theories and, for example, learnt more about types of therapies and their applications. The students have positive and enthusiastic attitudes to the subject. They listen and co-operate well although need encouraging to raise issues themselves. The teaching gave good support through open-ended questions to improve students' skills in evaluation and critical analysis. The teachers have good subject knowledge and high expectations. Planning is good with a useful mix of activity and teaching provides a good focus on skills required for particular grades, with helpful feedback and assessment.
104. Economics is very well taught and is attracting good numbers of pupils in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Results at both GCSE and A-level in the last two years have been good. The standards seen in lessons in Year 11 and Year 12 were good. GCSE pupils showed a secure knowledge of basic economic principles and made very good progress in learning about fiscal policy. This resulted from very well planned teaching with high expectations, good pace and a very sharp focus on skills as well as understanding. In an A-level lesson, the activity was well designed and question-answer was used skilfully to draw out students' understanding of economic theory. The teaching of economics contributes well to students' oracy skills by expecting students to make presentations and respond to questions.
105. **Media studies** is another A-level in which students show great interest and make good progress. In a very good Year 13 lesson on the textual analysis of advertising, the students collaborated very well in sharing and evaluating ideas. They showed a sound understanding of audience and sound skills of critical analysis. The very good teaching had a clear focus in preparation for work on desk top publishing, it used good questioning, valued students' contributions and maintained a challenging pace. The teachers seen displayed knowledge and enthusiasm which was reflected in the positive response of the students.
106. **Business Studies** has been a popular Key Stage 4 option with both boys and girls. The GCSE results were good in 1999 and an improvement on the previous year. In a lesson seen, the pupils were keen making good progress with a coursework task. The class contained a wide range of ability but all were

purposefully working on cashflow work with spreadsheets. Most had been taught sufficient computer skills to set up a spreadsheet and apply formulae. The activity was well organised and suitably structured so that higher attainers could extend the application of their skills. The good lesson involved effective routines and constructive help from the teacher.

## **GNVQ and BTEC**

107. The standards achieved by most GNVQ students meet the requirements for vocational units, the grading criteria and the relevant key skills standards. Although small numbers of students are involved, in 1999 a high proportion of the grades were at merit and distinction levels. Overall, students reported widespread satisfaction with their courses. There was enthusiastic support for the GNVQ work placements in Year 12, and the two days per week throughout the BTEC two year course, providing valuable material for their assignments, and giving them first hand experience of the world of work. Students' attitudes to learning are positive, demonstrating an ability to work independently. Although recruitment continues to be a concern, the students are well suited to their chosen courses. They are well motivated and have an accurate view of what is needed to improve their levels of attainment.
108. Students benefit from the high level of trust accorded to them by members of staff. One assignment review in a Year 12 Leisure and Tourism class was conducted as a board meeting in a commercial company and this illustrated the mature relationships. In another lesson, Childhood Studies students were making final preparations for a visit by a local authority childcare officer. They used internet research on the Childrens' Act to frame perceptive and carefully targeted questions to ask their visitor.
109. Balance is achieved by effective key skills support for all GNVQ students in communication, application of number and information technology. This is largely provided by course tutors with some support from specialist departments and is well integrated into relevant vocational assignments. Information technology skills are being put to effective use in compiling portfolios of evidence to the required standard. Attainments in the three key skills are of a good standard. In one lesson Year 12 and 13 Art and Design and Business Studies, students were confidently applying previously acquired skills in graph plotting to their work experience assignments. A similar approach is used on the BTEC Childhood Studies course with students effectively compiling log books to ensure sufficient coverage of the common skills for each assignment.
110. The quality of teaching overall is good, with high levels of technical subject knowledge related appropriately to the various vocational contexts. The response, attainment and attendance of students has improved since the teaching of key skills has been co-ordinated by staff within the vocational programmes. Course assessment is good. Although there is little contribution to students' spiritual or moral development, their social and cultural development is enhanced by regular work experience placements. For example successful work experience for Childhood Studies was seen in a local nursery class, other students make

occasional business trips to Brussels and Dublin and some students participate in the Community Sports Leaders' Award and demonstrate very good standards.

111. Overall, the provision is effective in meeting the needs of the GNVQ and BTEC students. Well-planned assignments offer good preparation for the world of work and for further and higher education and training. Leadership and management of the two programmes are good. Course tutors all understand the purposes and quality assurance mechanisms necessary, and are committed. Moderation and verification are successfully managed. Areas to be addressed relate to the enhancement of the spiritual and moral development of the students; information technology provision; and the marketing and the co-ordination of GNVQ and BTEC programmes.

## PART C: INSPECTION DATA

### SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

112. The inspection team consisted of 16 inspectors including the lay inspector. 60 inspector-days were spent in the school. During the inspection over 240 lessons were observed totalling over 190 hours. Almost all of the 124 teachers were seen teaching at least once and some were seen several times. Observations were made of a range of registration and tutor time, assemblies and extra-curricular activities. Planned discussions were held with groups of pupils from each of the eight year groups and informal discussions at other times. Around 30 planned discussions were held with staff having a range of management responsibilities. Discussions were held involving five representative members of the governing body. The analysis of the 530 responses to the parents' questionnaire was incorporated into the inspection evidence together with views expressed at the parents' meeting which was attended by 26 parents. Documentation provided by the school was analysed both before and during the inspection. The work from a representative sample of pupils from each year was available and was scrutinised throughout the week of the inspection. The behaviour of pupils around the building was observed before, during and after school.

### DATA AND INDICATORS

#### 113. 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 pupils eligible for free school meals
Y7 - Y11	1,566	10	109	88
Sixth	244	-	-	-

#### Qualified teachers

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent)	103.7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.46

#### Education support staff

Total number of education support staff	15
Total aggregate hours worked each week	472.2

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes: 79.2%

Average teaching group size:	KS3	24
	KS4	22

## Financial data for 1998/99

	£
Total Income	4,528,295
Total Expenditure	4,543,760
Expenditure per pupil	2,565
Balance brought forward from previous year	103,039
Balance carried forward to next year	87,574

## Parental survey

Number of questionnaires returned: 530

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	10	64	15	9	1
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	24	62	8	5	0
The school handles complaints from parents well	13	52	26	7	2
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	25	61	10	4	0
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	26	57	11	5	1
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	36	57	4	2	0
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	32	56	8	4	0
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	24	59	7	9	2
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	25	58	12	4	1

The school achieves high standards of good behaviour

29	61	7	2	1
28	53	12	5	2

My child(ren) like(s) school