

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Roundwood Park School**

Harpenden

LEA area : Hertfordshire

Unique Reference Number : 117520

Headteacher : Mr Andy Cunningham

Reporting inspector : Mr John Beardsmore  
16429

Dates of inspection : 15-19 November 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 708148

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school :	Comprehensive
Type of control :	Community
Age range of pupils :	11 to 18
Gender of pupils :	Mixed
School address :	Roundwood Park Harpenden Herts AL5 3AE
Telephone number :	01582 765344
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Appropriate authority :	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors :	Mr A Jackson-Robbins
Date of previous inspection :	6 March1995

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mr John Beardsmore, Rgl		Leadership and management Efficiency
Ms Diane Jenkin, Lay Inspector		Attitudes, behaviour, personal development Attendance Partnership with parents and the community Staffing, accommodation and learning resources
Ms Betty Barratt	History	Attainment and progress Teaching
Mr Bryan Newton	English Equality of opportunity	Curriculum and assessment
Ms Pamela Draycott	Religious education	Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development Support, guidance and pupils' welfare
Ms Jennifer Hall	Science	
Ms Valerie Mason	Mathematics	
Mr Peter Evans	Design technology	
	Information and communications technology	
Mr Michael Pennington	Modern foreign languages	
Mr Michael Merchant	Geography	
Mr James Bowden	Physical education	
Mr Brian Emery	Special educational needs	
Mrs Thelma McIntosh	Music	
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## MAIN FINDINGS

### What the school does well

The school has many strengths. These include:

- Pupils' levels of attainment are very high throughout the age range.
- Pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress throughout the school.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. Relationships between pupils and teachers are friendly and highly productive.
- The quality of teaching is consistently good throughout the school.
- Teachers are thoughtful about their practice.
- The school provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities of good quality.
- The headteacher provides excellent and highly effective leadership.
- Leadership and management are strong at every level.
- The school has a very successful partnership with parents and the community.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.
- The school provides good value for money.

### Where the school has weaknesses

The school has no significant weaknesses, but in the context of its many strengths, the following points for growth and development should be considered by the governing body:

- I. the more rigorous and systematic use of assessment systems and data to set targets and to track pupils' progress through the school.
- II. enhancing opportunities for pupils' personal development.
- III. improving the provision for pupils' spiritual and cultural – especially multi-cultural – development.
- IV. providing sufficient time for religious education at Key Stage 4.
- V. strengthening aspects of monitoring in some curriculum areas.
- VI. moving towards complying with the legal requirement for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

**Roundwood Park is a very successful school with many strengths and no significant weaknesses. The governing body's action plan will set out how it intends to address the areas for development outlined above.**

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

The school has made good progress in addressing most, but not all, of the key issues of the last inspection. No progress has been made in providing a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. The time allocated to religious education has been increased at Key Stage 3 but remains insufficient at Key Stage 4. The governors' annual report to parents does not include all the information required.

Overall, however, the school has made good progress since the last inspection. Academic standards have been maintained at a high level. Examination results have improved, especially over the past year. The quality of teaching has improved: the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching has fallen significantly and the proportion of teaching which is good, very good and excellent is now high. Leadership and management are now much stronger.

The school has recently introduced a number of measures to strengthen its effectiveness even further and is now in a very strong position to secure further improvement.

## Standards in subjects

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

Performance in:	Compared with all schools	Compared with similar schools <i>i.e schools with a similar percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals</i>	<b>Key</b> <i>A* Very high</i> <i>A Well above average</i> <i>B Above average</i> <i>C Average</i> <i>D Below average</i> <i>E Well below average</i>
Key Stage 3 tests	A*	A	
GCSE examinations	A*	B	
A/AS - levels	A	n/a	

Pupils make good progress throughout the school. Their attainment on entry to the school in Year 7 is above the national average but by the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 it is well above average. First hand inspection evidence of the work of pupils nearing the end of Key Stage 3 in Year 9 shows attainment to be well above average in all three subjects. Attainment in most other subjects is also well above average. The 1999 GCSE results in English, mathematics and science were very high in comparison with the average for all maintained schools and well above the national averages for similar schools. The results in most other subjects in 1999 were well above the national averages and at least matched the average in all. First hand inspection evidence of the work of pupils in Year 11 shows attainment to be well above average in most subjects and to be very high in design technology, information and communication technology and history. Inspection evidence shows that pupils in Year 13 are reaching standards which are above and in many cases, well above average.

## Quality of teaching

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 7-9	Good	English, mathematics, history, music	
Years 10-11	Good	English, mathematics, design technology, history, music	
Sixth form	Good	Mathematics, geography, religious education	
English	Very good		
Mathematics	Very good		

The quality of teaching is good. In the lessons observed during the inspection, it was at least satisfactory in 98 and in over 76 it was good or better. Thirty-one per cent of the teaching seen was very good and seven per cent was excellent. Teaching was unsatisfactory in only three of the 192 lessons observed. There is a very high proportion of good teaching in all subjects amounting to well over 70 in the great majority. Teachers' subject expertise is very good and is used effectively in promoting the achievement of high standards. Progress is also well supported in all subjects by a good range of teaching methods, the good management of pupils, good classroom organisation and the effective use of both time and learning resources. The procedures within subjects for the assessment of pupils' progress are good. High priority is given to the regular setting of homework as an integral part of learning. Tasks are well chosen to enable pupils to extend their learning and to develop their personal study skills.

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

### Other aspects of the school

Aspect	Comment
Behaviour	Very good both in classes and around the school. Pupils are mature and courteous. There are very few fixed term exclusions which are used judiciously. The rate of exclusion is below average.
Attendance	Very good. Punctuality at school and in lessons is also very good.
Ethos*	Strongly promotes the achievement of high standards, both academic and personal. Relationships are very good and the pupils are motivated to do their best.
Leadership and management	The headteacher provides excellent leadership, working in close partnership with the highly effective governing body. The leadership of other staff, including those in senior and middle management, is good. However, aspects of monitoring in some curriculum areas are not yet systematic enough.
Curriculum	The curriculum is broad, well balanced and relevant. In the sixth form choice is enhanced by the GNVQ course. There is a good programme of personal and social education, but it allows too little time for religious education at Key Stage 4. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities. Although the assessment of pupils' work within subject departments is good, there is inconsistency of practice between departments.
Pupils with special educational needs	Very good provision is made for pupils with special educational needs, who make good progress throughout the school.
Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The provision is good overall. There is a very strong moral code and a good range of opportunities for social and cultural development, despite somewhat limited opportunities for the broadening of multi-cultural understanding. Provision for spiritual development, whilst satisfactory, is given insufficient emphasis.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	There is a good match of both teaching and support staff to the needs of the curriculum. The level of learning resources is good and accommodation is satisfactory.
Value for money	Expenditure per pupil is average and financial controls are tight. Given the quality of teaching provided, the good progress made by the pupils and the very high standards achieved, the school gives good value for money.

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



## The parents' views of the school

What most parents like about the School	What some parents are not happy about
VII. The school enables its pupils to achieve a good standard of work VIII. It is easy for parents to approach the school with questions or problems IX. Pupils enjoy coming to school X. Standards of behaviour are high	XI. The amount, quality and consistency of  XII. A few parents would like to be better

The findings of the inspection support the positive views expressed by parents. With regard to the concerns expressed by parents it was found that:

XIII. There are good procedures which ensure that homework of good quality is set consistently;

XIV. Parents are regularly informed about their children's progress at annual consultation meetings and through the issue of written Records of Achievement which are issued annually. In addition summaries of pupils' progress are provided at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4.

## KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

There are no key issues for the school to address, but in the context of its many strengths, the following points for improvement should be considered as the basis for the governors' action plan:

**XV. Make more rigorous and systematic use of assessment and performance data to set targets and to track pupils' progress through the school by:**

establishing common and consistent procedures for assessment across all subjects to provide a sound basis for target-setting and monitoring pupils' progress across the curriculum (paragraphs 12, 53);

extending the role of form tutors and heads of year to include responsibility for monitoring pupils' academic progress (paragraph 74);

analysing all performance data relating to pupils entering the school in Year 7 to establish early benchmarks for the monitoring of progress throughout Key Stage 3 and to set targets for attainment across the curriculum at the end of Key Stage 3 (paragraph 12).

**XVI. Strengthen aspects of monitoring in some curriculum areas by:**

ensuring through the line management system that good practice in monitoring and evaluation is shared, so that they are equally rigorous across subject areas (paragraphs 76, 77).

**XVII. Enhance the opportunities for pupils' personal development by:**

ensuring that pupils have regular opportunities to take initiative both within their learning and more widely within the school (paragraphs 35, 39, 44);

making better use of assemblies and tutor time to promote pupils' development, for example, through their more active involvement (paragraph 56).

**XVIII. Increase the time allocation for core religious education at Key Stage 4.**  
(paragraphs 45, 242)

**XIX. Improve the provision for spiritual and cultural development by:**

increasing the opportunities for pupils to gain knowledge and insight into values and religious beliefs in assemblies and across the curriculum (paragraph 55);

creating opportunities for pupils to reflect upon the significance of their learning experiences in ways which develop their self-knowledge and spiritual awareness (paragraph 56);

increasing opportunities for a wider range of multi-cultural understanding (paragraph 59).

**XX. Move towards ensuring that the legal requirement for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils is met by:**

reviewing current practice (paragraph 80);

developing the use of form tutor time to provide opportunities for reflection (paragraph 56);

providing greater opportunities for pupils to be involved both in the planning and delivery of acts of worship and reflection in both assemblies and form tutor time (paragraph 56).

## INTRODUCTION

### Characteristics of the school

1 Roundwood Park School is a mixed, 11-18, county comprehensive school. Its total roll of 1019 pupils, broadly average in size, includes 188 in the sixth form. Boys outnumber girls by 569 to 450. It is situated in a suburban location on the northern outskirts of Harpenden, adjacent to a primary school. It draws its pupils, however, from the whole of Harpenden and from surrounding villages. It is popular and over-subscribed.

2 The attainment of the pupils on entry in Year 7 is above average, as demonstrated by their previous National Curriculum test scores and their scores in cognitive ability tests which they take in Year 7. The socio-economic circumstances of the pupils are above average. For example, the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals, at 2.5 per cent, is very low by comparison with the national average of 17.5 per cent. The school population is predominantly white; there are very few pupils from ethnic minorities. The proportion of pupils with identified special educational needs, at 16 per cent, is close to the national average of 15.4 per cent.

3 The school aims to provide an ordered but stimulating and challenging environment, in which pupils can achieve their potential in a variety of ways. It prides itself on its high academic standards, its pastoral care for pupils and the quality of its relationships with parents and the local community. In recent years the school has laid considerable emphasis on further raising standards through improving the quality of teaching. It has set realistic targets for the further improvement of examination results.

## Key Indicators

### Attainment at Key Stage 3<sup>1</sup>

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	81	80	161

National Curriculum Test Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	52	67	57
	Girls	70	74	64
	Total	122	141	121
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	88(94)	87(89)	75(88)
	National	63(65)	62(60)	55(56)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	72(73)	71(77)	50(66)
	National	28(35)	38(36)	23(27)

Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	55	68	61
	Girls	75	75	66
	Total	130	143	127
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	88(93)	86(93)	79(89)
	National	64(62)	64(64)	60(62)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	66(53)	67(76)	50(67)
	National	31(31)	37(37)	28(31)

<sup>1</sup>

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

## Attainment at Key Stage 4<sup>2</sup>

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	95	69	164

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	70	94	95
	Girls	66	69	69
	Total	136	163	164
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	82 (69)	100(99)	99(100)
	National	47.8 (44.6)	88.4 (89.8)	93.9 (95.2)

Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and percentage of *such pupils* who achieved all those they studied:

	Number	% Success rate
School	0	n/a
National		n/a

## Attainment in the Sixth Form<sup>3</sup>

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

Year	Male	Female	Total
1999	56	36	92

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	24.8	22.8	24.0(20.0)	0	8.0	8.0(4.3)
National	n/a	n/a	(17.6)	n/a	n/a	(2.8)

Number entered for the IB Diploma, and percentage of *such students* who achieved this qualification:

	Number	% Success rate
School	0	n/a
National		n/a

Number in final year of approved vocational qualifications and percentage of *such students* who achieved these qualifications:

	Number	% Success Rate
School	6	100
National		n/a

## Attendance

<sup>2</sup> Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

<sup>3</sup> Figures in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

Percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year :		%
Authorised Absence	School	4.7
	National comparative data	7.9
Unauthorised Absence	School	0.1
	National comparative data	1.1

## Exclusions

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

	Number
Fixed period	14
Permanent	1

## Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is :

	%
Very good or better	38
Satisfactory or better	98.4
Less than satisfactory	1.6

## **PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL**

### **EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL**

#### **Attainment and progress**

4 The attainment of pupils on entry to the school in Year 7 is above the national average overall. This is shown in the above average 1999 Key Stage 2 National Curriculum assessment results in English, mathematics and science and the scores of the Cognitive Ability Tests, administered to pupils on entry, which were above the mean. It is also reflected in first hand inspection evidence which shows the attainment of pupils to be well above the national average in English, mathematics and science, and above average in all other subjects apart from geography, art and physical education where standards on entry match the average.

5 Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 overall is well above national averages. The levels reached in the 1999 end of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science were very high in comparison with the national averages for all maintained schools and well above those for schools with a similar intake. Lesson observation and the scrutiny of pupils' work nearest to the end of the key stage, indicates attainment which is well above the average in all three subjects.

6 Attainment in the other subjects is also well above average. The results of the end of Key Stage 3 teachers' assessments in 1999 were above average, and first hand inspection evidence shows pupils to be attaining at well above the national average in all subjects (very high in design technology), apart from physical education where attainment is above average, and modern languages and art where attainment matches the average. The levels reached in religious education are above the expectations of the Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus.

7 At the end of Key Stage 4 attainment at GCSE is very high in comparison with the national average for all maintained schools and is above the average for similar schools. The 1999 GCSE average points score of 48.8 compared with the national average points score of 38.0 for all maintained schools, and with that of 46.2 for schools with a similar intake.

8 The 1999 GCSE results in English, mathematics and science were very high in relation to the national averages for all schools and well above the averages for similar schools. First hand inspection evidence shows attainment to be well above average in all three subjects.

9 The results in other subjects in 1999 were well above the national averages for attainment at grades A\*-C in all subjects apart from German, where the results matched the average. Inspection evidence shows attainment to be well above average in most subjects and very high in design technology, information communication technology and history. Attainment is above average in art and physical education, and matches the average in modern languages.

10 There was no significant difference in the overall attainment of boys and girls at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1998. However in 1999 the average National Curriculum level gained by girls was 0.46 higher than that of boys. There was also a significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls at the end of Key Stage 4 in 1999 when the average points score of girls was six points higher than that of boys. This represented a much greater difference than in 1998 when the average points score of girls was only 0.5 points higher than that of boys. Moreover, girls outperform boys at both key stages in modern foreign languages, to a greater extent than that found nationally.

11 Attainment at GCE Advanced level is well above average. In 1998 the average points score of 20.0 compared with that of 17.6 nationally. The 1999 results were better, resulting in an average points score of 24.0. Inspection evidence, especially of the work of pupils in Year 13, shows attainment to be above course averages in all subjects apart from modern languages where it matches the average.

12 Since the last inspection attainment at the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4 and the sixth form has improved overall. The average National Curriculum level at the end of Key Stage 3 has improved by 0.32 levels (equivalent to more than six months' progress), and at the end of Key Stage 4, the average total GCSE points score per pupil has risen from 45.4 in 1994 to 48.8 in 1999. At GCE Advanced level the average points score has risen from 21.1 to 24.0. The trend, however, has not been one of steady improvement. For instance, the end of Key Stage 3 results in science, while remaining very high, fell in 1999, and the results at both GCSE and GCE Advanced level, while above average through the period, showed no clear trend of improvement until 1999 when they improved significantly.

13 The school is successfully developing a number of measures to raise standards. These include the detailed analysis and use of performance data at the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4 to monitor performance, measure value added and to set targets for attainment at GCSE and GCE Advanced level; and a system of line management for the monitoring of attainment within subject departments. These systems are becoming well established at Key Stage 4 and post-16 but are underdeveloped at Key Stage 3. In particular, insufficient use is made of the data of pupils' attainment at the time of their entry to the school to set targets for attainment at the end of Key Stage 3, and thus to provide the first stage of systematically tracking pupils' progress throughout their time at the school. Realistic targets are set for attainment at GCSE.

14 At all stages pupils' literacy skills develop very well and they reach a high standard of competence. Speaking and listening skills are very well developed through the opportunities offered in most subjects. In geography, history, mathematics, physical education, English and music pupils' spoken language is clear, articulate and well developed and they listen attentively to each other and to the teacher. In music standards are very high and even younger pupils express themselves in sophisticated musical terms. In geography pupils make very effective presentations in class and their group discussions are well developed and co-operative. In mathematics, oral work was noted as a weakness at the last inspection and now pupils demonstrate high standards in speaking and listening. However, in modern foreign languages even higher attaining pupils are reticent and speaking is seen as relatively unimportant.

15 Reading develops well. In English and in religious education pupils read aloud fluently and with expression. In most subjects pupils read and interpret information effectively in researching their work and reading is strongly supported. Pupils use reference books readily and effectively. In modern foreign languages there are too few opportunities for pupils to read aloud.

16 Writing is generally neat and well presented, although there are some pupils who find spelling accurately difficult, especially lower attaining pupils at Key Stage 3. Pupils use writing effectively for a wide range of purposes - notes, annotations, diaries, letters, reports, essays, stories - and they often make good use of word processing to improve presentation. Writing development across the key stages is very good. By the sixth form pupils write extended, well-crafted and fluent essays. In history well structured extended writing develops well from Year 7 and in geography extended writing is a strong feature at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. In science pupils write scientific investigation work very competently from Year 7. In design and technology, pupils' design folders invariably include effective analysis and evaluation of the work completed.

17 Pupils' numeracy skills are well developed and stand them in good stead for work in their other subjects. For example, in design and technology they measure accurately and they can work to a variety of scales when completing their designs. In geography and history, pupils use the mathematics they have been taught to collect and present information from surveys in a variety of charts and graphs, selecting the type of graphical presentation best suited for the purpose. Pupils' investigative work in science is well supported by their mathematical skills, which they use effectively to manipulate, display and analyse numerical data from their experiments.



18 Pupils make good progress in Key Stages 3 and 4 in developing their skills in information and communications technology (ICT). By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils are able to use ICT with increasing levels of autonomy. They are also proficient at using CD ROMs and the Internet to find appropriate information to further their studies.

19 Pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress throughout the school.

20 Progress is well supported in all subjects by the teachers' very good subject expertise, clear and well-targeted teaching, high expectations and the good classroom relationships. In the great majority of cases pupils make progress because they are strongly motivated to succeed. There are also a number of other important factors which support progress across the curriculum but which are particularly evident in certain subjects. For instance, in most lessons, the work is well planned to meet the needs of individual pupils, particularly so in mathematics, science, history and music. The good progress made at Key Stage 3 in mathematics, for instance, is the result of the careful attention teachers give to placing pupils in teaching groups that match their stages of development and provide them with an appropriate level of challenge. Skilful and probing questioning is another major reason in many instances for pupils making good progress. For example, it is used systematically to test and monitor the progress being made in science and physical education; and in history, geography and religious education it is used well to challenge pupils in developing their thinking. Progress is also well supported in most subjects by a vigorous pace of work and good progression in the learning. This is evident, for example, in English where most lessons are characterised by a brisk and challenging pace, and also in mathematics, geography, art and physical education where earlier learning is especially well consolidated and built upon. In art and physical education, for instance, there is very good progression in the development of skills.

21 There are some instances when progress is not as well supported. For example, progress is occasionally slower in English and design and technology because lessons are not planned to challenge pupils sufficiently, and in modern languages when expectations are too low and there is a lack of pace and challenge in the teaching. Curriculum arrangements at Key Stage 3 also serve to impede progress in modern languages as the time allocated for the subject is insufficient for the consolidation of previous learning and practice in speaking skills. In a small minority of lessons in both science and music progress is hindered by insecure classroom control. In geography the progress of higher attaining pupils is sometimes slowed when they are delayed from working at their own pace, for instance, in small groups, by being required to listen to the teacher for too long.

22 Pupils with special educational needs make good progress across the curriculum especially when given specialist support in lessons. Their good progress is facilitated by the commitment and skills of teachers in ensuring that pupils with special educational needs are well supported in their learning. Practice is especially effective in English, mathematics, art, music and physical education. The good progress is reflected in the attainment of pupils with special educational needs at GCSE where in 1999 all entered gained a grade in the A\*-G range. Good progress is also made in the improvement of reading ages, the development of literacy and numeracy skills and in the attainment of targets on individual education plans. Many pupils move down the stages of assessment resulting in their removal from the special educational needs register.

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

23 Pupils' behaviour, attitudes and relationships are very good and this has a very positive effect on the educational standards achieved. The positive picture described in the last inspection report has been sustained and improved still further.

24 Almost all pupils show very positive attitudes and a real commitment to their work. They work diligently and conscientiously, sustaining high levels of concentration. In most lessons pupils are enthusiastic and eager learners who are willing to participate in discussions and are keen to answer questions. The pupils demonstrate very high levels of interest and motivation which is a significant factor in the good progress which they make. On a very few occasions, usually when the lesson is too directed by the teacher or there is too much reliance on text books, pupils' enthusiasm wanes a little. Pupils make good progress in developing their capacity for personal study by engaging in research work and homework projects in their own time. They make good use of the library and use information technology resources, both at home and at school, to complement their learning.

25 Behaviour is invariably very good, both in classrooms and around the school. In lessons pupils are courteous, abide by the classroom rules and follow teachers' instructions. They are polite to visitors and to their teachers. The vast majority are aware of the teachers' high expectations of behaviour and discipline and successfully meet them. Pupils can be trusted to organise themselves and to behave sensibly when allowed to work unsupervised. They move around the building sensibly even in the congested areas. Pupils are helpful, friendly, good humoured and welcoming to visitors. They show respect for the school's and other people's property and take care of the accommodation and resources. A very small minority of boys behave inappropriately at times. The rate of exclusion last year was below the national average. No incidents of bullying or racial taunting were seen during the inspection. Pupils interviewed were aware of some incidents of bullying, past and present, but felt that almost all of them had been dealt with quickly and effectively. Parents also share this view.

26 Relationships are very good throughout the school which creates a very positive learning ethos. Pupils relate well to one another and to the staff. They work well with the teaching and support staff and this ensures that they receive support in their learning and so make maximum progress. Pupils work very productively together in pairs or in groups, they collaborate well and are able to share resources and equipment. They are willing to share ideas and information and are mutually supportive of one another. Pupils show respect for the feelings and views of others and are prepared to find out about beliefs and values different from their own. They listen to each other and accept different opinions in a mature, open and friendly manner.

27 Pupils' personal development is good. When given the opportunity to show initiative in their learning, pupils respond well. Pupils take responsibility for useful tasks around the school and the sixth form pupils give effective support to younger pupils by helping them with their work.

## **Attendance**

28 Attendance is very good and well above the national average, and there is very little unauthorised absence. This has a very positive effect on the progress which the pupils make. The very good attendance reported in the last inspection report has been sustained.

29 Registration is carried out quickly and efficiently and registers are completed correctly and returned to the office. This represents an improvement since the last inspection. Punctuality is very good and pupils arrive at school and to lessons on time. Registers are also called at the beginning of lessons.

30 Absence figures are not reported in the governors' annual report to parents. The requirement to report authorised absence in the governors' report appeared in the key issues of the last report.

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

### Teaching

31 The quality of teaching is good throughout the school. During the inspection, teaching was at least satisfactory in over 98 per cent of lessons observed and in over 76 per cent it was good or better. Thirty-one per cent of the teaching was very good and seven per cent was excellent. Teaching was unsatisfactory in only three of the 192 lessons observed. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection when 15 per cent of the teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory.

32 There is a very high proportion of good or better teaching in all subjects amounting to well over 70 per cent in the great majority. Practice is of exceptionally high quality in English and mathematics where over 90 per cent of the teaching seen was good, and about half was very good and at times excellent. Teaching is also very good in design and technology, history, geography and music. In design and technology, history and music about half the teaching observed was very good and often excellent, and in geography 70 per cent of the teaching was very good. The unsatisfactory teaching occurred in science and modern languages. On the other hand in both these subjects over half the teaching seen was good and often very good.

33 Teachers' subject expertise is very good and skilfully shared with the pupils; it is a major reason for the good progress made by pupils across the curriculum. Teachers are able to draw readily on their wealth of subject knowledge in making often difficult subject matter accessible and interesting, and inspiring their pupils to share their enthusiasm for the subject.

34 Lesson planning is good. In most subjects it is well supported by detailed schemes of work and provides for clear logical steps in learning and a good variety of activities. At best, as in mathematics, planning takes good account of what pupils have already learned and of what is to follow. In a number of cases, however, whilst aspects of planning are good, insufficient attention is given to meeting individual learning needs. For instance, in science, planning does not always cater appropriately for the needs of higher attaining pupils in reaching the higher levels and grades at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4, or for the learning requirements of pupils with special educational needs. There are also several subjects, including design and technology, history and religious education where planning does not consistently provide sufficiently clear learning objectives.

35 The high but realistic expectations teachers have of their pupils is a key factor in promoting their progress. In most subjects, including, for example, English, mathematics, science, history and geography, expectations are almost invariably high and well founded on the good knowledge teachers have of their pupils' levels of attainment. In a number of other subjects expectations vary. In modern languages, for instance, whilst the best teaching is based on the highest expectations and establishes a high level of challenge, in a small minority of lessons expectations are too low especially in terms of the challenge to pupils in the use of the spoken language. Similarly in design and technology and physical education, while expectations are often high, there are occasions when pupils are insufficiently challenged in the development of skills.

36 Lessons are well structured and organised and the great majority are characterised by clear teaching and a good range of interesting and challenging activities. Learning is strongly promoted in most subjects by an effective blend of individual, pair and group work. There is skilled and probing questioning in many subjects, especially in mathematics, history and physical education. There is a good match of work to learning needs, for example, in modern languages. In a number of subjects, however, including modern languages, history, geography and religious education, progress is occasionally hindered because learning is over-directed by the teacher, leaving too little opportunity for pupils to take initiative in their learning.

37 Pupils with special educational needs are enabled to progress well because of the skilled teaching of the special educational needs co-ordinator and other staff in the learning support department, and also because in the great majority of lessons teaching and work is well targeted to meeting their learning needs. Progress is also enhanced by the often effective support in lessons by support teachers and assistants. The special educational needs staff are very knowledgeable and lesson planning is very thorough. Their expectations of pupils are consistently and realistically high and pupils are assisted well in their learning through a good range of teaching methods and strategies which are based on sound special educational needs principles, and make good use of a range of well chosen resources. The management of pupils is very skilled and the assessment of their progress thorough and systematic.

38 The learning of all pupils is very well supported in the great majority of lessons by very good classroom relationships and very high standards of behaviour which are often attributable to the challenge and interest of the work. There are only a few instances, for example, in science, design and technology and music where the management of pupils is less effective and the pace of learning is slowed as consequence.

39 In the great majority of lessons activities are well timed to sustain an appropriate momentum in the learning. In science, for instance, there is skilful and exemplary organisation of the 50 minute lessons with no loss of pace at transition points. Overall resources are used very well especially to stimulate interest and promote subject specific skills. In science, however, the use of well planned resources is thwarted on a number of occasions by faulty equipment or shortages of materials. The use of information technology to support learning is under developed in most subjects. In mathematics, however, its use has been significantly developed since the last inspection, to very good effect.

40 The procedures for the assessment of pupils' progress and attainment are effective overall but practice varies both within and between subjects. Pupils' work is generally marked regularly and mostly thoroughly, and assessment and feedback on progress occur throughout most lessons with especially good practice in this respect in design and technology. The written comments which often accompany the marking of written work vary in their usefulness in indicating clear improvements to be made. This is especially evident in science, modern languages and history. Self evaluation by pupils also varies. Where it occurs, for example, in English and physical education, pupils' participation in self-evaluation is valuable especially in enabling them to be aware of their capabilities and setting targets for improvement. Good use is made in many subjects, notably in mathematics and design and technology, of the results of assessment to adjust teaching to meet the learning needs of pupils. The procedures for the assessment of the progress of pupils with special educational needs are systematic and thorough.

41 Good use is made of homework to complement work in lessons and to assist the development of personal study skills. In the great majority of subjects much importance is attached to homework as an integral part of learning. For example, it is used well in science for consolidation, extension and research. In mathematics the investigative tasks often set help pupils to develop the skills needed for the Key Stage 4 course work.

## **The curriculum and assessment**

42 The school's aim that every pupil will feel, on leaving the school, that he or she has been given every opportunity and support to strive for ever higher standards - academically and personally - is reflected in the good breadth, balance and relevance of the curriculum at Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Although the school has no formal curriculum policy, there is an adequate curriculum statement which sets out the current position with regard to curriculum and pupil grouping arrangements.

43        Governors receive appropriate information about the curriculum and the members of the governing body linked to the subject departments present an annual report to the governing body on the progress of the department.

44        In Key Stage 3 the curriculum is very broad and includes all subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education. The teaching of Religious Education follows the Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus and is effectively taught in the five per cent curriculum time to which it was increased after the last inspection reported that it was insufficient. In addition, all pupils receive one drama lesson a week throughout the key stage and in Year 7 and Year 8, an information and communication technology lesson. In Year 9 ICT is taught specifically through mathematics and design technology as well as less formally through other curriculum subjects. The curriculum is further broadened because all pupils study two modern foreign languages, French and German, throughout the key stage. However, the time allocation for these two subjects - 13.3 per cent of curriculum time - is insufficient to promote enough progress in both languages, especially for pupils with special educational needs, and is not justified by the very small number of pupils who continue to study two languages in Key Stage 4.

45        Health education, citizenship, and careers guidance are effectively taught through the weekly personal and social education tutorial periods in Year 7 and Year 8 and personal and social education lessons in Year 9. However, the programme provides too few opportunities for pupils to reflect upon their learning experiences and to take greater initiatives within their learning environment.

46        At Key Stage 4 the broad range of subjects which pupils study includes a 'constrained' choice of a modern language and a technology and a free choice of an appropriate range of other non-National Curriculum subjects. Personal and social education provides a good programme of lessons on health education, careers, citizenship and economics. However, the time available for religious education within this programme is insufficient to meet the requirements of the Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus.

47        In the sixth form the recent introduction of the intermediate GNVQ business course has enhanced pupils' choices and further development of post-16 courses through consortium arrangements with the other local schools is in prospect. There is developing provision for information and communication technology. The curriculum is further enhanced by the good general studies programme which includes guest speakers and visits. However, there is no specific provision for recreational physical education for all students.

48        Statutory requirements are largely met. Coverage of control and sensing within the information and communication technology curriculum at Key Stage 3 is not yet fully introduced, although the school has in place well thought out plans for this to be remedied during this academic year. Insufficient time is allowed for religious education at Key Stage 4 to enable the Agreed Syllabus to be covered in sufficient depth.

49        Equality of opportunity is very good. All pupils have equal access to the curriculum. The school is sensitive to gender issues and where there is imbalance in the take-up of subjects - such as physics and biology at GCE Advanced level - the issue is addressed. The banding and setting systems based upon the attainment of pupils which the school uses are effective in helping to ensure that the work which pupils are given matches their needs. In mathematics at Key Stage 4, the very good arrangements for the group with the lowest levels of prior attainment provide for each pupil to have an individual weekly programme with specific targets to ensure that the full curriculum is covered.

50        The curriculum provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. All have full access to the curriculum. Pupils are effectively supported in improving their literacy and numeracy skills by withdrawal to the learning support department for limited but intense periods of help. Care is taken to ensure that withdrawal arrangements do not affect pupils' entitlement to access a broad and balanced curriculum. Across the curriculum all subject teachers are made aware of pupils' needs and weaknesses. Most, but not all, teachers use this information well. Learning support assistants play an important role in meeting the curriculum needs of pupils with special educational needs and in helping

teachers and pupils to meet the demands of particular lessons.

51 Planning for continuity and progression is good. Schemes of work are detailed and provide a secure basis for progress both within and across the key stages. At Key Stage 4, however, although all pupils have sufficient access to ICT to ensure that statutory requirements in the subject are met, this is not yet well enough planned. Teachers generally make good use of their day to day assessment to modify their teaching programme as they judge best.

52 Extra-curricular provision is good with many teachers involved at some time in activities and visits. A wide variety of activities includes lunchtime clubs, many musical ensembles and events, foreign visits and exchanges, field trips, theatrical productions and presentations, theatre visits, and sporting activities. Participation by pupils is good with large numbers attending drama clubs and taking part in sport.

53 Careers provision is good. Within departments staff give helpful guidance about options available to pupils. The guidance within personal and social education lessons at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 is well done.

54 The school's policy for assessment allows considerable autonomy to subject departments. Although the arrangements for assessment within departments are good the variety of ways in which departments mark, assess and record pupils' work is an obstacle to sharing information and to establishing a clear picture of the progress of individual pupils across the curriculum. This lack of consistency is a barrier to more effective target-setting to improve pupils' overall progress and performance. The current school development plan identifies more consistent assessment procedures as an issue to be addressed and the recently appointed assessment co-ordinator is working to improve the practice. Within departments the outcomes of assessment are used effectively to inform curriculum planning.

55 The last report identified some weaknesses in both curriculum and assessment. The school has responded well to most of these issues and has made considerable improvement. The school has developed an ICT policy and development plan and information technology is now part of the taught curriculum in Year 7 and Year 8; provision of computers has improved. The provision of design technology is now good and fully meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. The time allocation for religious education at Key Stage 3 has been increased to be in line with recommendations and it fully meets requirements. At Key Stage 4, however, the time allocated remains insufficient to meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus. The school's response to the issue concerning incomplete assessment, recording and reporting procedures has been adequate but more needs to be done to bring consistency to the system.

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

56 The school makes good provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its pupils. It succeeds in providing a happy and purposeful environment where pupils' personal development is valued. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory, for moral development very good, and for social and cultural development good. Comments in the previous inspection report have been addressed but unsatisfactory progress has been made with regard to co-ordinating and monitoring effectively the school's provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

57 Opportunities for spiritual development are well supported in the context of the work of subjects such as history, geography and religious education. Opportunities are taken to reflect on issues relating to the meaning of life and death, beliefs and values and the beauty of the natural world. However, the role of the whole curriculum in providing opportunities for spiritual development is not fully considered and this leads to inconsistencies and missed opportunities. Pupils do have some opportunities to attend acts of collective worship based on an assembly programme which focuses on issues of spiritual and moral concern. Most of this programme is of a broadly Christian character but it also includes consideration of other faiths and life stances. An opportunity is given in many, but not all, of these gatherings for pupils to reflect on or join in a prayer. Little use is made of form tutor time to reflect on spiritual and moral issues, and little opportunity is offered to pupils for a more active involvement in assemblies and form tutor periods.

58 Pupils' moral development is very well supported through the high standards of moral values which permeate the life and work of the school. Pupils know what is right and wrong and what is expected of them within the school. They are encouraged to consider reasons for and consequences of actions. The school effectively fosters values such as honesty, fairness, tolerance and respect for self and others. Religious education and the personal and social education programme throughout the school provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils to address issues of moral and ethical concern. Other subjects also provide opportunities through aspects of their curriculum content, such as in history when the value of human life and the morality of war are explored within the context of studies based around the First World War.

59 Provision for the social development of pupils is good and opportunities are given for them to relate positively to their peers, adults in the school, and the wider community. Relationships are very good and are based on mutual respect. Pupils are confident, polite and friendly. They work co-operatively as evidenced by the team spirit in many physical education lessons and sports teams, and collaborative group work seen in other lessons. For example, in religious education pupils often take part in small group discussions where they share personal beliefs confidently and where they deepen their personal understanding of the issues raised. In mathematics they collaborate in investigative tasks discussing possible solutions. The personal and social education and general studies programmes provide some useful opportunities to address issues of citizenship and wider social concern. Pupils act as form representatives and the school council encourages participation in the life of the school. The prefect system and a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including raising money for charity and the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme provide many opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for themselves and others. An annual Christmas party for senior citizens is organised and held by the sixth form.

60 The provision made for pupils to appreciate their own culture is good but the range of opportunities for them to explore the richness and diversity of other cultures is less well developed. Participation in school productions, trips to the opera and theatre, visiting story-tellers, regular concerts and a wide range of other extra-curricular activities all make positive contributions to pupils' cultural development. In some subjects there are good opportunities to explore a range of cultures. For example, in music a wide range of musical styles, including African, Indian, Chinese and Latin American are included and a number of dance and music groups visit the school. In religious education the link between religious beliefs and cultural practices is explored through, for example, studying different religious festivals. In art a variety of artistic styles is used as a focus for work. In geography opportunities are taken to help pupils gain insights into the cultural background of less developed countries. In most other subjects however, whilst opportunities occur they are not strongly emphasised. Displays around the school are very mono-cultural.

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

61 There are good arrangements for pupils' support, guidance and welfare. Teachers, year heads and the director of pastoral care work hard to promote the progress and well-being of pupils but systems for co-ordinating the academic and personal aspects of pupils' progress are underdeveloped. Form tutors and year heads are insufficiently involved in this process, because of the way their role is defined.

62 Procedures for monitoring pupils' academic progress are in place at faculty and departmental level but are still being developed at a whole-school level. At faculty and departmental level, subject have devised good systems for monitoring academic progress. These include regular marking and testing, some self-assessment by pupils, annual and interim reports and target setting. Targets in the records of achievement are sometimes very general. Systems used by the special educational needs department and in the sixth form are detailed and thorough. The information gained is usually well used by subject staff to keep track of pupils' learning and to identify any who need extra support. For example, in music, there is a clear recording system which evaluates and tracks progress using criteria identified within tasks and communicated to pupils. In geography the individual mark books of teachers are comprehensive and up to date and the records are well used in setting targets for pupils and in monitoring attainment. The different systems used in different departments and faculty areas make it difficult to ensure consistency across the school.

63 Arrangements for monitoring and supporting pupils' personal development are good. Pupils are very well known by their teachers, year heads and senior staff. There are satisfactory procedures for dealing with any concerns pupils or their teachers may have. Pupils feel secure and well cared for.

64 There are good procedures for promoting and monitoring high standards of behaviour. Pupils know what is expected of them and they behave very well in lessons and around the school. The high expectations of senior staff and teachers reinforce this behaviour. Systems focus on recognising and rewarding good behaviour with appropriate procedures for dealing with any unacceptable behaviour. The school takes incidents of such behaviour seriously, has effective measures for dealing with them, and pupils express confidence that these work.

65 The programme of personal and social education is well planned. It satisfactorily supports pupils in important areas such as relationships, careers, health and sex education, at times which are appropriate for their age. Form tutors deliver this programme in Years 7 and 8 and in the sixth form. It is taught by a personal and social education team in Years 9 to 11. External agencies, such as the Hertfordshire Careers Service, and visiting speakers are used well when needed. Satisfactory support and advice is offered on careers, options for GCSE, post-16, further education and employment.

66 Records of attendance are kept appropriately. There are very good systems for monitoring and checking on attendance and absence. Procedures for child protection comply with legislation. Staff know who is designated as child protection officer and what they themselves are required to do if a child protection issue arises. There is information about this in the staff handbook and periodic reminders are issued. Confidential records are kept appropriately. First aid and medical support, liaison with external agencies and arrangements for visits also ensure pupils' health and safety. The health and safety issues identified in the previous report were dealt with quickly and effectively.

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

67 The school has forged a very successful partnership with parents and the community which makes a very good contribution to pupils' learning and personal development. The very good practice described in the previous inspection report has been sustained.



68 Parents have a very strong interest in the work of the school and are involved in a number of ways. The thriving parent teacher association organises social and fund raising events and contributes in excess of £20,000 a year to provide resources to support pupils' learning. Parents give their time to help in the library and working with pupils with special educational needs. They support sporting activities and organise working parties to paint or repair the school accommodation. A team of parents run the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and parents are involved in Young Enterprise and act as facilitators on 'industry days'. Parents monitor their child's work at home by signing the homework diaries and find this very useful, although there is some concern that the diaries are not used consistently by all form tutors. Many parents have provided a computer for their child's use at home, often with access to the Internet. Parents' support for their children is also demonstrated by the high attendance at consultation and information evenings. Parents are very supportive of the school and find the staff very approachable. Parents' interest and involvement make a strong contribution to pupils' progress.

69 Parents are kept very well informed about general matters through the 'Roundwood Round-up' and are invited to information evenings when their child is starting at the school, choosing options in Year 9 and making decisions about post-16 and further and higher education. The prospectus is attractive and informative and gives all the statutory information. The governors' annual report to parents is interesting and readable but fails to give the necessary statutory information on examination results and absence. In the annual record of achievement produced for each pupil, the quality of the information given on achievement in subjects in the annual reports on progress is variable. There is some good information about what pupils know, understand and can do, but sometimes the comments are vague and do not relate to the National Curriculum and the targets set are not precise enough to be useful. The reports give parents information on pupils' personal development and attendance. Parents find the consultation meetings with staff useful and expressed the view that the organisation of these had improved recently.

70 The links the school has established with business and industry are excellent and wide-ranging. Pupils from Year 8 onwards have the opportunity to participate in an industrial or business led project. These projects are organised in association with a number of major companies, both local and national, and often result in additional support or sponsorship and direct involvement in the curriculum. This outstanding provision enables pupils to acquire and develop a wide variety of skills relevant to the work place and makes an excellent contribution to their personal development.

71 Links with clubs and societies in Harpenden have been made by the physical education and art departments and the school encourages pupils to enter local and national competitions, often with great success. A Youth Action Group has been established enabling a committee of pupils to work with the local youth worker to help address issues of concern within the school and the local community. Visitors from the community are invited into the school to speak to pupils and a wide variety of educational visits and residential trips is offered. There are links with schools in Holland, Spain and Finland through a European Union programme and participation in the millennium geography project 'On the Line' involves working with a school in Ghana. There is good liaison with other local secondary and primary schools. Pupils provide exceptionally strong support for many charities, local, national and world-wide, for example, the Turkey earthquake and the Kosovo appeals. These successful links also make a significant contribution to pupils' personal development.

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

### **Leadership and management**

72 The last inspection reported that, whilst the school was well led by the headteacher and had a positive ethos and a strong sense of purpose, there were weaknesses in its management structure and imbalances in workload, and there was a need for training for middle managers. Significant changes have been made since then, especially in the past two years, so that leadership and management at all levels are now good. The effects of this are clearly evident in improvements in the pupils' levels of

attainment and in the quality of teaching.

73 The headteacher's leadership is excellent and highly effective and, since his appointment just over two years ago, he has provided a very clear educational direction to the work of the school. He demonstrates a clear-sighted vision of how the school should develop, and a thoughtful and objective understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. He is supportive of staff who are experiencing difficulties, he takes care to consult and involve staff and parents wherever possible, yet is not afraid to take a firm line when this is required in the best interests of the pupils. Notable outcomes of the headteacher's leadership include the increased effectiveness of management at all levels and a growing willingness of teachers to reflect on, and modify, their practice. These in turn have led to the improvements in standards of attainment and the quality of teaching noted above.

74 The headteacher consults and works closely with the other members of the senior management team, who share in policy development and in the monitoring and support of those at middle management level, including heads of curriculum areas and heads of years. The senior management team has been restructured since the last inspection, following the departure of three of its then members, and now includes the school manager, whose role includes those of bursar and business manager as well as line management of the support staff. The creation of this new post and its inclusion in the senior management team have strengthened the team and have helped to rationalise its responsibilities and integrate curriculum and financial planning. Senior staff monitor and support the work of heads of curriculum areas through a line management system. This works well and, at best, highly effectively, for example, in supporting the new head of English in greatly improving the leadership and management of the English department which in turn has contributed significantly to its rising standards.

75 There have been significant improvements since the last inspection in the quality of the leadership provided by middle management, so that it is now good. During the past year, in partnership with the local education authority, the school has organised a substantial, in-house management programme for heads of curriculum areas, to develop their understanding of their management role and to enable them to contribute to the consideration of whole-school issues. Leadership of subjects is never less than satisfactory, is good in most cases, and is very good in English, design technology, art and geography. In science, whilst leadership and management are satisfactory overall, there are shortcomings, especially in the areas of monitoring and evaluating the work of colleagues. Heads of year provide good leadership to their teams of tutors and parents expressed their appreciation of the support and guidance which they give to pupils. Their role in monitoring the pupils' academic progress - and hence, contributing to their overall development - is limited, however, because this is currently not part of their brief.

76 Leadership of the learning support department by the newly appointed special educational needs co-ordinator is very good. All statutory requirements are met and the school fully complies with the Code of Practice for pupils with special educational needs.

77 At school level there are very effective systems for monitoring the quality of teaching, based on the line management system. The practice of heads of departments and curriculum areas, supported by their line manager, observing lessons, is now much more widespread than at the time of the last inspection. This observation is based on agreed criteria and feedback is available to the teachers concerned. Line managers hold regular meetings with heads of curriculum areas at which all aspects of their work are discussed, with particular emphasis on the support and monitoring of staff. Overall, the monitoring of teaching and curriculum development is good, though it is more variable at subject level, where it is still sometimes less rigorous. The deputy head has recently conducted a review of monitoring across curriculum areas, with the aim of identifying and sharing good practice.

78 Development planning, monitoring and evaluation are again very good at whole school level though more variable at subject level. The school development plan is well structured and based upon the school's key priorities, starting with raising standards of pupils' attainment. It therefore provides a useful tool for the further development of the school. The plans for curriculum areas are prepared by those responsible for them and have to relate to the priorities of the school development plan, in which they are incorporated. This ensures that priorities are consistent across the school. Planning and monitoring are satisfactory, and sometimes good, in subject areas, though not equally effective in every subject. In some cases, targets are not always sufficiently precise and monitoring is not systematic enough. The school's review and planning process has been improved since the last inspection and is now very effective. The implementation of the plan, including the parts relating to subject areas, is monitored through the line management system.

79 The governing body is well structured and very effective. Its members are highly committed to the school and take care to ensure that they know it well. For example, all are linked with one or more of the school's areas of activity, including the subjects of the curriculum, and are expected to inform themselves about its work and to present a report annually to the full governing body. This concept of linking includes visits to the school by the governor concerned and, unusually, even observation of lessons. Their committee structure ensures that they can exercise their various responsibilities efficiently. This includes a strategic planning group of senior governors which plans and co-ordinates the work of the governing body and its committees. Governors are fully involved in the review and planning process. For example, following the headteacher's appointment, they took part in a day's workshop with the senior management team in reviewing and reformulating the school's priorities. They are consulted about, and approve, the development plan. They work closely with the headteacher and each committee is serviced by the member of the school management team whose responsibilities coincide with theirs.

80 The school's aims are clearly set out in a vision statement in the school prospectus. These aims are that the school should be a happy and purposeful community where staff and pupils work positively together in an atmosphere of commitment, harmony and high standards; there should be equality of treatment for all, a striving for excellence, and a commitment by staff constantly to seek to improve the quality of the education which they provide. There is considerable evidence that the school is successful in pursuing these aims. The ethos of the school is very good, as are relationships between staff and pupils and amongst pupils themselves. The learning environment is very productive and there is a commitment to high standards. There is full equality of opportunity.

81 The school has made good progress since the last inspection. Its response to the key issues in the report was satisfactory, though there are three areas in which it still fails to meet statutory requirements. It has made little attempt to move towards meeting the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils and the time allocated for religious education at Key Stage 4 is still inadequate. In addition the governors' annual report to parents does not include for all parents the full range of information required, although this is available for those who request it. In other important ways the school has made significant progress, especially in the past two years, for example, in raising standards and improving the quality of management and of teaching. Because of the strength of its leadership and management and the effectiveness of its systems, it is now in a very strong position to secure further improvement.

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

82 There is a good match between the number, qualifications and experience of teaching staff. All but a few lessons are taught by subject specialists who are often graduates in their subject. This enables the curriculum to be taught effectively and has a positive effect on the quality of education provided. The high number of part-time staff does not have a detrimental effect on the quality of the teaching but does result in a number of split classes for English in the lower school. The teaching staff are well supported by a sufficient number of experienced support staff. The support given by assistants in the classroom makes a significant contribution to pupils' learning and technicians' support with the organisation of resources ensures the best use is made of teaching time. However, although there has been an increase in time for science technicians, this is still insufficient to ensure pupils are not kept waiting for equipment and materials. The effective team of administrative staff are developing their role in order to remove further administrative tasks from teachers.

83 There are good procedures for induction and this is an improvement since the last inspection. The school has good arrangements for teacher appraisal and these have been effective in identifying areas for individual staff development. The formal appraisal system is presently in abeyance following action by teacher unions and while the school awaits new guidance from central government. However, a significant amount of classroom observation takes place through the line management system, with structured feedback to the teachers concerned. In practice this is at least as systematic and rigorous as the formal appraisal system. Arrangements for professional development are good and in line with the requirements of the Investors in People scheme. Whole-school in-service training and departmental courses follow the priorities in the school development plan and there is some flexibility for individual needs. The arrangements are monitored to ensure a fair distribution of resources between departments and individuals. The effectiveness of courses, together with their impact in the classroom, is properly evaluated. The programme of training for support staff has been enhanced by the school's participation in the Investors in People programme.

84 The accommodation is satisfactory and adequate for the needs of the curriculum. A number of major building projects have taken place since the last inspection which have gone a long way towards improving the lack of quality accommodation identified in the last inspection report. Some specialist facilities have been provided and almost all subjects are now taught in suites of rooms, which is also an improvement. However, some areas are shabby and the science facilities do not provide a stimulating environment.

85 Most subjects areas have sufficient learning resources, of good quality, to teach the curriculum. This makes a positive contribution to the quality of education provided. The shortfalls in music and art, identified by the last inspection, have now been rectified. The ratio of computers to pupils is very good. Pupils benefit from the very good library which contains a wide variety of reference material, including access to the Internet. The library promotes a very good climate for learning and is very well organised and run by a chartered librarian who also supplies books and resources for use by pupils in classroom lessons.

## **The efficiency of the school**

86 The last inspection reported that the school was providing good value for money but that it was facing "serious financial problems", partly as a result of spending a high proportion of its budget on staffing. As a consequence, spending on resources was said to be low. Significant progress has been made, especially in the past two years.

87 Financial planning is now good. In broad terms, the school operates a balanced budget, with a small surplus for contingencies. The rollover from the last financial year is explained by the timing of major expenditure items. The school's income and expenditure per pupil are very close to the national average. The proportion spent on different parts of the budget is now more balanced than at the time of the last inspection, so that expenditure on teaching staff is now about the national average for comprehensive schools with sixth forms, while that on learning resources is now just above average. Planning is closely related to the educational priorities of the school development plan; for example, bids from curriculum areas must relate to current whole-school priorities. The school manager's membership of the senior management team helps to integrate financial and curricular planning. The governing body, through its finance and premises committee, is closely involved in financial planning.

88 The deployment of teaching and support staff is good. There is a good match between the expertise of the teaching staff and the requirements of the curriculum and education support staff, including learning support assistants, are well deployed. The school makes good use of the accommodation and the learning resources at its disposal, including its information technology resources. Very good use is made of the school library. The size of teaching groups in the sixth form varies but, overall, it is self-supporting, as its costs are covered by the income which its pupils generate. The school makes appropriate use of additional funds which it receives to support pupils with special educational needs and indeed supplements these from its own resources.

89 Since the appointment of the school manager in November 1998 there has been considerable improvement in the efficiency of the school's financial systems, although the school does not yet systematically evaluate the cost-effectiveness of educational expenditure. Long term provision is now being made to allow for redecoration and maintenance and the school has current plans to save money by taking over functions such as the staff payroll and school catering. The school's financial control systems were audited by the local education authority just before this inspection and found to be very effective, with no significant weaknesses. The governing body's finance committee is regularly, and fully, informed about current expenditure.

90 The school receives an average level of funding. It has a favoured intake, with above average levels of attainment on entry. Nevertheless, given the high standards of attainment which the pupils achieve, the good progress which they make throughout the school and the good quality of teaching which they receive, the school provides good value for money.

## PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

### ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

#### English

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

92 During Key Stage 3 all pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress. Pupils' speaking and listening skills develop very well. In group and pair work pupils discuss and negotiate thoughtfully, mostly express themselves clearly and are able to advance and defend a point of view effectively and usually fluently. Contributions to class discussion are mostly well judged and maturely expressed showing understanding and awareness of audience. In a Year 8 lesson pupils had brought examples of persuasive language - such as advertisements and charity appeals, which they had collected as a homework - and were able to identify and explain clearly key features and effects which the text presented. Some pupils were also able to formulate cogently reasons for categorising media texts in different ways - such as the difference between spoken and written texts. Pupils listen attentively and responsively to each other and to the teacher, showing very good understanding.

93 Reading skills develop well with all pupils showing increasing competence and improving awareness of implied as well as literal meanings. Reading aloud is mostly well done: expressive, clear and accurate. In a Year 7 lesson pupils responding to the Roald Dahl story *Boy* with their own 'tall' stories read their work aloud with good expression and awareness of their audience. Pupils use reference books readily and effectively. Pupils' written work is generally very good and shows increasing control and accuracy in a range of different kinds of writing, though lower attaining pupils in particular have continuing problems with spelling. Pupils make effective notes and there is particularly good use of draft writing. Pupils' handwriting is mostly neat and well formed. Presentation is good and includes very competent use of word processing and effective use of layout and fonts.

94 The attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 in the national tests in 1999 was well above the national average at both levels 5 and above and 6 and above. These results were very high compared with schools with pupils from similar backgrounds. Taking the three years 1996-1998 together the performance of pupils in English is well above the national average. The performance of both boys and girls is very high compared with the national average.

95 Progress through Key Stage 4 is good for all pupils, including those with special educational needs. All aspects of pupils' language skills continue to develop very well. Speaking and listening skills are displayed in the confident, pertinent and sometimes extended contributions which many pupils make to class and group work and in the responses that they make. In a Year 11 lesson on *Much Ado about Nothing* pupils showed sensitive awareness of the characters in the play and their motives through their well-expressed responses to the teacher's skilful questioning and they read aloud from difficult text with spirit.

96 Reading develops well and pupils read and respond to a range of increasingly demanding texts with understanding and appreciation. Written work demonstrates increasing accuracy, subtlety and length in a variety of forms for a range of audiences. Year 11 work showed pupils writing very good narrative, discursive and analytical pieces. The presentation of some of the work is enhanced by effective use of the word processor.

97 The department's policy is to enter as many pupils as possible for both English and English literature at GCSE. In both examinations the percentage of pupils gaining the higher A\*-C grades in the past three years was well above the national average for all maintained schools. In 1999 both subjects showed an increase in higher grade passes and all pupils who entered the examination

attained at least a grade G.

98 In the sixth form students make good progress in the combined language and literature Advanced level course showing a generally mature spoken and written response to their work. Written work shows good development and there are some very accomplished pieces of writing. There are well organised notes, annotations, analytical writing and critical responses. In a Year 13 class students showed good understanding and knowledge of the text and demonstrated their ability to use evidence from text to support their arguments.

99 In the 1999 GCE Advanced level the percentage of students entered for the English language and literature examination who attained a high grade A or B grade was well above the national expectation and all students who entered achieved a pass. Higher grade passes were up on the previous year.

100 At both key stages and post-16 pupils have very positive attitudes to their work, nearly always showing keen interest, responding enthusiastically to the tasks set for them and maintaining very good concentration and focus. Lapses in concentration are very rare. Relationships with teachers are good. Pupils work well together when asked to do so and show respect for each others' ideas. They are supportive of each other and show appreciation for each others' efforts. They respond very well to their teachers and are orderly and considerate. When opportunities arise pupils are keen to take initiative or accept responsibility such as in feeding back from a group discussion to the class or in taking a leading role in group activities.

101 In almost two-thirds of lessons teaching is very good or excellent. In nine out of ten lessons teaching is good, very good or excellent. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. The good relationships which teachers maintain with pupils and the high quality of most of the teaching contribute significantly to pupils' good progress, their generally enthusiastic response to lessons and their good behaviour.

102 Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of the subject and are nearly always effective in presenting information and ideas to pupils. Lesson planning is well grounded on the department's schemes of work and resource materials. Occasionally lessons are not planned to challenge pupils sufficiently or to have clearly defined learning outcomes. However, expectations of what pupils can achieve are almost always appropriately high and pupils respond very well to the demands made upon them and to the praise and encouragement with which teachers support their efforts. Teachers use an appropriate range of teaching methods and offer pupils a wide range of stimulating learning activities. There is very good use of pair and group work and also very good whole class teaching. Pupils are managed very well: the interesting, varied and demanding work, and the good relationships with teachers, contribute to the consistently good behaviour. Learning resources - particularly materials produced by the department - are effectively deployed. In nearly all lessons time is well used, pupils keep working right to the end of lessons, and the pace of learning is brisk.

103 Written work is marked carefully and teachers' comments suggest ways for pupils to improve their work. In lessons teachers are good at assessing what pupils are doing, involving pupils in self-evaluation and suggesting directions for improvement. Homework is used very effectively to support work in class or to prepare for work to come.

104 The English curriculum is well planned and meets the needs of all pupils. The organisation of groups is effective in providing appropriate learning environments for pupils of different levels of prior attainment. Many lessons give rise to opportunities for pupils to consider wider moral, social, spiritual and cultural issues, often to do with relationships and behaviour represented in the texts which pupils are reading. A good example of this was observed with a Year 9 class who were reading Joan Lingard's story about the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland *Across the Barricades*. However, although the department has a range of multi-cultural texts, there is no policy on using them and no monitoring to ensure that all pupils have experience of reading and discussing them. The department enhances the curriculum through opportunities for pupils to take part in extra-curricular activities such as theatre visits, the Rotary Club's Youth Speaks public speaking competition and many other competitions and events.

105 The head of department provides very good leadership for the department, maintaining a collaborative context in which all staff make a contribution. The ethos of the department is continually to improve teaching and learning and to help all pupils fulfil their potential. Staff work hard to provide a supportive environment for all pupils. Development planning is good: well directed and regularly evaluated. Monitoring of the progress and the work of the department is undertaken effectively by the head of department and the attached senior manager. The department's strong emphasis on high achievement for pupils of all attainment levels contributes to the high standards which pupils reach.

106 The department has made good progress since the last inspection in addressing the issues raised: teaching quality has improved significantly and there are now few lessons with notable shortcomings; almost all teaching is now sufficiently varied to sustain pupils' interest and attention throughout the lesson; information and communication technology provision and use is good.

## **Drama**

107 Drama is taught to all pupils at Key Stage 3 by specialist drama teachers within the performing arts faculty. At Key Stage 4 drama is a popular GCSE option for pupils. Post-16 performing arts is offered as an A level course.

108 The percentage of pupils attaining GCSE higher grades of A\*-C in drama in both 1998 and 1999 was well above average in comparison with the 1998 results for all maintained schools.

109 Drama is very well managed and the teaching observed was always good, very good or excellent. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good. Pupils respond very positively to work in drama, bringing enthusiasm, concentration, self-discipline and determination to do well. Their abilities to adopt and sustain a role with increasing sensitivity and awareness, to work creatively with each other in groups and to explore ideas and issues through drama all develop very well especially at Key Stage 4. Year 10 pupils used movement and space very effectively in their ensemble work, showing initiative in implementing new ideas, acuteness in their evaluation of the work and grace in accepting criticism. Year 11 pupils in groups presented their work in progress to their peers for their comments and suggestions. The presentations showed the good discipline, including the learning of lines, and the concentration and commitment of the pupils who were acting and the perceptive and thoughtful evaluations by the audience.

110 Pupils' abilities to reflect upon and to evaluate their own work and that of their peers is evident, especially at Key Stage 4, in the written diaries which all pupils keep, many of which are well written and include thoughtful and extended description and consideration. In the sixth form students' writing includes some well judged analysis and critical responses.

111 Drama makes an important contribution to pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development through the opportunities it presents for pupils to reflect upon themselves and their relationships as well as to put themselves imaginatively in other people's places. Drama also makes an important contribution to the speaking and listening skills of pupils.

112 Drama contributes significantly to extra-curricular opportunities for pupils through a wide variety of activities, including drama clubs, showcases and presentation evenings of the students' work, whole school annual productions - last year the musical *Oliver*, this year the drama *Teechers* [sic] - visits, festivals and competitions.



## Mathematics

113 Pupils' performance in the statutory tests at the end of Key Stage 3 has been consistently well above the national average since the last inspection. Increases in performance have followed the national trend year on year. In the most recent tests in 1999 almost all pupils reached the benchmark standard for their age, and a very high proportion well exceeded this level. Overall performance was well above the national average. When compared with the results attained by pupils in schools with similar characteristics, the performance of pupils at Roundwood Park was very high.

114 A similar picture of well above average performance occurs in GCSE examinations, and pupils' performance in the 1999 examination was well above the national average and that found in similar schools. Over the past five years the trend is of high standards. With rare exception all pupils attain a grade in the examination and the proportion achieving grades A\*-C has been well above the national average in each of these years. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A\* and A has risen year on year. The pupils' performance in the GCSE mathematics examination has been consistently better than in English and science and most of their other subjects.

115 This picture of success continues in the sixth form and A level examination results have been well above the national average year on year since 1995. In all years around two-thirds of entrants have achieved A or B grades.

116 In the Key Stage 3 tests, GCSE and A level examinations, the comparative performance of boys and girls has varied from year to year, without a clear trend. Differences are attributable to the particular cohorts taking the examination. No significant differences between the boys' and girls' achievements were found amongst the current pupils.

117 The school has been successful in sustaining the high standards reported at the time of the last inspection. The work seen during this inspection confirms the picture presented by national tests and examinations. Pupils enter the school with a wide range of attainment, although a higher proportion than usual joins the school having achieved above average standards at their primary school. The school builds well on pupils' earlier learning. The initial programme in Year 7 serves well to consolidate pupils' knowledge and understanding, whilst at the same time presenting new work which provides a level of challenge. For example, after some initial work to remind pupils about estimation, pupils extended their learning by having to handle more complex numbers within an everyday setting, deciding when it was appropriate to round numbers, for example, to the nearest 10 or 1000.

118 Throughout Key Stage 3 pupils of all abilities do well. Their good progress is the result of the careful attention the teachers give to placing pupils in teaching groups that match their stages of development. Within these groups teachers set work that enables the high flyers to reach their potential, whilst the slower learners have time to develop their understanding of concepts at a suitable pace. For example, in the lower set in Year 9, pupils made good progress in their understanding of standard metric measures by having time to consider familiar everyday situations and the units they would use to measure the lengths or heights of a variety of objects. By the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is above that expected at the age of 14 in all aspects of the subject. Standards in investigative work are impressive. For example, in lessons seen in Year 8 and Year 9 pupils used and applied their mathematical knowledge well to investigate and identify mathematical patterns. Their methodical approach resulted in most being able to predict the sequence and produce a mathematical rule that described it. In an investigation on polygons, pupils in Year 9 were quick to work out the relationship between the number of diagonals and the number of sides. They showed a particularly good understanding of the need to test their predictions before forming a general rule. Their explanations of the outcomes of their investigation were very clear and they used mathematical vocabulary with accuracy.

119 Pupils continue to make good progress through Key Stage 4 as a result of their teachers' careful planning to build systematically on what they have already achieved. The practical approach adopted by the teachers is a key feature to promoting good progress amongst pupils of all abilities. For example, in a Year 11 class of higher attaining pupils, their understanding of how graphs can be used to find solutions to quadratic equations was deepened through exploring the algebraic functions using a graphic calculator. In another class, where pupils are working at an intermediate level GCSE programme, pupils "discovered" the rule of Pythagoras by a practical drawing exercise. This practical activity helped to cement the concept firmly in their minds and they went on successfully to use the rule to solve a variety of problems involving right-angled triangles. Standards amongst the current Year 11 pupils are well above average overall and all pupils are well on course to achieve their target grades.

120 Throughout Key Stages 3 and 4 pupils have good numeracy skills which they are able to apply well in their other subjects. They are at ease, for example, in design and technology when they are required to measure accurately and they can work to a variety of scales when completing their designs. Pupils are particularly good at handling data and use their skills well in a number of subjects. In geography and history, pupils are adept at collecting and presenting information from surveys in a variety of charts and graphs and show a good understanding of which types of graphical presentation are best suited for the purpose. Pupils' investigative work in science is well supported by their mathematical skills to construct and interpret charts and graphs.

121 Mathematics is a popular subject in the sixth form and students do very well in the A level examinations. The work seen amongst Year 12 and Year 13 students who are following A level courses reflects these high standards. Progress in the different courses is good. Students in Year 12 are tackling new work with confidence and have already made good gains in their learning. This was evident, for example, in a lesson where students' understanding of the flight of projectiles was heightened as they mathematically modelled and analysed the flight of a tennis ball that is thrown into the air for the service. Some students with more modest GCSE results are following an intermediate GNVQ course in business education. These students are making satisfactory progress in the numeracy components of the course. They use their mathematical skills, such as handling data and calculating areas and volumes, to good effect within a business context as they complete their assignments.

122 Throughout the school pupils' response to the teaching they receive is good. In all classes teachers take considerable care to plan work that allows pupils to learn through practical activities that have relevance to them. This is effective in gaining and sustaining pupils' interest and they work hard and try their best, not only in lessons but also in their homework tasks. These provide opportunities for pupils to reinforce and extend the work in the classroom and, for the older pupils in particular, help to develop good levels of independence. Pupils have pride in their work and take great care to present it neatly. There is a consistent approach to discipline within the department and pupils meet their teachers' expectations well for good behaviour: they are attentive and work hard. They particularly enjoy the challenge involved in investigative work and problem-solving activities and are prepared to persevere until they find solutions. These positive attitudes and the extremely good relationships between pupils and their teachers are significant factors that help pupils to make good progress.

123 The overall quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. It is now very good; in the lessons seen it was never less than satisfactory and it was of a very good quality and frequently excellent in approaching half of the lessons seen. Much of this very high quality teaching occurred in the upper part of the school; in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form teaching is very good overall. Teaching in Key Stage 3 is good overall, although examples of very good and excellent teaching were also seen in this key stage. A strong feature of the teaching is the way in which questioning is used to initiate discussion. The teachers' good knowledge and understanding of the subject enable them to build on pupils' responses to questions and to probe and develop their thinking. At its best, this technique requires pupils to think deeply to find solutions to their own questions, and features frequently in A level teaching. Teachers are, however, alert to the occasions when this approach is appropriate amongst the younger pupils. For example, as a result of the teacher's probing questions, a very bright pupil in Year 8 managed to work through some complex algebra to prove that her solution to a problem could be expressed in a different way. In all classes teachers plan their lessons well to take account of what pupils have already learned and what is to follow. This helps pupils of all abilities to make good progress, but is particularly effective in Year 10, where planning for pupils with special educational needs is of outstanding quality; a weekly programme is planned for each individual in the teaching group. This programme is based on a thorough assessment of what each pupil achieves in each lesson, so that there is a balance between consolidation and new learning over the course of the week. Pupils are set individual weekly targets that are challenging yet achievable. Pupils are encouraged when they see that they are able to achieve success and they have good self-esteem.

124 Since the last inspection the department has developed the use of information technology within mathematics. Computer spreadsheet and database programs are used very effectively to support aspects of data handling, and pupils have an increasing understanding of the use and advantages of such programs to analyse and make calculations from large amounts of data. Schemes of work are well considered and provide good guidance for staff on how the National Curriculum may be taught to ensure progression and continuity from year to year. This is particularly useful for new members of staff, although the subject area co-ordinator is aware of the need for extra support to a new entrant who was trained abroad and is less familiar with the scheme. Teamwork is a major strength, which contributes to the success of the department. All staff are supportive of learning and work hard to create an atmosphere conducive to learning. They take care to display pupils' work attractively and these displays help to overcome, to some extent, the effects of shabby accommodation and threadbare carpets.

125 The subject is well managed and the subject area co-ordinator provides a good lead for its development. All staff share a clear view of future development, but monitoring and evaluation of planning and teaching is rather too informal to provide information about what needs to be done to be sure of achieving targets and priorities. Similarly, whilst assessment data is analysed well at Key Stage 4 to set and review targets regularly, the analysis and use of such data at Key Stage 3 is not systematic enough to identify where improvements might be made or to set targets for pupils' performance.

## **Science**

126 Standards of attainment in science on entry to the school are well above the national average. Current Year 7 pupils attained well above average in the 1999 Key Stage 2 national science tests; 92 per cent of pupils attained level 4 or above and 48 per cent attained level 5 or above. The attainment of boys in the current Year 7 is especially high, and higher than their performance in English and mathematics.

127 Progress made through Key Stage 3 is good overall. In a very small minority of lessons progress is unsatisfactory because the standard of discipline in the class is low. The progress of the highest attainers, especially in Year 9 mixed ability classes, is not as good as in mathematics. Unlike in mathematics, pupils in science are not reaching level 8 by the end of Key Stage 3. From Year 7 pupils are developing the full range of investigative skills in the contexts of biology, chemistry and physics; and by Year 9 the standard of reporting, explaining, applying, concluding and hypothesising is very high. Pupils in all years are using information technology skills to improve the presentation of their homework. They use scientific language and symbols routinely, and higher attainers in Year 8 have an understanding of chemical formulae and molecular structures. From Year 7 pupils are accessing the Key Stage 4 Programmes of Study, for example, learning the arrangement of elements in the periodic table. Standards of attainment in science at the end of Key Stage 3 based on all the inspection evidence are well above average. The great majority of the current Year 9 pupils are working securely at National Curriculum level 5 or above. A significant minority are working in level 7, understanding, for example, genetics and inheritance and the reactivity series of metals. The Key Stage 3 National Curriculum science test results in 1999 for boys and girls were very high in comparison with the national average for maintained schools, but in line with the performance of similar schools at level 5 or above. Performance was, however, well above the average at level 6 or above in comparison with similar schools. Standards in science in 1999 tests were considerably lower than in 1998; and also lower than the exceptional attainment of these pupils in the mathematics tests. The average performance in science of boys and girls over the last three years has been broadly similar.

128 Progress made by higher, average and lower attainers through Key Stage 4 is good overall. The highest attainers in Year 10, for example, are relating their knowledge of cell structure to the processes of water uptake and loss in a plant; and they are writing balanced chemical equations. By Year 11 the higher attainers are reaching the highest standards in all strands of their investigative work, for example, when finding the effect of diameter on the electrical resistance in a wire, using mathematical calculations to support their analyses and conclusions. Some of the lower attainers are beginning to suggest how their investigations can be made quantitative. By the end of Key Stage 4, standards overall are well above the national average. A small amount of unsatisfactory progress in Key Stage 4 is the result of unsatisfactory attitudes to work by the pupils and insecure management of the class. In 1999, GCSE double award science standards for boys and girls were very high in comparison with the national average for maintained schools, and well above average in comparison with similar schools. The performance of girls is improving and they attained a much higher percentage of GCSE A\* to C grades than boys. Although boys are sustaining very high A\* to C grades, the percentage attaining A\* and A grades was lower than in 1998 and not as high as that for girls.

129 The progress of most pupils with special educational needs in Key Stages 3 and 4 is satisfactory overall and good, particularly when carrying out investigative science, when additional support is available in lessons. In a Year 7 lesson on refraction, the joint planning by the science teacher and the learning support assistant followed by good quality support in the lesson enable pupils on the register of special educational needs to make good progress. However, science teachers are not routinely matching work closely enough to meet individual learning needs, especially in the Key Stage 3 classes which have the full range of attainment. Pupils with special educational needs in Key Stage 4 benefit from working in very small groups of similar attaining pupils, and almost all are reaching at least lower GCSE science grades. They can investigate the different amounts of energy in foods, for example, and investigate reflection and refraction, but need much one to one guidance as their personal study skills are not well developed. Pupils in all years are making extensive and accurate use of mathematical calculations and graphs, especially in physics and investigative work. Progress in the information technology skills in science lessons is still not well developed, as reported at the last inspection, although pupils make good use of information technology at home. Technical difficulties in using sense and control equipment in science must be resolved in order to guarantee the coverage of these aspects of the information technology Programmes of Study.

130 Progress made through the sixth form is good overall in GCE advanced level biology, chemistry and physics with extensive use of various quantitative approaches. Some of the Year 12 higher attaining Advanced level physics students are making very good progress in the short time they have been studying at this level by discussing, applying prior learning to draw conclusions, by working efficiently and effectively during paired practical work and being actively involved in lessons. Good progress in biology is promoted by active involvement of students in the lessons and by effective systems for assessing and diagnosing weaknesses in, for example, practical skills. Good progress in chemistry is occasionally marred because students are not actively involved in the lesson and because teaching methods and marking do not always offer sufficient guidance and support. The standard attained in science at the end of the sixth form is above average. The standard in 1999 GCE Advanced level physics was very high with nearly three quarters of students attaining A and B grades. This has been the trend for several years. The standard in Advanced level biology was above average in 1999; and in Advanced level chemistry the standard was broadly average, but is now improving after a significant fall in GCE A and B grades in 1999.

131 Pupils' response in science lessons and to homework is good overall. The response is best in the sixth form where it is very good overall; but the work of a minority of lower attainers, in biology, for example, can be disorganised when personal study skills are not well developed. Pupils' response through Key Stage 3 is mainly very good. Occasionally the response is excellent, as seen in a Year 7 investigation on the refraction of light, where high motivation, a mature, well organised and efficient approach to practical work, and excellent relationships with peers, teacher and support staff contributed to the very good progress. The response in Key Stage 4 is generally good but overall it is not as positive as seen in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form. Behaviour overall is good and pupils collaborate successfully for practical work. Some unsatisfactory progress in Key Stages 3 and 4 is the result of pupils' unwillingness to listen, unnecessary talking, and disregard for the teachers' attempts to establish high standards of discipline. Pupils work safely during practical work, treating the equipment with respect. Most learning is directed by the teachers, leaving little scope in lessons for pupils to show any initiative. Pupils with special educational needs readily accept the help of the learning support staff, making good progress when this additional support is available.

132 The quality of teaching in science is good overall and good in each of Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form. The quality of teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 has improved since the last inspection and in this inspection excellent and very good teaching was observed. There is, however, a small amount of unsatisfactory teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 where insecure management of the pupils is contributing to unsatisfactory progress in these lessons. There is a large team of full and part-time science teachers, all well qualified. Although biologists outnumber physicists this does not have a detrimental affect on standards. The small amount of excellent teaching is characterised by well established routines where pupils understand what makes a good lesson. Pupils know the teacher's high expectations of them; and there is clear communication of the lesson aims. Very high standards of discipline are established so no learning time is wasted; joint planning with the learning support staff ensures activities are well matched in a mixed ability class to the pupils' stages of learning. There is skilful and exemplary organisation of the 50 minute lessons with no loss of pace at transition points; a good range of whole class teaching and practical work, and sufficient time at the end of the lesson for open questions to monitor progress and explain homework, which is well established as an important extension of the curriculum. Where teaching is not so successful there are two main weaknesses; difficulty in securing firm management of the class; and insufficient planning to meet individual learning needs, for example, of higher attainers to level 8 in Key Stage 3, and to grade A\* standard at GCSE. Generally planning for pupils with special educational needs is not well developed. The use of well planned resources is thwarted on a number of occasions by faulty equipment or shortages of materials.

133 All statutory requirements are in place. The science faculty is providing satisfactory value for money. There has been satisfactory progress in responding to the last inspection report. Schemes of work have been revised. New concept maps are a recent good initiative which have the potential to improve module and lessons planning so tasks can be better matched to pupils' different stages of learning. Sixth form science provision has been reviewed but Advanced level study continues to be the only provision. Attempts have been made to improve the numbers of girls taking Advanced level physics, but as yet with little success. Issues of equality of opportunity have been monitored effectively. The amount of science technician hours, although improved since the last inspection, is still too low for a school of this size with nine laboratories on two floors. The technicians work exceptionally hard but, as reported last time, there is a limit to the service they can provide. Their task is not helped by the woefully inadequate preparation areas for technicians and teachers. The number of science laboratories is generally satisfactory although several lessons have to be taught in classrooms. The timetabling of a Key Stage 4 lower attaining class in a small laboratory is unsatisfactory when chemistry investigations have to proceed adjacent to expensive computer hardware. The staff have produced some very good displays in the laboratories in an attempt to provide an interesting learning environment, to compensate for the poor state of decoration in the laboratories, and to offset the ageing furniture, fixtures and fittings. The health and safety issues reported at the last inspection have been resolved. There has not been enough progress in formally monitoring the progress of individual pupils, in setting specific targets in annual reports, nor in formally monitoring marking. Induction remains too informal and staff development on managing behaviour is not formally planned. The need for continuing development of information technology has been mentioned above.

## **OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES**

### **Art**

134 The attainment of pupils in art at the end of Key Stage 3 is above the national average. Teacher assessments at the end of the key stage over the past two years show that more pupils attain grades A and B than in similar schools. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils know how to use a variety of drawing, painting, printing and modelling materials. In drawing, most students understand line and shape. Many pupils represent tone effectively in monochrome drawing and coloured pastel work, but some of the lower attaining ones find difficulty in depicting the difference between pattern and tone. Pupils observe well, have a sound idea of proportions and draw what they see with a good degree of accuracy. Most pupils attain higher when drawing from pictures and photographs than when looking at objects in the round. Many pupils spot texture and can represent it successfully. Colour work is lively, pupils mix and use paint boldly and brightly, as seen in their 'underground' posters, but lettering is generally poor and often detracts from the design work. Paint is used carefully, but most pupils need to handle a wider variety of paint in order to understand translucency and texture. Imaginative work is less well developed, especially among the lower attainers, as their free work often reverts to a primitive style. Print work is good. Pupils know how to put designs on to paper and fabric using stencils, liquids, blocks and screens. Ceramics work, using the influence of artists such as Edouard Paolozzi, is above average. Pupils know about clay preparation, manipulation and something of firing and glazes. A few of the boys are heavy-handed, but finished results show they understand how to use modelling tools to gain low relief decoration and how to stick pieces of clay together. Sketch books contain many pages of drawings, paintings and research and the overall quality is well above average for the majority of pupils. There are clear differences in these books from the higher attaining pupils who show greater attention to presentation and detail than others. Pupils know about the lives of real artists and crafts people, recognise famous works and most can emulate their styles. They know how to use the computers for design work, but do not use them very often at this key stage.

135 The attainment of pupils in art at the end of Key Stage 4 is above the national average. The number of pupils gaining A\* to C grades in GCSE is above the national average in art and design and well above in art and design graphics. The number of pupils attaining A\* to G grades is also higher than the national average. Results have greatly improved over the past three years although boys' results are consistently lower than those of the girls. Fewer pupils choose to take art than in other subjects, but for the ones who do, their results are similar across the option range. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils experiment freely and with confidence. They show skill in working through a theme in a variety of media, they research well and use the works of real artists and art from other countries and cultures to influence their designing. They have good powers of analysis and are adept at self-assessment. Most pupils complete a good volume of work by the end of the key stage, although some boys are not finishing enough course work, nor refining their efforts. In some instances, written work is good, but a few cannot express opinions sufficiently clearly and many pupils show greater aptitude for practical work. The displays of Year 11 GCSE portfolios are impressive, and show that some pupils draw and paint in fine detail and others are skilled in multi-colour printing. Portraiture is good, but figurative work needs developing as only the higher attaining pupils manage body proportion successfully. Experiments with fabric and recycled media for collage and relief work are well presented. Sketchbook work is well above average. Pupils use their books to record ideas in word and graphic form and for collections of inspirational media. Pupils pay good attention to the layout of the pages, adding suitably-coloured backgrounds and interesting fly leaves.

136 The attainment of students in GCE A level art and design is in line with the national average. Results over the past three years have improved, as now over a third of students gain either A or B grades and in 1999 the lowest grade was a D. All students normally gain between A and E. During the past three years, boys' results have been better than those of the girls, which is unusual for this subject. By the end of their sixth form course, students can give critical analysis and appreciation of art, justify their choices and opinions about art projects and produce some lively work. A few students can write well, but oral work is relatively weak. Their sketch books show interesting mature work, with worthwhile experiments often realised in the final pieces. Some work is done on a large scale, demonstrating confidence in designing and skill in using the chosen media. Personal studies, with a very sophisticated range of study titles, are well presented and well researched by most students in the groups. Currently, a few students are drifting and need persuasion to keep to their time planning.

137 Most pupils make very good progress in Key Stage 3. There is most progress at the beginning of the key stage as many pupils enter school with very little skill in drawing and only a limited understanding of art. In Year 7, much of the work is new and exciting and pupils make good progress when they are engaged in work which interests them, where they are learning new skills and gaining knowledge and understanding of arts and craft. Currently, pupils in Year 7 are studying the circus and groups are engaged in different work. Some are depicting the circus through the four seasons and using their knowledge of colour to represent mood and climate. The few pupils who have experienced the Moscow State Circus have made best progress in representing atmosphere. Other groups are concentrating on drawing clown faces and gaining inspiration from the brightly coloured works of the Fauve artists. Groups of pupils making full size clown figures are making the greatest amount of progress in discovering how to scale drawings, apply paint and create movements. In Year 8, most pupils consolidate their learning and make good progress in experimenting with a variety of mixed media projects as seen in the mask-making project. In Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, progress is good for most pupils. During lessons, most second and subsequent attempts show greater skill and accuracy than the first. At these stages, pupils build on to their skills and knowledge and make good progress in analysis and appreciation. Throughout the school, pupils show good progress in ceramics from first efforts on small pots and ceramic heads to composite work, often on a large scale. Pupils benefit from having a talented resident ceramics expert to give them advice. The higher attaining pupils make best progress in observational drawing and painting, whereas the lower attaining pupils who find difficulty with paper work make best progress in clay work. Pupils with special educational needs make sound progress in practical art as they receive good support from the teaching staff although they struggle with some of the homework and theory.

138 The response to art is good in Key Stage 4 and very good in Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form. Most pupils say they like art lessons. They show positive attitudes to art, watch demonstrations closely, wait for instructions, select their own equipment and settle to tasks quickly. Pupils generally enjoy looking at the work of real artists and the security of using pictures and artefacts as starting points for their own work. They speak politely to adults, are keen to answer questions and some of the more inquisitive ask sensible questions or make comments. Most pupils try hard in lessons and keep busy, with only a few losing concentration as they encounter difficulties. Pupils share fairly, especially when they work in pairs, some willingly help each other, and most take good care of their work. Many pupils show responsibility by clearing away without undue fuss towards the end of sessions. Most pupils accept homework cheerfully, but some, especially the less confident and skilled, tend to do the minimum.

139 The quality of teaching overall is good. It was very good in a quarter of lessons observed, good in half and satisfactory in the remainder. The main strengths are in the enthusiastic delivery of a well-balanced scheme of work which is appropriately matched to pupils' age and experience. Teachers know their subject, demonstrate well, and give clear instruction in techniques which give pupils confidence to try for themselves. They choose resources carefully which extend pupils' knowledge and understanding and they set high standards. Most lessons are carefully timed and with a good mix of instruction and time for pupils to do their own work. Teachers establish good working relationships with their pupils and the one-to-one appraisal of pupils' work is very sensitively conducted. Pupils are left in no doubt about what is expected of them. All work is valued and displayed effectively throughout the art rooms and circulation areas. Appropriate homework is set each week. Pupils gain much from the good practice of putting clear, sensitive diagnostic comments on both class and home work.

140 The department has responded well to the few critical comments made in the last inspection report. There is now a multi-cultural policy which is being implemented in many of the new modules of work. The attainment of boys remains below that of the girls, but the scheme of work has been rewritten to address the problem of boys' motivation. Links with feeder primary schools have yet to be strengthened, but the department is aware of the levels of attainment and the diverse experiences of the pupils at the end of Key Stage 2. In addition to the responses, there have been significant changes. There is a new head of department, who is respected as a very good leader. The department works well as a team, altering the scheme of work, planning for improvement and analysing the examination results. GCSE results have improved at grades A\* to C from 45 per cent in 1997 to 79 per cent in 1999. Statutory requirements for curriculum and assessment are met. Teachers have attended training in the use of the computers and some textile art, notably batik. Visits to galleries and exhibitions have been extended and the sixth form now visits a European centre each summer, such as Barcelona, Paris or Amsterdam. Life drawing classes for the sixth form have been established between this and a nearby school. The art club, held twice weekly, is flourishing and helps pupils to improve their work and extend their studies. Occasionally pupils work alongside local artists to gain an insight into commercial art and art as a career. By moving internal walls, the four small original studios have been converted to three, but they are still too small for some of the very large groups, especially in Key Stage 3. Storeroom space is poor and the sixth form does not have enough room to store project work.

## **Design technology**

141 Pupils join the school with a diverse history of design technology experiences. Their attainment on entry to the school is above national average standards.

142 In Key Stage 3 pupils make very good progress. They develop their practical skills effectively, refine and improve what they are making, and develop a clear understanding of the various stages of the design and make process as illustrated in their project folders and work files. Some lower attainers in a minority of lessons make only satisfactory progress. This is usually caused by poor concentration and results in these pupils underachieving.



143 By the end of the key stage, all pupils can use effectively a range of equipment, tools and utensils. They are able to work with a variety of materials including wood, plastic, metal, food, textiles and electronics. The products they make are of a high quality as is their written work. In 1999, over 90 per cent of pupils achieved level 5 or higher in their end of key stage assessments and nearly half of the year achieved level 6 or higher. Both figures are significantly higher than national averages. By the end of the key stage, therefore, pupils' attainment is very high in relation to national standards.

144 During Key Stage 4, pupils build effectively on their technology experiences in Key Stage 3. They continue to make very good progress. This is exemplified by the increasing depth of research carried out into the designs which the pupils themselves have chosen. Other features of this very good progress are the range, quality and creativeness of possible design solutions; the rigour by which the evaluations are carried out in relation to the design specification; and the increasing accuracy and quality of the finished products.

145 In both key stages, pupils with special educational needs make very good progress in their written work. Some make excellent progress in their practical tasks with their eventual levels of attainment being in line with the whole cohort of pupils.

146 In all of the GCSE design and technology courses on offer, pupils are able to produce high quality practical and written work. In 1999, for all design and technology subjects at GCSE, 89.7 per cent of pupils achieved A\*-C, which significantly exceeded the national average. This level of achievement was broadly consistent across all aspects of the subject. These results were an improvement on the previous year's already high results in the subject. The standards of attainment at Key Stage 4 are therefore very high in relation to national averages.

147 Those students studying the A level course also make very good progress. They develop their research and designing skills to a level which enables them to achieve above the national averages. In 1999, from a small group of students, half achieved A or B grades at A level.

148 In all years, attainment during the taught lessons is consistent with the high levels of achievement demonstrated through end of key stage assessments or exam grades. Overall, the department is sustaining high standards at Key Stage 3 and significantly improving them at Key Stage 4.

149 Pupils in all years show a real commitment to the subject. This is exemplified by the way many return at lunchtime and after school to finish off work or develop further what was started in class. Concentration is usually very good in lessons. Pupils are attentive listeners and stay on task throughout sessions with only a few exceptions.

150 Behaviour is invariably very good in lessons. Pupils are polite and respectful to each other and their teachers. They are trusted to organise themselves with the appropriate tools and equipment which they do very well and always safely. Pupils sometimes have to share resources or space in the subject such as when sharing cooking equipment or preparation space in food technology. This is always done in a mutually supportive manner. Their positive attitudes and behaviour help to promote the very good progress that pupils make.

151 Higher attaining pupils often show initiative by choosing certain tools or pieces of equipment in preference to others in order to form or refine their products most effectively. In some aspects of the subject, many pupils are only given limited opportunities to do this. Pupils are, however, very responsible in organising their work, starting the next stage of a process, and in the clearing up at the end of the lesson.

152 Teaching is very good at both key stages and in the sixth form. There is no unsatisfactory teaching in the subject. In nearly three-quarters of the lessons observed the quality of the teaching was good or better with one in five lessons having excellent teaching. From these observations, there was a higher proportion of good or better teaching in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3.

153 In the most effective lessons, the teaching of skills leads to the greatest possible pupil independence when they choose their tools and techniques with materials; when other pupils' work is used as exemplars, including work from previous cohorts of pupils; and when clear criteria are given against which attainment is to be assessed, either internally using school-based criteria or externally using those from an examination board.

154 Other strong features of the teaching are the effectiveness and timeliness of teacher interventions to help move pupils on and the use of ends of lessons to summarise key learning points. In most instances, teacher expectations are very high but, in some lessons in food technology and textiles teaching, pupils are sometimes allowed to be inattentive or to let their attention wander.

155 All teachers have a very good command of their subject. Lesson planning is good. Teaching strategies and the organisation of the lessons are invariably appropriate to both pupils' needs and the requirements of the particular activity. Pupil management is very good and there is little wasted time in lessons, with reminders often being given to ensure pupils keep up a brisk pace in their work and meet deadlines.

156 Teachers continually monitor pupils' work during and after lessons to ascertain the most appropriate next steps in their teaching. Homework is used very effectively to consolidate learning, enable research to be carried out and as a genuine complement to classwork. There is some evidence that homework in food technology is, on occasions, insufficiently challenging.

157 The subject is very effectively led. There are clear procedures for all aspects of the day-to-day running of all aspects of the subject and strategic direction is provided for longer-term developments. The effect of this is to provide coherence between different aspects of the subject and a strong feeling of commitment to commonly shared goals.

158 A regular programme of classroom observations and feedback is undertaken which supports the development of teaching in the subject. There are clear procedures and practice for the regular monitoring of the designing and making aspects of pupils' work in the subject as well as their homework. There is some written development planning and priorities are set for the subject. These plans currently lack sufficient detail and do not state the costs involved.

159 The school offers a very good range of design and technology experiences in Key Stage 3. Resistant materials (wood, plastic and metal), food, textiles, graphics, pneumatics and electronics all form part of the subject. Pupils have the opportunity to experience a comprehensive range of tools and equipment during this time. Aspects of control technology are not yet covered but there are well-formulated plans to introduce this aspect in the academic year. The subject integrates the use of ICT into its courses very effectively.

160 Similarly, in Key Stage 4, a full GCSE course in resistant materials, electronic products, graphic products, textiles and food is offered. All pupils follow a full design and technology GCSE course. The design and technology curriculum is broad and balanced but there is scope for more use of multicultural contexts for practical projects. Statutory requirements in both key stages are met.

161 Marking is consistent across the department and assessment is accurate in all aspects of the subject. Assessment is effectively used to provide pupils with feedback about their progress and where improvements in their work might be made in order to achieve higher levels. End of Key Stage 3 assessment information is effectively used to inform targets for GCSE attainment.

162 Staff are fastidious in applying health and safety measures in all areas of the subject and at all times. This is a very strong feature of the department.

163 Overall the number and range of books, tools, equipment and materials is sufficient for curriculum coverage. To improve the quality of education in the subject, however, electronic equipment

and woodwork and metalwork tools need enhancing. There are good reference texts and CD ROM sources in the library to support design and technology projects.

164 There have been significant refurbishments in the accommodation since the last inspection. Further improvements are still required in the food room in order to offer the same quality of provision. In the metalwork workshop modern equipment is needed, geared to newer technology which relates to the requirements of the contemporary National Curriculum. The investment in the subject has corresponded with a significant improvement in standards in the subject which represents good value for money.

165 The ethos that is generated in the subject reflects the aims of the school well. There have been significant improvements in the subject since the last inspection in terms of the curriculum provision, the accommodation and the standards of achievement. The key issue from that inspection has been fully addressed. The school is now one in which design and technology has a significant profile with very good provision.

## **Geography**

166 Interviews with Year 7 pupils and a scrutiny of their work show that their prior knowledge of geography is close to that expected nationally. However, all pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress through Key Stage 3. They often make very good progress in individual lessons as a result of teaching that is imaginative, interesting and which stimulates the pupils to move on at a vigorous pace. Pupils with special educational needs benefit from effective class support from learning assistants and sixth formers. The department has made good progress developing learning materials which meet the needs of these pupils.

167 Attainment at age 14 is above the national average. The 1999 statutory teacher assessment at the end of Key Stage 3 shows that 69 per cent of pupils attained level 5 or above, compared to 61 per cent nationally. Nearly half of all pupils reached level 6 or above, compared to 31 per cent across the country. Most pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of processes and well-developed geographic skills of map interpretation and the evaluation of information. Many have a well-developed appreciation of relationships, such as the influence of Japans' physical geography on urban land use and the environmental impact of new transport routes.

168 Pupils' attainment at age 16 is well above national averages and has been maintained at this high level for the last five years. The percentage of pupils attaining grades A\*-C at GCSE, at 80 per cent in 1999, is well above the national average of 56 per cent. Attainment at grades A\*-G has been 100 per cent for the past four years. Pupils' grades in geography are higher than in many of their other subjects. Most pupils have a very good knowledge and understanding of geographic processes and patterns, such as changes in agriculture and in urban land use. Many have a sophisticated understanding of environmental issues and are able to evaluate complex geographic information.

169 Progress of all pupils through Key Stage 4 and in individual lessons is very good. Teachers skilfully consolidate prior learning at the start of each lesson, and introduce pupils to ideas and material that are more commonly found at GCE A level. This contributes to attainment at age 19 being very high and well above national averages. In 1999, 83 per cent of all students attained grades A or B at GCE A Level, an improvement over 1998 when 59 per cent of students achieved these grades compared to just under 34 per cent nationally. The attainment of grades A - E at A Level has been well above the national average for the last four years. Students have a very good knowledge, understanding and application of a wide range of fieldwork techniques. They have a deep knowledge of the subject and are able to use this to solve problems and make reasoned, evaluative judgements, for instance, of the pattern of global car manufacturing.

170 Students make very good progress in the sixth form, and most attain grades in excess of those predicted for them at the beginning of the course. This rapid development of geographic understanding

and skills is a result of teaching which is stimulating, interesting and sets a high level of challenge for students.

171 The overwhelming majority of pupils are enthusiastic and eager to learn in geography lessons. They are ready to ask and answer questions and to join in class discussions. Imaginative homework and assignments help pupils to develop skills of individual research and problem solving and in class they readily work in pairs or groups to share information and solve problems. Relationships between pupils and with teachers in the department are very good.

172 Teaching is very good overall. It was satisfactory or better in all lessons observed and was very good in nearly three-quarters of all lessons seen. The geographers have an excellent and contemporary knowledge of their subject. This is transmitted to pupils through enthusiastic teaching which makes constant reference to relevant and topical issues. Lesson planning is very good. Teachers use a wide range of interesting and stimulating activities, such as problem solving and role play, which extends the knowledge and understanding of high attaining pupils and supports those who learn at a slower pace. Teachers expect a lot of pupils, both in terms of the quantity of work and its depth. Pupils respond to this by producing work that is often of a standard normally produced only by much older pupils. The majority of lessons are characterised by clear and authoritative teacher explanation and stimulating lesson introductions that link to previous work and make clear what is expected of pupils in the lesson to come. Pair and group work are effectively used to deepen pupil understanding, as are role play and simulation exercises. Class management is highly effective. It is calm and authoritative, firm but not repressive. Well planned, varied and interesting fieldwork, including residential visits, does much to deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding of geography, as does the imaginative and extensive use of information and communication technology. The development of the use computers in the subject, however, is inhibited by an absence of an automated weather station or Internet access in the department.

173 Day to day assessment in the department is good. Marking is consistent and supportive and teachers make good use of classroom assessment to influence the course of a lesson. However, the department has yet to develop fully ways of using assessment to help them plan the geography curriculum, for instance, when writing new schemes of work. Nor is assessment fully used to set clear and precise targets for individual pupils in Key Stage 3.

174 The department is extremely well led and managed. The newly appointed head of department and her team of well-motivated geographers have a shared sense of purpose as to how an already successful department can be further improved. Schemes of work are being re-written to integrate approaches to assessment and teaching and staff readily take on delegated tasks. The department realises that attainment in geography would be enhanced if assessment at Key Stage 3 were to be more closely linked to National Curriculum levels, and the progress of pupils more carefully monitored against targets set for them. The department has made very good progress since the last inspection at raising pupils' attainment further, through effective leadership and skilful teaching.

## **History**

175 The work of pupils on entry to the school reflects attainment which is above average. By the end of Key Stage 3 they reach standards which are well above the national average. Although the Key Stage 3 National Curriculum teachers' assessment in 1999 showed pupils' attainment in that year to be below average, a scrutiny of the same pupils' work at the end of Key Stage 3 shows attainment to be well above the national average. Similar levels of attainment are reflected in the work of the pupils in the current Year 9. The great majority have very good levels of historical knowledge and understanding which enable them to grasp concepts, to make comparisons and links, and to offer explanations and descriptions. These often arise, especially in the case of higher attaining pupils, from well substantiated and independently formed conclusions. Historical skills are well developed. Most pupils are confident in the analysis of historical sources. They have a good ability to select and organise information, a good awareness of chronology and good levels of empathy. Written work is generally of

good quality. It is factually detailed, accurate and presented in a range of appropriate ways.

176 At the end of Key Stage 4 attainment at GCSE is very high in relation to national averages; this has been the case for the last two years. The levels attained by pupils in current Year 11 are very high and reflect those of the 1999 GCSE results. Knowledge and understanding are very good and historical skills are very well developed. The majority have a good ability to analyse the relationships between events, people and changes, and to provide explanations in a wider historical context. They analyse and explain different historical interpretations often with considerable perception, judging the reliability of historical sources and using them critically in investigative work. Information is very well selected and presented. Written work is well structured and detailed. At best essays include good sustained argument and clear explanation.

177 Attainment at GCE Advanced level is above the national course averages. The attainment of students in Year 13 is also above average. The majority of students demonstrate good knowledge and understanding and a sound grasp of key issues, concepts and trends. They use historical sources critically. Many display independent thinking, an ability to challenge; and to present well integrated argument orally and in writing. Written work is detailed and factually accurate and at best reflects conceptual awareness, well supported argument and clearly drawn conclusions.

178 Pupils make very good progress at all stages. At Key Stage 3 progress in the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills is rapid and especially noticeable in the work of pupils in Year 7. There is very good progress in the development of structured extended writing from Year 7 onwards. Progress continues to be impressive at Key Stage 4 where there is clear evidence of new learning, and of building on to and consolidating earlier learning. In particular there are very good gains in knowledge, understanding and empathy with pupils learning to grasp and interrelate often very complicated issues. In the sixth form students rapidly develop very good attitudes and skills as mature students of history. They make very good progress in deepening their knowledge and understanding of the topics being studied. In lessons there is clear evidence of the consolidation and further development of both knowledge and skills. Over time essay writing develops very well, becoming increasingly relevant, analytical and well argued.

179 Pupils with special educational needs also make very good progress. At best they are helped by skilful teaching, careful match of the work to their learning requirements and the good learning ethos, which gives pupils the confidence to succeed.

180 The pupils' very high levels of interest and motivation have a very positive influence upon their progress and attainment. In lessons pupils are very attentive, work conscientiously and sustain very good levels of concentration. They respond very well to the high expectations of the teachers and their capacity for personal study develops well. The very good behaviour and relationships in lessons create a very positive learning ethos.

181 Teaching is of high quality and the major reason for pupils' very good progress. In the lessons observed during the inspection teaching was good or better in 70 per cent of lessons and never less than satisfactory. In 20 per cent of lessons teaching was very good and in 30 per cent it was excellent.

182 Teachers' specialist expertise is very good and it is used very effectively in helping pupils to gain knowledge, to understand complex topics and issues, and to share the teachers' enthusiasm for the subject. Lesson planning varies with some being very detailed but in other cases it fails to provide clear objectives for learning and a well timed structure of activities to ensure that these are met. The department's programmes of study do not provide adequate guidance for lesson planning of a consistently high quality across the department.

183 Teachers' expectations of pupils are always very high. Pupils are expected to work hard and responsibly, to think and develop historical skills, to undertake individual research and concentrate well in lessons. There is, however, a tendency in some lessons to expect too little of pupils in terms of the extent to which they are able to take the initiative in their learning and, for example, to acquire and develop their knowledge and understanding in the context of discussion and debate. The teachers' high and realistic expectations of lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs

enables them to make better than expected progress.

184 All lessons are characterised by clear teaching and the majority strongly promote the development of historical skills through a range of well chosen activities. For example, a lesson in Year 9 strongly promoted pupils' research and investigative skills through the close study and interrogation of well chosen historical sources in the context of a good blend of small group work and independent study. The majority of lessons are well managed and organised and learning is tightly structured. All are characterised by good questioning which is successful in both testing and extending knowledge and understanding and in challenging pupils to think deeply. Work is well matched to pupils' learning needs and there many instances of very good individual tuition to this end.

185 The very good behaviour and relationships in lessons create an excellent learning ethos. Time is always used to the full. In most lessons activities are well timed and paced to sustain momentum in the learning. In others too much time is given for pupils to work individually in silence with no opportunity for learning through collaboration. The range of resources used is appropriate and well matched to pupils' learning requirements. Insufficient use is made of information technology to support the development of study skills.

186 Pupils' progress is assessed regularly both during lessons and through marking and testing. The marking of class and homework, however, is often superficial. At best written comments offer constructive guidance to help pupils to improve their work but practice in this respect varies. Insufficient use is made of National Curriculum levels throughout Key Stage 3 as an integral part of assessment and to set targets. The lack of moderation of assessment across the department results in differences in judgements of the levels being reached.

187 Homework is set regularly and at best as an integral part of learning. Tasks are mostly appropriate in extending and consolidating learning in lessons. However, the lack of text books for use at home restricts the range of tasks which can be set and limits opportunities for pupils to undertake personal research at Key Stage 3. The use of reproduced materials also limits access to wider knowledge.

188 The curriculum is appropriately broad, balanced and relevant. The leadership of the department is very experienced and is very effective in generating close professional team work, setting and achieving very high standards and providing a very good ethos for the learning of history. Aspects of the management of the department, however, are not sufficiently systematic and rigorous. Programmes of study do not provide sufficient support and guidance for teaching, strategies for the monitoring of practice within the department are under developed, and development planning lacks measurable targets and clearly defined strategies for their achievement. Nonetheless, in the light of the average level of funding, the high quality of education provided and the very high results achieved, the department provides very good value for money.

## **Information and communications technology**

189 Pupils' attainment on entry is above national average standards in information and communications technology. In Key Stage 3, all pupils make good progress including those with special educational needs. This good progress is characterised by pupils being able to apply previously acquired skills to new contexts; extending their capacity to use facilities within a software package; having a more acute awareness of audience in what they are creating; and being more accurate or creative in how they frame enquiries or produce their final product on screen.

190 By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils are able to use ICT with increasing levels of autonomy. They can use word processing, graphics and desk-top publishing packages to communicate ideas very effectively. They can use spreadsheets and databases to store, manipulate and communicate information with very good levels of accuracy. Pupils are also proficient at using CD ROMs and the Internet to find appropriate information to further their studies. At the end of this key stage, pupil

attainment is well above national standards.

191 In Key Stage 4, pupils following GCSE courses which are rich in ICT content, such as information studies and business studies, make good progress. They develop the skills acquired in Key Stage 3 and apply them to new situations, culminating in using ICT to solve problems which they have identified for themselves. Pupils not following these options also make good progress in their use of ICT when given the opportunity to do so.

192 By the end of Key Stage 4, the attainment of pupils following the GCSE information studies course is very high compared with national averages with, in 1999, 95 per cent of pupils achieving grade A\*-C. These results were an improvement on the previous year's already high results in the subject when it was the highest performing subject in the school. Over time, the subject is improving its standards.

193 Of particular note is the degree to which many pupils use ICT resources outside lessons to further their studies, either in the library or at home. This use is extensive in preparing and presenting their work for a range of subjects and in carrying out research on CD ROMs and the Internet. The extent to which this occurs indicates a high level of interest and commitment and an understanding of the importance of ICT in their general learning.

194 This interest is also seen in ICT lessons where pupils maintain their concentration very well and are highly motivated by the subject. Pupils behave well in lessons, are courteous, and always treat the ICT resources with care. Pupils often support each other on particular problems within a task or in the use of certain facilities of a software package.

195 The quality of teaching is good and no unsatisfactory teaching was observed in the subject. Of the lessons observed, over 80 per cent of the teaching was good. In such lessons the teacher enables pupils to demonstrate their genuine ICT capability, as defined in National Curriculum levels of attainment or exam course criteria, rather than just extending their capacity to use the facilities of a software package. Teaching was also effective when the pupils were given the necessary technical vocabulary and when the underlying concepts of the work were clearly explained. On the other hand, when a task was either insufficiently broken down into manageable steps or given insufficient support for the pupil to access it, progress and achievement were constrained.

196 All ICT teachers have a very secure knowledge of their subject. Lesson planning is good. Overall, the activities are well constructed and organised, and appropriate to the curriculum requirements. In most instances, teachers' expectations are appropriately high. However, given the pupils' previous experiences in ICT and the extent to which the vast majority of them have access to some of the software being used in school on their computers at home, some of the activities in Key Stage 3 ICT lessons are insufficiently rigorous or challenging.

197 All teachers have very good classroom procedures that ensure that pupils have the maximum amount of time on the computers. Teaching strategies are invariably appropriate in relation to the activity being covered, with clear aims being set at the start of most lessons. The effectiveness of the end of lessons, in summing up the key learning points or evaluating what has been achieved, is variable and needs attention.

198 Pupils are well managed and standards of discipline are good. Only occasionally are pupils inattentive and insufficiently challenged. On these occasions their progress is constrained.

199 A good pace is maintained in lessons with time signals used to ensure pupils finish their work on time and log off from the network effectively. Resources are well marshalled with hardware and software efficiently managed to support the curriculum requirements. Pupils' work is continually monitored during lessons and at the end of lessons with a view to ascertaining next steps in the teaching. Homework is used effectively to complement class work and further the learning of pupils.



200 In ICT lessons at Key Stage 3, there is a coherent scheme of work which teachers use to inform their short term planning. This ensures good continuity and progression. In the GCSE information studies course, there is a well constructed scheme based on the syllabus that achieves the same outcome. The department has a consistent approach to marking in both key stages, however, there is insufficient formative commentary on pupils' work. As the subject becomes more cross-curricular, the department needs to develop a secure and easy-to-use assessment system in order to ensure that reliable teacher assessments are made for the end of Key Stage 3. The subject record of achievement forms for ICT sent to parents are too vague and insufficiently relate to National Curriculum criteria.

201 ICT is used in most subjects in the curriculum at some point in Key Stage 3 as a support to the teaching and learning. It is particularly well used in mathematics, English, design technology, geography and art. When used within subjects, ICT has real relevance. In ICT lessons, all the planned activities are based on, or relate to, real world situations but they insufficiently draw on contexts which already exist in the curriculum content of other subjects in the school. In this key stage, most of the strands of ICT are covered. Well developed plans are in place to implement the control technology aspect in design technology but further attention is needed to guarantee that pupils have access to using ICT to monitor and sense data in science.

202 The Year 7 and 8 ICT lessons provide a satisfactory basic entitlement. In Year 9 the current arrangements for ICT provision through mathematics and design technology form a good model for future development but, as yet, only provide partial coverage of the ICT strands in that year. The school needs to monitor carefully the impact of these arrangements on standards of achievement in ICT capability for the end of Key Stage 3 before making further changes.

203 In Key Stage 4 a smaller range of subjects are involved in using ICT but all pupils have sufficient access to ICT either through their taught courses or as part of their private study to ensure statutory requirements are met in the subject. This access in Key Stage 4, for the majority of pupils, is however, insufficiently mapped or planned. The school has also successfully introduced an ICT key skills course for Year 12.

204 Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. In ICT lessons, differentiated tasks are available. For some of these tasks, pupils are offered the tasks with the data pre-entered so that data entry does not form a major obstacle to them reaching the genuine ICT core of a task. In other instances, the learning resources are modified to ensure appropriate access to the curriculum.

205 Parents make a significant and valuable contribution to ICT in the school through donations of equipment and on-going financial contributions through the Parent Teachers Association. Most parents provide their child with access to a computer at home. This has a significant impact on the quality of presentation of much of the pupils' work.

206 There is good systematic, thorough management of the subject on a day-to-day basis. The ICT policy group provides effective strategic direction for the development of the subject at a whole-school level. There is a whole-school development plan for ICT. It is comprehensive in its coverage and clearly identifies priorities and targets. Its implementation to date has been successful. However, it insufficiently encompasses evaluation and financial costings of these priorities.

207 There has been an effective programme of staff training that has improved the capacity of some staff to use ICT in their teaching. The ICT rooms provide an effective learning environment for the subject and the provision of ICT facilities elsewhere in the school further enhances this, in particular the library resources. There is a good range of curriculum software to support both ICT lessons and other subjects across the curriculum. Good access to the Internet is provided across the network. The school has a very good pupil:micro ratio of 6:1.

208 The school has invested heavily in ICT and continues to do so through a rolling programme of leases. In this same period, the results have been very high. This represents good value for money. It has made significant improvements in this subject since the last inspection. This has happened particularly in the areas of curriculum provision, the level of resources, strategic management, and the impact of all of these on standards. The key issue from that inspection has therefore been addressed.

### **Modern Languages (French and German)**

209 The modern languages faculty has suffered in recent years from staffing difficulties but has made significant progress since the appointment of the present head of faculty. The quality of teaching has improved and standards of attainment are rising.

210 Progress throughout both Key Stages 3 and 4 is satisfactory. During Key Stage 3 many of the highest attainers make good and often very good progress because they retain what they learn and have well developed study skills. Pupils of average and below average attainment, however, do not recall prior learning readily. They communicate successfully in brief phrases but do not learn to apply their knowledge and understanding of vocabulary and phrases in longer contexts. In lessons, however, most pupils make good progress because of good teaching. In a Year 8 German middle set, for example, they learned successfully to ask each other the times of their favourite television programmes, and in Year 9 German, they were quick to absorb and apply vocabulary of jobs and places of work. Usually, however, pressure of time reduces opportunities to practise speaking adequately. Pupils with special educational needs progress well in class, participating very well in speaking and listening activities. However, the main reason why they and most other pupils do not make better progress over time is insufficient time to practise skills, especially speaking.

211 Overall standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are average. Girls do considerably better than boys. Many higher attaining pupils in Year 9 in both French and German are well above average in all skills except speaking, on course for National Curriculum level 6 and above by the end of the key stage. They deduce meaning confidently and see links between previous and new learning. The most able can write freely in past and future tenses with a flair for including appropriate personal asides, some with a touch of humour. A sample of written work from this and last year shows a high level of creativity in a rich variety of forms. In Year 7, for example, there are illustrated posters of lost pets, and in Year 9, estate agents' property displays. Last year, Year 9 produced cartoon booklets, and, under test conditions, current Year 9 German pupils write accurate accounts of a shopping expedition including extended dialogue. Pupils begin to read independently following the new reading scheme. Standards of listening and writing are above average overall. Most pupils understand instructions and requests promptly and can at least extract necessary detail from recorded conversations. They can write short personal descriptions and spell simple phrases accurately. However, few pupils show the expected aural sensitivity in pronunciation and even fewer can speak at length from memory. There is little flair for language below the upper sets, and overall standards in class are not yet at the levels of last year. In the 1999 Key Stage 3 National Curriculum teacher assessments attainment was accurately assessed at above the national average, with most pupils at or above the national average of level 4.

212 In Key Stage 4, the very highest attainers continue to progress well, and many others make more noticeable gains because time allocation is more appropriate and because the modular GCSE course provides short-term incentives. Below the upper sets, however, progress is not good because too many pupils did not learn satisfactorily when they were in Key Stage 3. Their language learning skills are undeveloped. They know and recognise basic vocabulary but their grasp of grammatical structure and form is insecure, and they have not memorised enough language patterns to use in oral work. Speaking is the weakest of skills at all levels. However, as in Key Stage 3, progress is often good in lessons in both years because of good teaching. There are clear signs in Year 10, for example, that the high standards produced last year in Year 9 are being sustained and improved further. Pupils in a top set French can paraphrase when challenged, and confidently link statements and reasons. Their written sample shows fluency in reflections on the school timetable and

descriptions of favourite meals and future plans.

213 By the end of Key Stage 4 standards are average over both languages. A sample of coursework in modules already completed in Year 11 and observed lessons show that, as at Key Stage 3, the very highest attainers are well above average in all skills. In oral work, some can improvise and deal with the unexpected. Their writing is very good, rich in expression, and solid in structure. The most able challenge themselves to write at length, and personally. At other levels, many pupils have undeveloped skills, but are able to recognise vocabulary and pattern in limited contexts. Pronunciation standards are below average. Overall standards in Year 11 reflect those of recent results in the GCSE. At the end of Key Stage 4 standards at GCSE are average for both all and similar schools. They have risen slightly since 1995, but fluctuate from year to year and between languages, according to the ability of pupils choosing each language in Year 9. In 1998, standards in French were at the national average for similar schools and well above in German. In 1999, results were reversed. Over two-thirds of pupils obtained higher (A\*-C) grades in French, and half in German. It is good that the proportion of the year group entering each language is above average, and that there was a 100 per cent A\*-G success rate in both languages, above average, in both years. However, over recent years, pupils have performed less well in modern languages, particularly in French, than in their other subjects. Although some boys achieve the highest grades, the underachievement of boys in general is a particular concern. The gap between the standards of girls and boys is very significant and wider than that nationally.

214 Sixth form students make satisfactory progress. Those in Year 12 take time to adjust to the increased conceptual and grammatical demands of Advanced level, but by Year 13 the highest attainers progress well in making personal responses to literature and writing inventively in a range of styles. Results in the most recent Advanced Level examinations were in line with course requirements in French. There were no German entries. Currently, standards are across a similar range in Year 12, but higher in Year 13 German.

215 In summary, overall GCSE standards have improved a little over recent years, but they are not consistently high enough. There is too much variation year by year, and between languages. Where attainment and progress are now improving in Years 8 and 10, it is largely the result of improved teaching. Where progress is on occasions unsatisfactory, ineffective teaching fails to compensate for inadequate provision of lesson time.

216 Pupils respond well, often very well. Attitudes are positive, some younger pupils showing real enthusiasm, keen to show what they know and can say. Relationships are very good throughout, pupils collaborate well in paired and group tasks, and most sustain concentration well. They listen properly to each other and to the teacher. Higher attainers in particular are very organised and present their work neatly. Behaviour is very good, often impeccable: most pupils behave as required even where lessons are not motivating. Some lower attainers and especially pupils with special educational needs persevere well throughout. They enjoy matching sound and text and remembering vocabulary, and gain in self-esteem. All pupils benefit from opportunities to access computers for word processing and to use listening equipment independently in Key Stage 4, and are beginning to produce their own tapes. Most higher attainers develop very well, becoming independent users of the language as early as Year 9, and responding inventively in open-ended written tasks. However, numbers taking up the second language option in Key Stage 4 are disappointingly low. Modern languages have been unpopular in recent years because of much staffing instability and unsatisfactory teaching. There is still a residue of low-level disaffection in some middle and lower sets from Year 9 on. In general pupils have not heard the language used enough in class for communication or learnt through speaking it. As a result too many pupils at all ability levels undervalue the importance of speaking. They are either reticent, reluctant to take risks, or do not set themselves high enough standards of content, accuracy or pronunciation.

217 Teaching is good and has improved since the last inspection and following staff changes. It is at least good in two-thirds of lessons, and very good in a fifth. Occasionally it is unsatisfactory, with shortcomings in pace, expectations and challenge. The pattern is broadly similar in Key Stages 3 and 4, and in each language. Teaching in the sixth form is good. The good teaching is based on the highest of expectations, as shown in systematic and realistic use of the spoken language, a lively pace which keeps pupils actively involved, and instant correction of any inattention. Organisation and methods are very good, with a range of activities which promote effective learning in achievable stages, and develop skills, often in combination. The most significant of many common strengths is the quality of planning of differentiated tasks, outstanding at its best.

218 In the very best teaching, as seen in top sets in Year 9 and 10 French, teachers drill patterns crisply, using a range of tone and expression, and provide expertly planned exercises for different attainment levels within the set, including open-ended writing tasks for the very highest attainers. These challenge pupils appropriately and enable them to make good progress. Challenge is very good throughout when timed tasks are set, and when teachers use their knowledge of individual pupils to expect a more accurate or better pronounced response. In these lessons learning is both demanding and enjoyable. Resources are used effectively to support listening and oral work, and homework in provision is satisfactory. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, in a small minority of lessons, expectations are too low. The spoken language is not used for routine communication, which fails to challenge pupils' listening and speaking skills sufficiently. In these lessons, too, there is too much teacher-direction, activities do not require pupils to practise skills sufficiently, and the pace is far too pedestrian. Even where teaching is good, there is insufficient attention paid to the importance and accuracy of speaking. Although the use of the target language has improved since the last inspection, there is still a tendency in many lessons to use English unnecessarily, particularly in Year 7 and Key Stage 4. The core French coursebook encourages too much new learning through text. Although marking practice has improved and is often good, there is inconsistency. Some use of targets is good, but otherwise some pupils are not given sufficient guidance on how to improve, and the agreed mark scheme is not followed uniformly.

219 The faculty is led well. The recently appointed head of faculty has made considerable impact in little time and has ensured that, after some delay, issues identified at the time of the last inspection have now been addressed successfully. The curriculum and assessment procedures now comply fully and assessments are matched accurately to National Curriculum levels. Corporate working benefits from good in-service practice and is now a strength. Support for the newly qualified teacher is good. Staff are reflective and practical, and have identified appropriate strategies for continuing to raise standards to necessary levels. Further practical research is needed into appropriate grouping arrangements and learning strategies for boys, linked with continued development of the use of information technology for purposes other than word processing. The use of assessment data is improving in Key Stage 3, but it does not yet help the routine monitoring of pupils enough. Further development of classroom observation is needed to ensure that all staff learn from the sharing of best practice.

220 The department provides satisfactory value for money, but pupils need to make uniformly better progress. A major obstacle is curriculum provision in Key Stage 3. It is inappropriate for pupils with special needs and other lower attainers to study two modern languages throughout the key stage. It is also unrealistic for those in the middle range to make good progress on only two lessons a week. There are also deficiencies in resources and accommodation. There are sufficient books, but they are unsuitable for average and lower attaining French sets, and some copies are in poor condition. Sound reproduction is unsatisfactory in most rooms and in some blackout is inadequate.

## Music

221 Standards of attainment in music at the end of Key Stage 3 are good, exceeding the nationally average levels. Most pupils play keyboards fluently over a relatively wide range of notes, using appropriate fingering, and many can co-ordinate both hands. Ensemble skills which include the ability to listen to other parts and recover from mistakes without interrupting the continuity, are well established. In composing, pupils develop their ideas imaginatively, both in experimental work and when using conventional idioms, to produce well structured pieces. Younger pupils confidently used a minor scale to create the atmosphere for the words of a song about Noah. Pupils listen carefully to music they hear and are able to identify important detail. They confidently use a good range of technical vocabulary. At the end of Key Stage 4 standards of attainment are well above average and recent GCSE candidates achieved 100 per cent success in the range A\*-C. Pupils compose imaginatively in a variety of genres, and the work of higher attaining pupils is original in concept and has several memorable features. Many pupils perform with confidence and competence at a level well beyond the requirements of the terminal examination. However, there is insufficient attention to sensitive interpretation. Their aural and listening skills are very good. In the sixth form, where groups are small, standards of attainment, which are in line with students' abilities, are above average for the course. Students achieved results in the range A-D in the recent examination. Levels of research and scholarship in essay writing are very good, as is performing. Standards of composing, where students confidently use a wide range of devices, structures and genres, are good.

222 Pupils make very good progress early in Year 7 and good progress overall in Key Stage 3. Within a relatively short time of starting the course pupils learn to experiment with sound, make decisions and complete pieces. Within lessons pupils make good progress, quickly grasping concepts of variety and structure to produce pieces which convey particular moods. In one group composition pupils of higher attainment were able to organise selected sounds to create a lively and well structured piece which used a wide range of dynamics and texture. Older pupils make good progress in diatonic composing. In a Year 9 lesson, pupils of higher attainment, exploring variation form, were absorbed in the challenge of discovering a range of possible options. Pupils' performing and listening skills develop steadily across the key stage. Pupils with special educational needs generally make good progress but those who have difficulty in concentrating make unsatisfactory progress because of lack of individual support, and often disrupt the learning opportunities of other pupils. In Key Stage 4 pupils make very good progress over time in all aspects of the subject. They develop independence, imagination and control in composing and become confident performers. Their aural perception and critical listening skills become increasingly secure. Students in the sixth form make good progress in all components of the course. Particularly remarkable was the increase in depth of perception and style of presentation in essay writing observable as students rose to the challenge of the rigorous demands of the GCE A level course. Composing becomes steadily more imaginative, with secure control of form and economic development of ideas, and performing improves in style and sensitivity. Year 12 students made very good progress during one lesson seen, quickly developing individual techniques for score reading and applying their previous knowledge and understanding to identify features of the composer's style.

223 Pupils generally co-operate well, concentrate properly and use equipment carefully. They listen well to each other's performances and are supportive of one another. A small minority of younger boys in display immature attitudes in music and occasionally disrupt other pupils' learning opportunities. This situation is exacerbated by the difficult acoustics in the main teaching room.

224 The quality of teaching in lessons observed was almost always good or very good in equal proportions, and in one lesson teaching was excellent. It was never less than satisfactory. Teachers communicate with enthusiasm and are excellent role models in terms of academic rigour. They are consistently committed to higher achievement. Good questioning conveys constant challenge and high expectations, effectively reinforcing pupils' knowledge and developing their further understanding by encouraging them to build on previous knowledge and understanding and to think beyond the obvious. Intervention is well judged to provide appropriate support. Tasks are properly matched to pupils' ages and abilities, on-going assessment ensures that methods are adapted to meet individual needs, and procedures to track and monitor pupils' progress are used to modify the planned curriculum. Occasionally too much time is allocated to one task, and at times control is not sufficiently firm, causing loss of teaching time. Theory lessons are not firmly linked to practical demonstration and example. The quality of instrumental teaching, which involves around 200 pupils, is good.

225 The curriculum in music is satisfactory in almost all respects, but insufficient time is allocated for the A level course and for singing in Key Stage 3. There is a wide and challenging range of extra-curricular activities which are well supported by pupils of all ages, and concerts, recitals and major productions take place regularly. The school's musicians toured in Spain during the summer. Since the previous inspection there has been very good improvement in all areas of the department. It is efficiently managed, teaching is consistently good, and this, coupled with improved provision for music which includes newly built practice rooms, has had a significant effect in raising standards of attainment at all stages.

## **Physical education**

226 Pupils arrive with variable levels of basic skills though, for a significant number, football and netball skills are secure. As a result of good quality teaching they quickly establish good rates of progress as they move through Year 7. At the end of Key Stage 3, in lessons, the attainment of the majority of 14 year olds meets national expectations in the games and activities taught and is above average overall. A small number of boys are still working towards the national expectations in gymnastics. This is because of their limited prior experience in Years 7 and 8. No girls' gymnastics lessons were observed during the inspection. All pupils have a secure understanding of the need for appropriate warm-up before physical activity.

227 Department teacher assessment records indicate that, since 1997, the majority of pupils achieve national expectations at the end of Key Stage 3 with no differences between boys and girls. In 1999, however, a significant number of both boys and girls were still working towards national expectations. The proportion of those working at or beyond the national expectation was less than that seen nationally.

228 Across Key Stage 4 all pupils make very good progress in both their GCSE lessons as well as in lessons in the course that all pupils follow. Pupils refine and develop their individual and teamwork skills in invasion games such as association football, netball and rugby union. Progress in other activities is also very good. In trampoline lessons, for example, pupils are developing their competencies in both individual and synchronised sequence work.

229 Standards are again above average at the end of Key Stage 4, where the attainment of the great majority of 16 year olds in lessons meets national expectations. A significant minority attains beyond the national expectation. The attainment of those pupils studying GCSE physical education has a positive impact on overall standards of attainment at the end of the key stage in the course that all pupils follow. This is particularly so in pupils' knowledge and understanding of the principles and rules of games such as hockey and rugby. There are no significant differences in attainment between boys and girls.

230 Since 1997 groups of pupils have had the opportunity to follow the GCSE physical education course. The proportion of pupils gaining A\* - C grade passes in 1998 was 84 per cent and in 1999 was 88 per cent. In comparison with the average for all maintained schools these proportions are very high. The comparatively small number of girls entered for the exam does not make for sound comparisons in terms of gender.

231 GCE Advanced level physical education has recently been introduced and post-16 students are making good progress in lessons in relation to syllabus requirements. In an anatomy and physiology lesson, for example, Year 12 students were developing their knowledge and understanding of the relationship between cardiac output, heart rate and stroke volume. Year 13 students, meanwhile, were developing their knowledge and understanding of exercise physiology through statistical analysis of a split-timed run over 100m. The first group of students is due to take the examination next year.

232 Though no pupils identified as having special educational needs were observed with additional help, they receive appropriate support, are well integrated and make progress in line with that of other pupils.

233 Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good. They are very well motivated and have a positive attitude to the subject both in their lessons and extra-curricular activities. Pupils respond particularly well to the teachers' consistent high expectations of good discipline, behaviour and commitment to practising and refining skills. When given responsibility to lead aspects of warm-up or coaching and evaluating one another, pupils show respect for the efforts of one another. They handle equipment and apparatus safely and responsibly in relation to their own safety and that of others. Pupils respect the ethos within which the subject is taught.

234 The quality of teaching is good. In over 30 per cent of lessons observed the quality of teaching was very good, in 40 per cent of lessons it was good and in the remainder was satisfactory. There are no significant differences in the quality of teaching between the key stages. Practical lessons are very well structured and well planned for the range of pupils' attainment levels. GCSE and GCE Advanced level lessons are well planned in relation to syllabus requirements.

235 Clear introductions to lessons ensure pupils are aware of what is expected of them. In practical lessons pupils are helped further in this respect when skills are broken down and demonstrated: thus, pupils are made further aware of what is expected of them and what they have to do in order to make progress. In a Year 11 trampoline lesson, for example, this method was very effectively implemented when teaching the forward turnover. Though warm-ups are a feature of all lessons, aspects of stretching are not always fully developed, for example, the development of Key Stage 3 pupils' knowledge of the names of muscles and muscle groups being stretched. This would be of particular benefit to those who opt to take the GCSE course in Key Stage 4.

236 Pupils are given the opportunity to reinforce and extend existing skills and knowledge in both theory and practical lessons. Teachers use appropriate terminology and through effective questioning they not only encourage pupils' speaking and listening skills, but also identify the extent of their knowledge and understanding. All teachers successfully convey the expectation that all can have success in practical lessons, thus boosting pupils' confidence when faced with additional progression and challenge. In a Year 7 mixed gymnastics lesson, for example, the group was provided with a good range of tasks related to their individual physical capabilities, hence all were able to make progress. Pupils are given sufficient opportunities to be involved in the evaluation of one another. In a Year 9 boys' gymnastics lesson pupils working in small groups effectively evaluated each other when developing their pair and group sequences. They were therefore developing a clearer understanding of what they had to do to make further progress.

237 The provision in the great majority of lessons, both practical and theory, of a planned and structured variety of activities helps ensure pupils and students stay on task and are able to refine and consolidate both existing and new skills. On occasion, though, teachers do not always fully challenge pupils when these skills, having been successfully executed in small group practices, are not then applied in competitive situations such as small sided games at the end of a lesson. Though teachers are generally adept at ensuring pupils are fully involved throughout the lesson, there are a few occasions when the few non-participants are not as fully involved as they should be, for instance, in whole group introductions and evaluative and summative sessions.

238 Effective and timely intervention by teachers ensures pupils are making progress and understand further what is required of them. In all lessons, good use is made of praise, encouragement and constructive criticism thus ensuring pupils and students are becoming aware of their capabilities. Effective whole group summative sessions at the end of lessons are also helpful in this respect. Appropriate homework is set for the GCSE and GCE Advanced level courses. The quality and consistency of marking is, though, somewhat variable.

239 The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. A strength of the department is extra-curricular provision that further enhances pupils' learning experiences. The activities provided include both recreational and inter-school competitive fixtures, including Saturdays. As a result of this, last year the Year 9 netball team were district champions and individuals represented county sides in rugby, hockey (both boys and girls) and cricket. Although there are effective procedures for assessing pupils in the course that all follow, there is a lack of clarity at Key Stage 4 as to which two activities the pupils have chosen to be assessed in.

240 The head of department, who is also a head of year, provides effective leadership and has ensured progress has been made and that the issues raised in the previous report have been addressed where possible. The department is now part of the performing arts faculty and there have been changes in staffing: one new teacher joined the department last year and a newly qualified teacher joined this year. Induction procedures within the department have ensured the quality of teaching has remained good thus ensuring overall standards of attainment have been maintained in the course that all pupils follow. Some aspects of accommodation remain areas for concern: the outdoor changing facilities are still in poor condition and are a health and hygiene issue; and there is still insufficient indoor accommodation when wet weather does not permit the use of the outdoor areas. Although GCE Advanced level physical education has been introduced there are still insufficient formal opportunities for recreational activities or for other accredited courses. Other positive aspects referred to in the last report have been maintained.

## **Religious education**

241 On entry pupils' levels of attainment are above those expected in Hertfordshire's Agreed Syllabus for religious education. Over the key stage the majority, including those with special educational needs, make good progress. By the end of the key stage they achieve levels that are above the expected range, some at higher levels. Pupils are enthusiastic, committed to and involved in their learning. They make gains in knowledge and understanding and are beginning to develop skills of applying their learning to new situations. They use religious terminology accurately, have a good recall of work previously engaged in and can sometimes make comparisons of similarities and differences between different religious beliefs and practices. Pupils complete tasks diligently and take part in discussion and group tasks conscientiously.



242 Progress made in Key Stage 4 by the small number following a GCSE in religious studies is very good and leads to results that consistently exceed national course averages. Individuals' results also often exceed the average gained in other GCSE subjects. Pupils deepen their knowledge and understanding of the religions studied as well as developing skills of interpretation, analysis and empathy. The standard of written and oral work is often very good with examples of detailed and perceptive work common. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in the general religious education course where they explore a range of religious, social and moral issues. By the end of the key stage pupils are attaining standards expected by the Agreed Syllabus with many at higher levels. Many attain good grades in the personal health and social education certificate they take to which the religious education course contributes. Attitudes to learning are positive. They work well together, complete tasks usually thoroughly and are sensitive to the range of beliefs and ideas of their peers.

243 Progress made by the small number following the A level religious studies course is very good. Standards achieved are above average for the national course expectations. They also consistently achieve above average in relation to the other subjects studied. Religious education is a short module within the school's general studies programme in the sixth form. Standards are above expectations in relation to their knowledge and understanding of the issues covered and progress is good.

244 Pupils' attitudes to learning in religious education are good and often very good throughout the school. They show interest and are attentive. They work well individually, in pairs, small groups and as a class. They are prepared to put forward their own viewpoints and listen very respectfully to those of others.

245 The quality of teaching is good. In all lessons seen the quality of teaching was satisfactory or better with three quarters being good or very good. Positive relationships, good discipline and high expectations contribute to good quality teaching. Secure subject knowledge leading to detailed and probing questioning, particularly with Year 9 and above, enhances learning. Lesson planning is satisfactory but there is insufficient focus on the learning outcomes to be achieved during individual lessons and units of work. A range of teaching strategies is evident but occasionally an over-reliance on whole group discussion and written task completion slows the pace for some pupils. A range of resources including departmentally produced work and information sheets, text books, religious artefacts and videos is used appropriately. The assessment of pupils' work is effective, particularly in examination classes and through the assignments set in core religious education in Key Stage 4. Teachers mark work following departmental policy. The department is poised to incorporate into its assessment procedures proposed developments to the revised Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus in order to enhance practice further. Homework makes a satisfactory contribution to learning across all years.

246 Teachers are suitably qualified with a wide and secure knowledge and understanding of the subject. The department is well led by an experienced teacher and ably supported by committed colleagues. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection in appointing a second religious education specialist and by increasing the time allocation over Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form general studies programme. Unsatisfactory progress has been made with regard to meeting statutory requirements for Key Stage 4 pupils where the time allocation for the core course remains too low to meet the full requirements of the Agreed Syllabus. The department makes an excellent and effective contribution to the school's ethos for learning and provides good value for money.

## PART C: INSPECTION DATA

### SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

247 Fourteen inspectors, including one lay inspector, spent a total of 52 days in the school. They spent a total of just over 146 hours observing 192 lessons or part lessons, including all subjects and courses taught at the school. Inspectors also observed assemblies, form registration periods and the general routines of the school. They talked in depth with six pupils from each year group and perused the written work of a sample of pupils representing the full range of attainment in the school. Inspectors held structured interviews with several members of the governing body, including the chairman and vice-chairman, chairmen of committees and a group of parent governors. Structured interviews were also held with the headteacher and other senior staff, as well as with all heads of subject departments and other teaching and support staff.

### DATA AND INDICATORS

#### Pupil data

	Number of pupils on roll (full-time equivalent)	Number of pupils with statements of SEN	Number of pupils on school's register of SEN	Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals
Y7 - Y13	1019	17	163	26

#### Teachers and classes

##### Qualified teachers (Y7 - Y13)

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent)	60.42
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.87

##### Education support staff (Y7 - Y13)

Total number of education support staff	14
Total aggregate hours worked each week	248.5

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:	77.1
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KS3	26
KS4	21

## Financial data

Financial year:

1998-9
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	£
Total Income	2,572,433
Total Expenditure	2,524,616
Expenditure per pupil	2,507
Balance brought forward from previous year	7,415
Balance carried forward to next year	55,232

## PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out:

1022

Number of questionnaires returned:

166

### 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	22	63	12	2	1
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	32	58	4	5	1
The school handles complaints from parents well	14	56	22	4	4
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	14	59	18	9	-
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	22	53	14	10	1
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	34	58	4	3	1
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	33	47	16	3	1
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	24	54	9	8	5
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	28	57	11	4	-
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	22	67	8	2	1
My child(ren) like(s) school	33	57	8	2	-