

# ERRATUM

**Page 13** – The first sentence in paragraph 14 should be changed to read ‘The level of permanent **and fixed-term** exclusions is about average for a school of this size and type and this sanction is used appropriately.’

## INSPECTION REPORT

### **KINGSDOWN SCHOOL**

Hyde Road, Stratton St Margaret,  
Swindon, Wiltshire, SN2 7SH

LEA area: Swindon

Unique reference number: 126502

Headteacher: Mr D Williams

Reporting inspector: Mr G Price  
2555

Dates of inspection: 15 – 18 May 2000

Inspection number: 184886

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of students:	11 to 16
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Hyde Road Stratton St Margaret Swindon Wiltshire
Postcode:	SN2 7SH
Telephone number:	01793 822284
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr R Field
Date of previous inspection:	15 May 1995

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Gerry Price	Registered inspector	mathematics	What sort of school is it?
			How high are standards?
			How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
			How well is the school led and managed?
			What should the school do to improve further?
Jane Chesterfield	Lay inspector		How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Bob Thomas	Team inspector	modern foreign languages	How well are students taught?
Louise Brierley	Team inspector	English	
		English as an additional language	
Alan Rawlings	Team inspector	mathematics – support	
David Hardcastle	Team inspector	science	
Tony Pearce	Team inspector	geography	
		history	
Bernard Cooper	Team inspector	design and technology	
Mary Schley	Team inspector	art	
Douglas Potts	Team inspector	music	
Alan Brine	Team inspector	religious education	How well does the school care for its students?
Jenny Drake	Team inspector	physical education	
Bill Robson	Team inspector	equality of opportunity	
		special educational needs	
Pamela Craven	Team inspector	information technology	

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## REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>7</b>
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Students' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY</b>	
<b>HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?</b>	<b>11</b>
The school's results and achievements	
Students' attitudes, values and personal development	
<b>HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO STUDENTS?</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES</b>	<b>29</b>

## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

This is a comprehensive school for boys and girls aged 11 to 16 years which draws most of its students from Stratton St Margaret and adjacent communities in north-east Swindon. It is larger than average with about 1150 students and has grown by about 200 since it was inspected in 1995. Each year a handful of students registered at the school are educated at the nearby Stratton Education Centre. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is lower than the national average although the school serves an area which is more socially disadvantaged than average. The school has an above-average number of students on the register of special education needs (SEN) but the proportion with SEN statements is below average. The proportion of students for whom English is an additional language is a bit higher than in most schools. Results of reading tests and Key Stage 2 tests indicate that students start at the school with attainment levels close to the national average but that a substantial minority has weak literacy skills.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

The school provides students with an effective education which enables most to make good progress. As a result of sensitive and effective leadership and the professionalism and commitment of staff, standards have improved steadily. The school provides good value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- the personal and social needs of students are supported well
- a very good range of opportunities to exercise responsibility prepares students well for adult life
- standards in art, drama and music are particularly high and students achieve well compared with their other subjects
- students are particularly well prepared for GCSE mathematics and many achieve their best result in this subject
- effective specialist teaching enables those with weak literacy skills to make rapid progress
- financial planning is very good

#### **What could be improved**

- the range of opportunities and strategies used to foster students' intellectual curiosity and capacity for independent study
- the monitoring, evaluation and support for teaching and learning
- standards in information technology (IT)

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

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION**

The school was last inspected in May 1995. Since then there has been a rise in students' attainment in line with the national picture. Last year's GCSE results were the school's best ever and twice as many students now gain A\* and A grades than at the time of the last inspection. There has been a considerable improvement in the quality of teaching which is on a par with schools nationally. Work is usually appropriately matched to students' needs and able students receive a more consistent challenge than at the time of the last inspection, although there remains scope for further improvement. The school now has a full range of policies which are helping to ensure more consistent practice in the school. The monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance is now much more thorough and systematic. Statutory requirements not fully met at the time of the last inspection have



been tackled although the school still does not provide a daily act of collective worship.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16-year-olds based on average point scores in GCSE.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	C	C	C	D

  

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

While the average GCSE points score is broadly in line with the national average, students do not achieve as well as those in schools with similar numbers of students entitled to free school meals. They make good progress in Key Stage 3 and their attainment at the end of Year 9 is well above average and in line with similar schools. Achievement is satisfactory in Key Stage 4. GCSE results improved substantially in 1999 with the proportion gaining five or more A\* - C grades being above average. Standards in English are about the national average and in mathematics and science they are above average. The work of the current Year 11 suggests that this improvement is being sustained.

## STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Most students have positive attitudes towards school and their studies.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is good in lessons and very good around the school.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships among students are good. Older students show confidence and maturity in their dealings with fellow students and adults.
Attendance	Close to the national average overall but below 90% in Year 11.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good

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

Teaching is good overall. Of the 169 lessons seen, 94% were satisfactory or better, 17%

very good and 2% excellent. There was 6% of teaching which was unsatisfactory but no poor teaching was seen. It is good in mathematics and satisfactory in science and English. There is some very effective teaching of literacy and numeracy skills but this is not consistently so. There is a great deal of high quality teaching in art, music and drama. Students' learning is satisfactory. However, their intellectual curiosity and capacity for independent learning is underdeveloped.

#### OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Students are provided with a broad and balanced curriculum. In Key Stage 4, the modular enrichment curriculum is successful in its aim to provide wider learning opportunities. Planning for progression in students' learning of IT skills is weak.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Satisfactory. Good provision to help improve students' reading but progress in geography, modern foreign languages and religious education is hindered by withdrawal from some lessons for extra reading.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Satisfactory overall. Provision for social and moral development is good. There are good cultural enrichment opportunities but insufficient attention is paid to other cultures. Provision for students' spiritual development is unsatisfactory.
How well the school cares for its students	The pastoral system's strength is in the support provided for students' personal development. Academic support is developing quite well but assessment procedures are unsatisfactory in some subjects.

#### HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides good leadership and has established a cohesive and mutually supportive senior management team. A stronger focus on academic achievement is bringing improved results at GCSE.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors provide good support for the school and have established thorough systems for judging the effectiveness of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Evaluation of performance is thorough and systematic but not yet sufficiently related to improvements in learning. Arrangements for monitoring and supporting teaching are underdeveloped.
The strategic use of resources	Financial planning is good. The school ensures that its resources are targeted upon development priorities. It has adequate accommodation and learning resources and sufficient staff. However, library provision is inadequate.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• students are expected to work hard and achieve their best</li><li>• students make good progress</li><li>• the teaching is good</li><li>• they are comfortable about approaching the school with questions or problems</li><li>• their children like school</li><li>• the school is well led and managed</li><li>• students are helped to become mature and responsible</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the arrangements for homework</li><li>• the range of activities out of lessons</li><li>• the extent to which the school involves parents</li><li>• the information they receive about students' progress</li></ul>

The evidence of the inspection confirms parents' positive views of the school. Their confidence in the headteacher is justified and the school has been successful in establishing a climate which parents find welcoming. There is a great deal of effective teaching and the school has good plans for bringing more teaching up to the standard of the best. Most staff set homework regularly and there are many examples of this consolidating or extending what has been learnt in lessons. There is a good range of activities for students to attend out of lesson time which is comparable with other secondary schools' provision. There are a number of ways in which parents are involved in the work of the school and arrangements for their involvement are satisfactory. In the past there has been some inconsistency in the quality of reports of students' progress. An improved format for reports is being introduced and this is intended to address this matter. Students take on increased responsibilities through the school and it is successful in helping them to become mature and responsible young adults.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and achievements**

- 1 Since the school was last inspected, GCSE results have improved in line with the national trend. Last summer, the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE A\*-C grades rose sharply to a record level for the school and was above the national average. The proportion of students gaining at least five graded results at GCSE is also above average. This is a good achievement given the above-average numbers of students with special educational needs. The average total GCSE points score per student is about average. GCSE results are not as good as in schools having a similar proportion of students entitled to free school meals, although such comparisons are of limited value in an area of high employment but relative social disadvantage.
- 2 In 1999, GCSE results in mathematics and science were above the national average and about average in the case of English. Results were at or above the national average in all other subjects with the exception of music where students nevertheless achieved well. In art, German and mathematics generally speaking students did better than they did in their other subjects. Students' results in English Language, French and home economics were not as good as their results in the other subjects they took. Overall, girls achieved better results than boys but the gap in their performance was less than the difference nationally. Exceptions to this were results in English, geography and history where boys were much less successful than girls.
- 3 The number of students gaining A\* or A grades has doubled over the last five years and is now close to the national average. The school has, therefore, had considerable success in tackling one of the key issues arising from its last inspection. Although there remains scope for some students to be extended further and attain at a higher level, gifted and talented students achieve well.
- 4 Last summer's Key Stage 3 test results were above average for English and well above average for mathematics and science. These results are at least in line with the performance of schools with similar numbers of students entitled to free school meals. There has been a steady improvement in results which has been broadly in line with the national trend. Assessment of students' attainment in other subjects at the end of the key stage show standards are at or above national averages with the exception of information and communication technology (IT) where standards are very low.
- 5 The school set targets for the current Year 11 students which it believed to be ambitious. It is now confident that these can be exceeded substantially. The current performance of Year 10 students suggests that its targets for 2001 are challenging but achievable.
- 6 During the inspection a careful analysis was made of students' current work, including Year 11 'mock' examination papers and coursework. This points to the sharp rise in students' performance last summer being sustained at a level above the national average. In Key Stage 3, current standards are average or better in nearly all subjects; they are above average in science, modern foreign languages and music and well above average in mathematics and art. Standards in design and technology

are average overall with work in resistant materials being good but unsatisfactory in the case of home economics. Current standards in religious education (RE) are below expectations in Key Stage 3 but, for those taking GCSE, they are in line with expectations at the end of Key Stage 4. There is insufficient evidence to make a judgement about attainment in the statutory RE programme. The standard of current work is at or above the national average in most subjects at Key Stage 4. Art, music and drama are particular strengths with many students producing work of high quality. Standards in IT are very low in both key stages because there is little focus on raising standards year on year. This needs urgent attention.

- 7 Generally speaking, students' achievement is satisfactory in both key stages; in mathematics, modern foreign languages and music it is good and in art, very good. In religious education, the large numbers following the GCSE course are achieving well, but achievement is unsatisfactory for those who receive only the limited statutory RE provision. Progress in electronics in Key Stage 4 is unsatisfactory. In the case of IT, progress throughout the school is poor.
- 8 Students with special educational needs (SEN) make very good progress in basic literacy skills at Key Stage 3 when withdrawn for small group tuition by the learning support department. However, this is at the expense of progress in some of the subjects from which they are withdrawn, especially in modern languages and RE. Their progress in modern languages through both key stages is unsatisfactory and lower-attaining students achieve significantly lower grades at GCSE than in the other subjects they take. In mathematics, SEN students make good progress over time and in art they often achieve higher standards than could be predicted. The few students for whom English is an additional language also make good progress.
- 9 Standards of literacy are satisfactory. Students are able to speak clearly and fluently when responding to questions, although at times responses are not fully developed because teachers' questioning makes insufficient intellectual demand upon them. They establish good reading habits and some cope well with demanding texts, although there is not always sufficient depth in their analysis of literature. Able students produce written work of a high standard but those whose literacy skills are less well developed are less confident in committing their ideas to paper. Overall, standards of spelling, punctuation and grammar are about average.
- 10 Basic number work, algebraic and graphical skills are learned well. However, other subjects, such as science, do not make sufficient use of students' mathematical learning and consequently they do not have sufficient opportunity to apply this in other contexts. There are also examples of students using bar graphs and scatter diagrams in subjects other than mathematics when there is too little data to make their use worthwhile.

### **Students' attitudes, values and personal development**

- 11 The school has been successful in maintaining high standards in this area of its work since the time of the last inspection. Most students of all ages have good, positive attitudes to the school and take full advantage of the opportunities it offers them. They are keen to take part in sports or musical events, such as the concert held during the inspection, and pleased to represent their fellow students on the School Council. They are attentive in lessons, listen carefully to their teachers and apply themselves thoroughly to their work. Students are often passive in their approach to studying unless teachers spur them on to use their own initiative, which happens only

in the best lessons.

- 12 Students' behaviour is good in lessons and very good around the school. They are aware of the standards of behaviour expected in lessons and have the self-discipline to live up to these. As a result, teachers waste very little time establishing order in class. Misbehaviour in lessons is rare. Students are obedient and amenable, and generally do as they are told. They focus on their tasks even when these are too easy or not very interesting and students rarely exhibit disruptive behaviour. Several students with special educational needs often require close supervision in lessons. They can concentrate and collaborate quite well in group work but often find it difficult to take responsibility for their own learning.
- 13 At break and lunchtime, students behave very well around the buildings and the site. The school is a sociable and civilised place to be. Students are well-mannered and sensible in the dining hall, and orderly out in the grounds, so that those of all ages can feel safe. They use the space available well, for playing sport, relaxing and studying, and they generally treat their surroundings with respect. However, they often leave litter lying around and this creates unnecessary work for the caretaking staff.
- 14 The level of permanent exclusions is about average for a school of this size and type and this sanction is used appropriately. There are few instances of bullying and students and parents are happy that these are dealt with swiftly and firmly. There is no evidence of sexist or racist behaviour.
- 15 Relationships between students are good. They get on well together and co-operate well with one another in class. Older students show confidence and maturity in their dealings with fellow students and adults. This was very much in evidence in a Year 10 lesson from the modular enrichment course. Here students had to work together to solve a range of problems, and successfully negotiated the approach and the methods amongst themselves. There is generally a sense of mutual respect between students and their teachers. Students also show respect for the differing beliefs and views of others. In a Year 7 religious education lesson, for example, students were genuinely interested in learning about Sikhism and showed sensitivity towards those features which were alien to them.
- 16 Students willingly take on responsibility around the school and are happy to play their part in helping the school day run smoothly. During the inspection, for example, Year 10 students had just started training to be prefects. They took this role seriously and showed pride in their new status.
- 17 The level of students' attendance at the school is satisfactory overall, other than in Year 11. It is in line with the national average and is at a similar level to the time of the last inspection, although it had risen slightly in the interim. Most absence is caused by illness and the amount of absence for unacceptable reasons is below the national average. Attendance in Year 11 is unsatisfactory, as it has consistently stayed below 90% throughout the year. The school has worked hard to combat this in conjunction with the educational welfare service and has been successful with a number of students. Punctuality is also satisfactory. The majority of students arrive at school on time and most make the effort to get to lessons promptly.

## HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

- 18 The quality of teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now good at both key stages. Almost six out of ten lessons are good or better. Nearly one lesson in five is very good and two lessons in a hundred are excellent. There is no poor or very poor teaching and only six lessons in a hundred are unsatisfactory. There is little difference between the two key stages although there is a shade more good, very good and excellent teaching in Key Stage 4. The best teaching is in art, where no teaching is unsatisfactory and more than nine out of every ten lessons are at least good, of which well over half are very good or excellent. There is also a good deal of very effective teaching in music and mathematics.
- 19 The most effective lessons are characterised by a warmth of relationship and depth of mutual respect between students and teachers. In these lessons students respond with high levels of motivation, confidence and independence. In many of the very good lessons, teachers are effective in sharing their objectives for learning with students and, in particular, in placing current learning within the context of what students have already learned and will go on to study later. In this way, many students have a very clear idea of the direction of their learning and what is expected of them. This is especially common in many geography lessons. The most effective teachers are skilful in developing students' thinking through the questions they ask, especially in art. They encourage students to develop their responses and to explain what they are thinking rather than being satisfied with simple answers. For instance, in a Year 8 mathematics lesson, the teacher's probing questions helped students to strengthen their understanding of percentages. Many teachers, across the range of subjects, give carefully pitched and timed explanations which motivate students and enable them to move swiftly to a depth of understanding which underpins their developing knowledge and skills. Students also often receive clear individual feedback which helps them to know not only how well they have done but also how to develop their thinking and learning to a higher level.
- 20 The school's recent emphasis on equipping students better to meet the challenge of GCSE has been successful but this now needs to be built on so that more students are exposed to the level of intellectual challenge experienced in the best lessons. The overwhelming feature of otherwise satisfactory teaching is a certain narrowness of approach which has the effect of consolidating students' knowledge at the expense of extending their independence and initiative. The small amount of unsatisfactory teaching is due to a range of factors, principal of which are low expectations of students' performance and a mis-match of work to students' level of attainment. In many subjects at Key Stage 3, particularly geography, history, IT, RE and science, teachers' use of day-to-day assessment is unsatisfactory. Consequently, it is more difficult for teachers to pitch work accurately to students' levels of attainment and, although students' understanding of their progress is satisfactory, it is not made sufficiently clear how they can improve. On the other hand, assessment in mathematics is particularly effective in this respect. Homework is set and marked thoroughly, and in most classes teachers use it regularly to develop students' learning, although there are occasions when it is of less value in helping students to make progress.
- 21 The teaching of reading, writing and spelling to students with special educational needs in withdrawal classes is good. Teachers in the learning support department have a good understanding of how to teach basic literacy and numeracy skills. They make good use of assessment to ensure that they provide students with work at an

appropriate level. They manage students with potentially challenging behaviour very well. In mainstream classes, subject teachers often provide good individual support for these students. They take into account students' needs and difficulties to make sure that they can participate fully in lessons. Since the previous inspection, planning between teachers and education support assistants (ESAs) has improved. Teachers now involve ESAs well in most lessons. For instance, in a Year 7 mathematics lesson, a group of students were given good additional help while the teacher concentrated on the rest of the class. ESAs have good relationships with students and usually help them effectively.

- 22 The quality of students' learning is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4. Students are keen to learn and work hard, for the most part. They concentrate well and make an effort to succeed. Their intellectual curiosity is, however, often limited and needs to be stimulated more by their teachers. Too often, students' learning remains at a superficial level, because the spark of desire to extend their knowledge and understanding has not been ignited. However, there are many instances across the curriculum in which individual teachers are skilful and determined in probing and extending students' learning. In these cases, the students respond energetically to the intellectual challenge and produce work of real depth and quality.
- 23 To further improve the quality of students' learning, the school needs to capitalise on the questioning skills of its most effective teachers and extend and refine the range of teaching strategies used.

#### **HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO STUDENTS?**

- 24 The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum which meets the needs of its students. It has established good links with the primary schools from which it draws most students and there is a good range of joint activities designed to ensure continuity and progression in students' learning. There are also effective links with local colleges of further education.
- 25 At Key Stage 3, the planning for each subject is generally sound. Schemes of work are designed to ensure adequate coverage of the National Curriculum although too little attention is paid to investigative work in science. Throughout the school the planning to teach skills in information and communication technology (IT) is weak. The integration of this into students' learning of other subjects is currently leading to fragmented experiences of IT and too little attention being given to ensuring progression in learning. As a result standards in IT are very low.
- 26 There are a number of distinctive features in Key Stage 4 which enable the curriculum to be tailored to the needs of different groups of students. Students take fewer GCSE subjects than in some other schools to allow time for broader study. This partly explains why students' average total GCSE points score is below that of similar schools, since the schools with which Kingsdown is compared include some where students take more GCSEs and so can gain a higher points score.
- 27 By requiring students to take one less GCSE examination, the school creates time for a Modular Enrichment Course of short study units. Some of these are compulsory thus ensuring that able students have sufficient time to study more advanced mathematics; speaking and listening within the English syllabus are given particular attention; and those not taking religious education (RE) as a GCSE option course still



receive some RE lessons. The amount of RE taught in Key Stage 4 has increased since the school was last inspected but still too little to allow full coverage of the Agreed Syllabus. Other units are available as a guided choice. Those being taught at the time of the inspection were providing worthwhile opportunities which could not easily be provided as a GCSE option. For instance, a problem-solving course is clearly having a beneficial effect on the motivation of some disaffected students.

- 28 Those students who would find a full programme of GCSE courses too demanding are able to take an alternative course and this is giving a considerable boost to their personal development and their self-esteem. The flexibility that the school has built into the Key Stage 4 curriculum goes a long way to ensuring that the courses they study are relevant to students' needs although there is scope for building in a stronger element of vocational learning. Nevertheless, the quality of careers education and guidance is good and the curriculum provides a comprehensive and coherent experience for students. They are well prepared for the work experience programme provided through effective links with local businesses.
- 29 The learning support department continues to provide effectively for students with special educational needs through a corrective reading and spelling programme in Years 7 and 8. This takes place during registration each morning and in three lessons each week when students are withdrawn from various subjects. Students' learning and progress in these subjects is disrupted as a result, especially in geography, modern foreign languages and religious education. There are satisfactory arrangements to help students improve their levels of numeracy. In Key Stage 4 the school has introduced suitable alternative courses for lower-attaining students since the previous inspection. Courses towards initial awards and certificates of achievement are now available so that all students have the opportunity of gaining qualifications.
- 30 The school provides a good range of sporting and other extra-curricular opportunities. Additional support for learning outside the school day is also provided through revision classes and other informal arrangements. Some students take an extra GCSE in drama or art by attending voluntary classes after school and achieve high standards. While some parents would like the school to provide a wider range of activities, there is already a good choice.
- 31 The provision made for personal and social education (PSE) is satisfactory overall although the quality of its delivery is very inconsistent. The programme includes an appropriate range of work and is planned by the Heads of Year and their tutor teams with guidance from some specialist 'network groups' of staff. There are currently some shortcomings in the degree to which tutors have a shared understanding of the value and purpose of PSE. The quality of the planning and the resources provided are variable. Successful teaching of the course is heavily dependent on the skill of individual tutors. Some are confident in their use of appropriate strategies and methodology and students in their tutor groups have positive opportunities to mix and work together, develop their social skills and to explore important issues. Elsewhere, students are passive in lessons and indicate that they do not find the work challenging.
- 32 Tutors also see their group for an extended tutor period lasting 25 minutes on those days when there is not an assembly. While this enables them to get to know students well on a personal level, this time is not yet being used effectively to realise the school's intention that tutors are the 'learning managers' for the students in their tutor

group.

- 33 The overall provision made for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. The provision for social and moral development is good and for cultural development it is satisfactory. The provision for spiritual development is underdeveloped and therefore, unsatisfactory.
- 34 The range of planned opportunities to enhance students' spiritual development is limited. Some assemblies incorporate moments of reflection on stimulating material about more profound aspects of human experience but this not consistent. Providing for spiritual development is one of the strengths of the art department where students are able to explore and reflect on their own lives in a personal way. Religious education (RE) makes a sound contribution to this aspect of development. Elsewhere however, there is limited evidence of any significant planned provision for, or clear understanding of, spiritual development. In many subject areas there are restricted opportunities for developing an enthusiasm for learning and providing for independent, creative thinking.
- 35 The provision to foster students' moral development is good. Teachers set a good example and very clear expectations about behaviour provide a secure framework within which students develop their moral awareness. A sense of respect for others underpins the life of the school community. The good range of charity work supported by the school develops students' sense of moral responsibility. There are more specific opportunities for students to discuss and think through moral issues in some assemblies and in a range of subjects notably English, RE and geography.
- 36 The opportunities to enrich students' social development are good overall. The wide range of extra-curricular activities, the very active School Council and the OCR Initial Award course at Key Stage 4 all provide particularly good contexts for students to develop their social skills and responsibility. The prefect system is well developed and there are good opportunities for older students to support those who are younger. The PSE programme makes a satisfactory contribution and opportunities to explore social issues and citizenship are provided in RE, English, drama and aspects of the Modular Enrichment Course at Key Stage 4. Opportunities for students to develop social skills through collaborative group work and exercising responsibility for their learning are satisfactory but could be extended further.
- 37 The provision for cultural development is sound overall. The contribution made by all the arts subjects and physical education is strong and this is further enriched by the good extra-curricular provision in these areas. For example, the quality and range of extra-curricular music is good. The school arranges a number of visits and enrichment activities to, for example, Barcelona and Berlin as well as fieldwork in geography, history and RE. The school is less proactive in planning for the cultural development of the students in relation to their exploration of non-Western traditions.

#### **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?**

- 38 The overall quality of the care provided for students is one of the strengths of the school.
- 39 There are clear policies for child protection and health and safety. The designated Child Protection Officer has a good awareness of the appropriate procedures and ensures that all staff are informed of their responsibilities in relation to child

protection.

- 40 The practice surrounding health and safety is good and the concerns raised at the last inspection have all been addressed. All safety equipment is checked regularly and risk assessments are undertaken appropriately. The procedures for dealing with accidents and safety concerns are fully implemented and effective. During the inspection, two safety matters were drawn to the schools' attention: the need to improve the ventilation for the kiln in the art room and the risk posed by the unprotected windows in the modern foreign languages area. The school is already taking action in relation to the latter concern.
- 41 The procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are effective. The school works closely with the education welfare service and maintains close liaison about attendance matters with its feeder schools. There is a good pattern of rewards and certificates to encourage high attendance.
- 42 Behaviour in the school is good and this reflects the clear policies and very good procedures for monitoring and improving this area. The lines of responsibility in relation to incidents and concerns are very clear and the experienced heads of year are effective in dealing with behaviour. Very detailed records are maintained that enable the school to identify patterns and trends and specific concerns in relation to behaviour. Where students are experiencing more serious behaviour difficulties, the school is particularly effective at working in a co-ordinated way with external agencies such as the educational psychology service. A number of specific initiatives have been introduced. For example, there is a successful module of work at Key Stage 4 on problem solving designed to support students who are experiencing behaviour difficulties or are disaffected. The pattern of action to improve behaviour and reduce disaffection is proving effective and is an expression of the school's commitment to inclusion.
- 43 The arrangements for assessing students' attainment and for monitoring and supporting their progress are satisfactory overall although there are significant inconsistencies of practice. However, the use made of assessment information to guide future curriculum planning is unsatisfactory.
- 44 The arrangements for assessment are good in some subjects such as mathematics, design and technology and music and good in most cases at Key Stage 4. In the majority of subjects, arrangements are satisfactory but in history and religious education they are unsatisfactory. Where assessment is good, there are effective arrangements for identifying and recording attainment and checking consistency. There are some shortcomings in the overall co-ordination of assessment which result from insufficient monitoring of current practice.
- 45 The use being made of assessment information to guide curriculum planning is unsatisfactory overall. There are exceptions such as music, mathematics, art and geography where adjustments are made to planning in the light of assessment evidence. Elsewhere in, for example, science, modern foreign languages, English and history this is a weakness that has a significant impact on the accuracy with which teachers plan to address students' needs.
- 46 Since the previous inspection the school has introduced assessment procedures for students with special educational needs which meet the requirements of the Code of Practice. The learning support department writes Individual Education Plans (IEPs) so

that all teachers know the needs of students on the special needs register. However, targets on these IEPs are not sufficiently precise. Subject teachers are not involved in setting these targets and do not measure students' progress against them. Heads of year keep a register of students with behaviour difficulties which is separate from the special needs register. This is confusing, as students are often at different stages on each register. The school liaises well with a range of outside agencies which provide good support and advice for students on the special needs register.

- 47 The procedures for monitoring and supporting students' academic progress are satisfactory but at present the tutors play too limited a role in this process. There are good systems for gathering regular information about students' personal and academic performance and the school does identify when patterns of behaviour or attitudes change and might affect academic progress. However, the more detailed use of data to set targets for students and monitor subsequent performance is underdeveloped, particularly at Key Stage 3 and this is where the shortcomings in relation to assessment have greatest impact. Various strategies are being used to provide students with opportunities to discuss their progress following the suspension of a co-ordinated pattern of time for personal development planning due to budget constraints. Many departments target additional support for students who need it, particularly at Key Stage 4 although equality of access to this provision is inconsistent.
- 48 There are very effective systems in place to monitor and support students' personal development. The pastoral structure is well managed and co-ordinated by a deputy headteacher and the heads of year, ensuring students are safe, secure and well supported when in difficulties. Tutors know their tutees well and carry out routine checking and monitoring of matters such as homework diaries effectively although the use made of tutorial time is often limited. There is a simple but very effective 'blue slip' system that enables staff to alert colleagues to any student about whom there is a matter of concern, pastoral or academic. The very good provision in school of a part-time trained counsellor is a further expression of the commitment to student welfare.

#### **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?**

- 49 The school has continued to foster and maintain very good relationships with parents since the time of the last inspection. Parents are positive about the school and what it offers them and their children. Most are rightly happy about the approachability of the staff, the expectations they have for the students, and the quality of the leadership and management. There is also a high level of satisfaction with their children's progress and personal development, and with the quality of teaching in the school. This, too, is supported by the findings of the inspection. Some parents have concerns about homework, extra-curricular activities, the information they receive on their children's progress and the extent to which the school works closely with parents. Their anxieties here are only partially justified. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities, particularly in sport and music, on a par with what is typically found in secondary schools although some of these are not open to all students across the school.
- 50 The school has developed good links with parents and keeps them well informed about its daily life and organisation. The arrangements to tell parents about Year 6 transfer are particularly good, with a carefully planned programme of meetings supported by good quality written material. Regular questionnaires to parents,

seeking their opinions on a variety of issues, are also a good initiative. They indicate the school's genuine desire to listen to parents and respond to their views. Documentation for parents, including yearbooks, newsletters and other correspondence, the prospectus and the governors' annual report, is of a high standard. It is detailed and thorough, although there are some omissions from the prospectus. Insufficient information is included about the provision for students with special educational needs, and some national and local comparisons are missing from the tables of public examination and test results.

- 51 Reports to parents on their children's progress are satisfactory overall. The new format is good, promoting consistency and clarity across the curriculum, and the standards students have attained are usually stated. However, too many comments over-emphasise the students' attitudes to their work rather than the quality of it, and the targets set for improvement are often too vague to be helpful. As a result, parents do not always know what their children need to do to make further progress. Some parents' reservations regarding the quality of information about their children's progress are therefore understandable and the revised format for reports is designed to overcome these concerns. Good opportunities are available for parents to discuss their children's progress with staff, and the system for issuing interim reports part way through the year is a good feature.
- 52 Parents give sound support to the school's work and their children's learning. There is a dedicated parent-teacher association which is committed to helping the school through fund-raising, supporting school events and undertaking practical work around the premises. The recent much-needed refurbishment of the girls' shower rooms is a good example of this. Most parents support the work of the school by ensuring that their children attend regularly and complete their homework, and by coming to relevant meetings and consultations. The Year 10 careers evening, held during the inspection, was extremely well attended, and clearly showed the school and the parent community working closely in partnership for the benefit of the students.

#### **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

- 53 The headteacher provides good leadership of the school and has established a cohesive and mutually supportive senior management team. A stronger focus on academic achievement is bringing improved results at GCSE. As a result of sensitive and effective leadership, standards have improved steadily without any loss of the caring ethos of which the school is justifiably proud. All the school's staff show enormous commitment and work very hard to motivate students and help them fulfil their potential.
- 54 Heads of year, heads of faculty and other staff with management responsibilities respond positively to the lead provided by the senior management team. They ensure that the day-to-day organisation and management of their team runs smoothly and are developing their role as leaders of improvement in the school. Leadership and management by heads of faculty is of consistently satisfactory standard and in the case of mathematics and design and technology it is good. The same is true of these with responsibility for particular subjects or year groups although aspects of leadership in information and communications technology (IT) and history are not as effective as they should. The role of subject and year leaders in monitoring the quality of work in their area is at an early stage of development. The school recognises the need to develop the skills of its 'middle managers' and intends to provide extra

training over the next year or so.

- 55 The governing body provides good support for the school and is committed to raising standards. Chairs of its key committees show a sound grasp of the issues facing the school and are effective in carrying out their role as a critical friend of the school. For instance, the curriculum committee has established a very good programme for reviewing aspects of the work of the school which gives them a clear understanding of strengths and areas needing improvement. They are very conscious of the need to link budget planning to school priorities and have been very successful in achieving this given recent budget constraints.
- 56 The governing body ensures that virtually all statutory responsibilities are fulfilled. However, insufficient information about provision for students with special educational needs is published in the school prospectus and, as at the time of the last inspection, the school does not meet the requirement for a daily act of collective worship.
- 57 The governors approved a very brief action plan following the school's last inspection but there have been many improvements since then. Last year's GCSE results were the school's best ever and twice as many students now gain A\* and A grades than at the time of the last inspection. There has been a considerable improvement in the proportion of satisfactory teaching. Work is usually appropriately matched to students' needs and able students receive a more consistent challenge than at the time of the last inspection although there remains scope for further improvement. The school now has a full range of policies which are helping to ensure more consistent practice in the school. The monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance is now much more thorough and systematic. All of this is evidence of the school's success in improving the quality of education it provides. It has the capability to continue to bring about improvements, particularly as it capitalises upon its links with a local project on learning in the middle years and its work with Bath University on raising standards.
- 58 The process whereby the school determines priorities for improvement and plans actions to achieve these is currently changing. It is setting its usual annual planning process into the context of a five-year vision for the school. Wide consultation with staff, parents and students helps to identify potential areas for improvement. Suitable priorities have been identified and these are closely related to the key issues for action identified in this report. However, the school has yet to determine with sufficient precision how it will measure whether implementation of its plans has been successful.
- 59 Review of examination results is rigorous and procedures for evaluating the school's performance ensure that staff and governors are clear about strengths and weaknesses. However, monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is not as systematic as it needs to be. This is illustrated by the evident surprise of some individual teachers when inspectors identified for them features of their teaching which were exceptionally good or needed attention. Subject leaders, in particular, do not currently see enough of their colleagues' work to identify and disseminate best practice or to pinpoint with sufficient precision what needs to change in order to bring about further improvement in standards and the quality of students' learning.
- 60 Since the last inspection a special needs policy has been written to meet all requirements of the special needs Code of Practice. The special needs co-ordinator has developed a clear policy for the allocation of support staff to classes and students. However, she has limited access to the school's record keeping system and

this affects the efficiency of record keeping for students with SEN.

- 61 The school's income per student is slightly below the national average and these resources are well deployed to bring about improvement where it is most needed. Reduced funding since the school changed from grant maintained to foundation status have created budgetary pressures but these are being managed well by drawing upon reserves and ensuring that long-term financial planning results in a match between income and expenditure. In taking financial decisions the school applies the principles of best value very well. It is particularly careful to consult with parents, students and the local community on major changes. For instance, a regular questionnaire sent to parents every two years ensures that it knows what they think are the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Students leave school with examination results that represent good progress over five years of secondary education. They are given good support to enable them to become more mature and responsible. The school is providing good value for money.
- 62 The school has adequate staffing for the curriculum it provides. Although staff spend a little above average time teaching this is compensated by better than average levels of administrative and support staff. Class sizes are reasonable. The school's continued approval as an 'Investor in People' is an indication of the importance it attaches to staff development. Funding for staff training has reduced substantially in recent years and consequently staff are able to attend fewer external courses. The school recognises the need for development opportunities to be linked to its priorities but there is scope for greater clarity as to which areas of activity staff can expect support for.
- 63 The accommodation is adequate in most subjects with convenient grouping of rooms. The more recently built rooms provide a light and attractive learning environment, although the design of the new computer suite makes whole-class instruction difficult. Older parts of the school are less attractive and some corridors, in particular, are dull and in need of redecoration. Overall, the accommodation is adequate to the needs of the curriculum although there are examples of the quality of students' work being limited by inadequacies in some modern foreign languages, music and physical education rooms.
- 64 The library plays a limited role in students' learning despite the best efforts of the school librarian. Although there are useful computer facilities available for students' use, they do not currently have access to the internet. The stock of books includes too many which contain outdated information and so it is not surprising that the level of loans is low and that it is not viewed by students as a centre for independent learning. Despite low levels of spending on learning resources, students have access to adequate texts and other materials in most subjects. However, weaknesses evident in modern languages, physical education and religious education limit the quality of students' learning.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

To further improve the quality of education that students receive and the standards that they achieve, the school now needs to:

1. Take steps to ensure that students have a more active role in their learning and are enabled to think things through for themselves by:
  - improving the quality of teachers' questioning so that students' learning is more effective;
  - extending and refining the range of teaching strategies so that all students encounter appropriate intellectual challenges;
  - improving the library resources so that they are better suited to support students' independent study.  
(*paragraphs: 11, 20, 22, 34, 64, 69, 77, 82, 101, 117, 136*)
2. Further improve the existing procedures for evaluating the school's performance by:
  - making more explicit what improvements in learning are intended to result from school priorities;
  - improving monitoring of teaching and learning so that those with leadership and management responsibilities are able to better support their staff.  
(*paragraphs: 44, 54, 58, 73, 78, 84, 94, 109, 114, 119, 132*)
3. Raise standards in information and communication technology (IT) by improving:
  - curriculum planning so that there is better progression in the teaching of IT skills;
  - assessment procedures so that judgements about students' attainment in IT are more accurate and consistent.  
(*paragraphs: 4, 6, 7, 25, 72, 83, 94, 103, 109-114, 123*)

These key issues are consistent with priorities for improvement identified by the school.

There are also the following weaknesses in the work of the school, not included in the issues for action, but which should be considered by the school.

- assessment procedures and the use of assessment to influence curriculum planning (*paragraphs: 43-47, 72, 103, 108, 111, 137*)
- provision of vocationally-focused courses in Key Stage 4 (*paragraph: 28*)
- provision for students' spiritual development and awareness of non-western cultures (*paragraphs: 34, 37*)
- attendance of Year 11 students (*paragraph: 17*)
- targets in Individual Education Plans for students having special educational needs (SEN) (*paragraph: 46*)
- the progress of students with SEN in geography, modern foreign languages and religious education. (*paragraphs: 29, 99, 116, 135*)



## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	169
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	54

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	17	36	38	6	0	0

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

### Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of students on the school's roll	1153
Number of full-time students eligible for free school meals	67

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	12
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	390

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	17

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	29
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	26

### Attendance

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
	%		%
School data	7.5	School data	0.6
National comparative data	7.9	National comparative data	1.1

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	127	97	224

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	87	100	92
	Girls	80	70	61
	Total	167	170	153
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	75 (79)	76 (75)	68 (72)
	National	63 (65)	62 (59)	55 (56)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	30 (57)	48 (50)	34 (41)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	86	85	88
	Girls	88	64	60
	Total	174	149	148
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	78 (67)	67 (64)	66 (71)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	34 (30)	31 (41)	41 (33)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	113	83	196

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	56	109	110
	Girls	50	77	78
	Total	106	186	188
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	54 (40)	95 (94)	96 (96)
	National	47 (46)	91 (87)	96 (93)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	51 (36)
	National	n/a (37)

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	School	51 86
	National	n/a

### **Ethnic background of students**

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	1
Indian	9
Pakistani	5
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	4
White	1127
Any other minority ethnic group	5

### **Exclusions in the last school year**

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	1
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	32	1
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

### **Teachers and classes**

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	60
Number of students per qualified teacher	19:1

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of education support staff	14
Total aggregate hours worked per week	349

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	79%
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	25
Key Stage 4	23

### **Financial information**

Financial year	1998/1999
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	£
Total income	2,588,631
Total expenditure	2,621,699
Expenditure per student	2,395
Balance brought forward from previous year	107,938
Balance carried forward to next year	74,870

## **Results of the survey of parents and carers**

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	1153
Number of questionnaires returned	498

### **Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	31	59	7	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	35	61	3	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	25	62	8	1	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	19	62	15	4	1
The teaching is good.	22	70	4	1	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	28	60	12	0	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	41	50	6	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	49	48	2	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	25	59	13	1	2
The school is well led and managed.	36	53	2	1	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	32	58	6	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	20	49	13	3	15

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

### **ENGLISH**

- 65 At the end of Key Stage 3, results are above the national average and in line with those of similar schools. GCSE results in English and drama are about the national average although results in literature are just below the national average. This is broadly similar to the standards achieved at the time of the last inspection. The level of attainment of students on entry to the school compared to the standards they achieve while at the school indicates that the progress they make overall is satisfactory. At GCSE, the gap between the attainment of boys and girls in English and literature is wider than that seen nationally. Sensible steps are being taken to reduce this gap but it is too soon to judge the effectiveness of these.
- 66 Students' attitudes and behaviour in English and drama lessons are often good or better. Most students respond well and many show enthusiasm for the subject. The attitudes of students taking GCSE drama as a curricular extension activity are excellent. These students demonstrate considerable commitment to their work and support each other very well. In lessons where attitudes and behaviour are good, students work collaboratively and effectively in groups, developing their ideas by discussing them with each other. In the minority of lessons where attitudes and behaviour are unsatisfactory, some students are inattentive during class discussions and unable to work with sustained concentration on their own or in groups.
- 67 Speaking and listening skills are appropriately developed in English lessons, and drama activities make a satisfactory contribution to the development of students' communication skills at Key Stage 3. Students are able to speak clearly and fluently when expressing their ideas and responding to questions, although at times, responses are not fully developed because teachers' questioning is insufficiently challenging. The speaking and listening component of the Modular Enrichment Course at Key Stage 4 provides a good opportunity for the development of speaking and listening skills and students produce work of a good standard in these lessons. Students following the curricular extension GCSE drama course at Key Stage 4 demonstrate excellent skills in the use of dramatic conventions, to convey mood and sensitively portray a range of emotions.
- 68 Regular library lessons and the opportunity to read in every English lesson encourage students to read independently and help to establish good reading habits at Key Stage 3. As a result, most students read regularly, and higher-attaining students read demanding texts which they are able to discuss in detail. Appropriately challenging texts are utilised in English lessons at Key Stage 4 and, in responding to these, students can identify literary devices although they do not always analyse in sufficient depth the effect created.
- 69 While many students are able to produce sustained writing, some written tasks are too limiting. Consequently, students do not fully develop their ideas. However, higher-attaining students produce written work of a high standard and, for example, write confidently and with great sensitivity and insight in responding to challenging texts.
- 70 Teaching is satisfactory overall with nine out of ten lessons taught satisfactorily or better, including four lessons out of ten taught well. One lesson in ten is taught very well, while one lesson in ten is taught unsatisfactorily. The proportion of teaching

which is satisfactory or better has increased since the last inspection. Most teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and their expertise in examination requirements is an important strength. When teaching is good, there is effective organisation of group work and tasks are carefully structured to enable students to deepen their understanding of the text. Teachers have a good rapport with students, who respond well. The provision of key words supports students' learning. Teachers' questioning targets individuals, challenging them to justify their opinions and explain their views to others. Students are given a role as independent learners and are challenged to take responsibility for the outcomes of the lesson. When teaching is unsatisfactory, speaking and listening tasks are not managed well so students are unable to sustain concentration; written tasks are limited and unchallenging with little scope for students to develop their own ideas.

- 71 The development of literacy is supported very well in art lessons through the teaching of subject-specific vocabulary and the opportunities provided for students to develop oracy skills. Subjects such as RE, science and English provide, for example, key words to support speaking and listening and writing tasks but in general, strategies to support literacy are at an early stage of development in the curriculum. Further attention needs to be given to the literacy environment. Students for whom English is an additional language, receive adequate support.
- 72 Planning provides good coverage of the Programmes of Study. Students' work is marked regularly and accurately. Some marking is very detailed and therefore provides good support for the progress of students by informing them exactly what they need to do in order to improve. However, the assessment of students' work does not sufficiently inform planning at Key Stage 3 so work does not always provide the opportunity for progression. While lower groups receive a carefully structured curriculum which gives good support for the development of basic literacy skills, this leads, at times, to insufficient emphasis being placed on the development of extended writing or the consideration of the effect of literary devices. The use of information technology (IT) has not improved since the last inspection.
- 73 The faculty is efficiently managed, as at the time of the last inspection. To raise standards further attention should be given to:
- the setting of clear expectations for the subject; and
  - the monitoring of teaching and the sharing of good practice.

## **MATHEMATICS**

- 74 Standards in mathematics are above the national average. Last summer's GCSE results were particularly good with nearly six out of ten students achieving a grade C or better and virtually all those entered gaining grade F or better. Many students gained their best GCSE result in mathematics. The current standard of work by Year 11 students indicates that this good performance is being sustained. The quality of work in Year 10 is also good with the standards currently achieved by those in the lower sets being particularly impressive. Results in the Key Stage 3 tests were well above average. This represents good progress beyond the just about average attainment in mathematics when students start at the school. Standards in mathematics have improved considerably since the school was last inspected.
- 75 Students do well in examinations because they are particularly well prepared for these. Regular testing is carefully linked to examination standards. Students' progress is carefully monitored and the thoroughness of assessment procedures means that

they have a clear picture of what they need to do to achieve good results. The teaching of mathematical techniques is particularly thorough and students are helped to master these through well-structured practice exercises. As a result, basic number work, algebraic and graphical skills are learned well. However, other subjects, such as science, do not make sufficient use of students' mathematical learning and, consequently, they do not have sufficient opportunity to apply this in other contexts. The quality of students' mathematics coursework also indicates that they are less confident in situations where they need to apply mathematics, tackle less-structured mathematical tasks or work more independently.

- 76 The quality of mathematics teaching is good in both key stages and this represents considerable improvement from the time of the last inspection; a significant proportion is very good or excellent. Only two examples of unsatisfactory teaching were seen. In these cases the work was too easy for the class and they became bored and inattentive.
- 77 Mathematics teachers know their subject well, plan lessons thoroughly, explain new ideas clearly and ensure that a good working atmosphere is maintained throughout lessons. Appropriate homework is set. This is marked regularly and thoroughly although it is less consistent in identifying for students what they need to do to improve. While the work students are set helps them to master the skills they are taught, it is less successful in helping them to apply their mathematical knowledge. For instance, in lessons on calculating percentages of a quantity, very little reference was made to the real-life application of this skill to discounts, VAT, etc. Teachers' questioning is very effective in reinforcing the techniques students are learning but it is only in some of the very good or excellent teaching that it helps them to deepen their understanding or make links between related aspects of mathematics. The high-quality questioning seen in one Year 8 class, where the teacher's probing questions helped the whole class to a more secure grasp of percentages, is not sufficiently widespread. Students were interested in the lesson, sustained high levels of concentration and were clearly enjoying learning what many find a difficult topic. This level of enthusiasm for mathematics was less evident in other lessons but students consistently behave well and work hard.
- 78 The mathematics department is well led and benefits from a committed and experienced team of staff. Their work is monitored conscientiously by the head of department although there is scope for more systematic observation of work in lessons. They work together well in a business-like and purposeful way which has a beneficial impact on the standard of student's work. The team has many strengths and no serious weaknesses. To improve further the quality of students' mathematics education, there is a need to:
- refine and extend their teaching strategies so that students' understanding of mathematical concepts and ability to apply these, matches their very good levels of knowledge and skills; and
  - improve the monitoring of teaching and learning so that staff are better able to share their expertise.

## SCIENCE

- 79 Results in the Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests were well above the national average in 1999. They are broadly in line with those of similar schools. Although boys nationally do slightly better in the tests than girls, the difference in the school is significantly larger. The trend in results over the past three years follows the national



pattern. In Key Stage 3 lessons, students show standards of work that are in line with the national expectation. Although students have an appropriate understanding of scientific facts and terminology, their ability to apply this information and to produce explanations is less well developed. This means that standards in experimental and investigative science are lower than they should be. Students can carry out many of the 'mechanical' skills (e.g. measuring, drawing graphs of data) to an appropriate level but their conclusions, predictions and evaluations are at a lower level because their skills in applying knowledge are underdeveloped. The previous inspection also reported that such skills were weakly developed. Students make satisfactory progress during Key Stage 3, given the levels with which they enter the school.

- 80 GCSE results have improved considerably over the past three years. They have improved faster than the national rate and in 1999 were above the national average. Boys obtained more high GCSE grades (e.g. A\*, A and B) in science than the national figure and, as a consequence, their performance was well above the national average. Boys' results were significantly better in science than they were in the rest of the school. Although girls' results were above the national average overall, they did not perform as well as the boys at the higher GCSE grades; their performance at these higher levels was below that nationally. As a result, girls' results on average are worse than those they attain in the other subjects they study. Given the results that students obtain in their National Curriculum tests, they make satisfactory progress through Key Stage 4. Standards of work seen were above those nationally. Students have a good understanding of scientific facts and terminology but are weaker at applying this knowledge. As a result, there is a similar disparity to the one seen at Key Stage 3 in the elements of experimental and investigative science. GCSE results have improved considerably since the previous inspection. The performance of boys has improved in particular. Girls' results have also improved but not as markedly.
- 81 Teaching is satisfactory overall, with the majority of lessons being satisfactory or good and one lesson in sixteen is very good. However, one lesson in eight is unsatisfactory. Lessons are business-like: teachers clearly explain ideas and the work to students so that they understand, and they take care to help students complete the work successfully. In Key Stage 4 in particular, teachers make effective use of time and pitch the work at the appropriate level for students. This ensures that students learn an appropriate amount during lessons. Teachers use effective strategies to check students' understanding from previous lessons. This helps to consolidate their understanding and provides an effective springboard for new learning. The unsatisfactory teaching occurs in Key Stage 3. On these occasions, students are given work that lacks appropriate challenge, time is wasted because activities take too long and as a result, students learn little that is new to them. These features of the teaching in the department are similar to those reported in the previous inspection. However, there has been an improvement in the expectations of the level at which students should work in Key Stage 4.
- 82 Students work well in lessons. They are keen to complete the work set, rather than wanting to learn because they are curious. This is because they are given few situations in which to apply their understanding or to explain and thus stimulate such curiosity. They concentrate well. Their behaviour is very good and they co-operate well when working in groups. This is an improved picture to the one described in the previous inspection.
- 83 The curriculum ensures that statutory requirements are met. However, the current arrangements at Key Stage 3 do not provide satisfactory opportunities for students to

develop their IT skills, their skills in experimental and investigative science or the ability to explain or apply understanding. As a result, their skills in these areas are underdeveloped. Also, teachers have to rely on their experience in pitching the work at the right level. This sometimes results in students being given undemanding work to do, or in work continuing for too long, with the result that students do not always make enough progress. Because there is no mechanism that makes the expected challenge clear to teachers, marking tends to reward effort and comment on presentation rather than achievement. This does not provide a satisfactory basis to enable students to improve the quality of their scientific work. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is good. The scheme includes opportunities for the use of IT skills and the teaching of experimental and investigative science. The assessment structure used by the Examination Board ensures that teachers have appropriate expectations of students and this is the reason for the improvement in GCSE results. The Certificate course for low-attaining students benefits those students for whom it is relevant. However, library resources do not support the learning of these students adequately.

- 84 The head of department has ensured that there has been satisfactory progress since the last inspection. She has made good use of her knowledge of the strengths of the department to deploy teachers to the best benefit of the students and identified appropriate priorities for development. There now needs to be greater rigour in measuring the impact of such developments on standards.

## **ART**

- 85 Art is characterised throughout the school by exciting work of a high standard. Since the previous inspection, standards have improved considerably, and with consistent year-upon-year improvement, are now well above the national average for both girls and boys. The foundation for these very good GCSE results is laid in the lower school. Students enter with average standards of achievement and soon make very good progress in drawing skills. Students know and understand how to use a wide range of materials, tools and techniques to develop their drawings to communicate their ideas in art and design. The Year 8 work related to designing and making perfume containers is a good example of this. By the end of Year 9, a high proportion of students achieve standards above national expectations. Good improvements are evident in students' ability to use their knowledge of subject vocabulary accurately and confidently to discuss their own and others' work. Older students use and develop their knowledge and understanding well to explore, research, test and realise an exciting range of personal ideas. All students show interest, enthusiasm and commitment for completing both class work and homework, evident in sketchbooks which are used well. Students take responsibility for completing homework, which extends learning and demands personal initiative, such as the three-dimensional structures for work linked to A. Gaudi's architecture. Students' behaviour is always very good in art and they know their ideas, opinions and work is highly valued. There is good mutual respect between staff and students for work, materials and a diversity of approach.
- 86 The quality of teaching is good in both key stages and often very good or excellent. Teachers use their subject knowledge well to teach and maintain a good balance between the development of skills and applying these to meaningful purpose. This creates an exciting curriculum in which the learning about other artists and designers is well related to their work. Some older students are capable of a greater challenge to link their personal research about artists to their investigating in developing ideas visually. Teachers have and use a good command of teaching methods, encouraging

the use of imagination and observation.

- 87 The development of resources for practical and theoretical work is very well prepared and ensures access and equality for all students. The introduction of IT for older students extends the potential for students to research and develop ideas. For example, students' use of the digital camera in scanning and manipulating images enhanced the understanding of the work of Magritte.
- 88 Teachers enjoy very positive relationships with students which reflect their trust and confidence in all students' ability to achieve high standards and succeed. Motivation, enthusiasm, dedication and good-quality support are common features of most lessons.
- 89 The strength of the department lies in a shared and passionate philosophy. They believe that the development of knowledge, skills and understanding is to equip students with the confidence to express and communicate their ideas, feelings, emotions and meaning in a visual language. The enormous improvement in the breadth of the curriculum reflects the commitment and enthusiasm teachers have for their subject. The team of teachers is very well led by a head of department, who is relentless in the energy used to acquire resources, initiate new ideas and respond to national and school demands. In order to maintain these high standards and achieve the ambitious targets they have set themselves, the department will need to:
- use monitoring of teaching and assessment to further refine strategies; and
  - build on the good work begun to introduce more speaking and listening by using a wider range of literacy strategies which will support learning in art.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

- 90 Standards of attainment in both key stages in design and technology are broadly in line with national averages. In the specialist areas of resistant materials and graphics, there has been a steady and substantial improvement in GCSE results since the last inspection. However, within food technology, although GCSE results have also improved, standards are currently below average. At the end of Key Stage 3 students achieve standards which are in line with national averages. In all areas of design and technology, students achieve higher standards when they are engaged in manufacturing activities than when they are designing. The incorporation of unnecessary constraints within the units of work in Key Stage 3 prevents many higher-attaining students from achieving higher standards in designing. Lower-attaining students achieve standards which are good in relation to their abilities.
- 91 The overall quality of teaching in design and technology is satisfactory. Although there are some examples of very good teaching in design and technology, and most lessons are well taught, there is a small proportion of lessons when teaching is below an acceptable standard. The best teaching occurs in resistant materials and graphics lessons when designing and making skills are clearly explained and demonstrated and high expectations communicated to students. In addition, teachers employ creative methods to secure students' interest and involvement in designing and making activities, particularly when commercially-produced products are being analysed in order to deepen students' appreciation of design specifications. In lessons when the quality of teaching is unsatisfactory, the failure of teachers to organise adequately and provide appropriately challenging work for higher-attaining students results in low standards of attainment and some student disinterest in the

content of the lessons. The teaching of electronic products in Key Stage 4 has weaknesses, particularly when students are being guided in their GCSE coursework selection. Within lessons when students are working with food and textiles, there is a tendency to use restrictive teaching methods, often using worksheets which serve to constrain students' achievements and suppress their ability to work creatively and independently. In comparison with when the school was last inspected, while there is still some unsatisfactory teaching, the proportion of lessons in which teaching is good or very good has improved. Despite shortcomings in some aspects of the teaching, both teachers and support staff work conscientiously and strive to provide a high-quality education for students.

- 92 In all areas of design and technology students respond well, demonstrating positive attitudes and respect for teachers and each other. They behave well in the vast majority of lessons, and on the rare occasions that students display immature behaviour, it is mainly the result of unsatisfactory teaching.
- 93 Although the Key Stage 3 curriculum enables students to experience designing and making using a broad range of materials and technologies, there is insufficient planned differentiation for the range of teaching groups, which are organised by students' abilities. Some of the designing tasks are pitched too low and there are insufficient opportunities for students to generate and respond to objective design specifications. The range of practical manufacturing skills is well covered and computer control activities are successfully established. The recently introduced GCSE options of Electronic Products and Textiles Technology provide an appropriately broad range of subjects for students to choose from in Key Stage 4. The assessment and recording system introduced to track students' achievements across all areas of the subject provides a source of valuable information about students' progress.
- 94 The overall leadership and management of the design and technology department are good, and have improved since the last inspection. The head of department leads by example in his own planning, teaching and organisation and has a clear and appropriate vision for the future. Currently, monitoring of curriculum provision is insufficient to have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning across the whole department. Plans for the future development of the subject are well thought through, although the CAD/CAM resources identified as needed for the introduction of the new National Curriculum are only the very minimum to enable students to receive their future curriculum entitlement.
- 95 The health and safety related shortcomings which were identified in the previous inspection report have all been satisfactorily remedied.
- 96 Overall, there has been an improvement in design and technology since the last inspection exemplified by improved GCSE results, more good quality teaching and much better management of the subject. In order to improve further the following matters need to be addressed:
- the quality of teaching of food and textiles for higher-attaining students;
  - more explicit planning for the teaching of students of different abilities;
  - the teaching of the designing aspect of designing and making;
  - the quality of teaching in electronics in Key Stage 4; and
  - for all units of work, the clarification of the learning objectives.

## GEOGRAPHY

- 97 The standards of attainment in this subject have risen substantially in both key stages in the last three years. In 1999, the percentage of students gaining A\* - C grades rose to above the national average and the percentage of students gaining National Curriculum levels or higher rose to just below the national average. At the same time, more students have been enabled to attain the higher grades in their GCSE and levels 6 and 7 in Key Stage 3. This improvement is due to successful teaching and learning strategies having been put in place, including more rigorous moderation and the development of portfolios of indicative benchmark work. The targeting of literacy in both key stages has also been a contributory factor.
- 98 The current standard of attainment seen in the scrutiny of work by Year 11 students shows it to be in line with the above-average attainment reached last year. The standards of attainment seen in Year 10 lessons and in students' work files show it to be in line with the national average. Higher-attaining students are being enabled to reach very high standards in their individual project work. Such work in both years show good literacy and numeracy skills. The allocation of higher grades in GCSE coursework indicates that students are making good progress in this key stage.
- 99 Oral and written evidence, including students' work on display, indicate that by the end of Key Stage 3, standards are in line with the national expectation. However, higher-attaining students are not reaching their full potential in the subject. The students display good oral skills and use a wide geographical vocabulary in their descriptions and explanations. There is some good writing but too little is of an extended form. The work does contain evidence of good applied number skills. The majority of students' files show a good range of work. It is evident from the end-of-key-stage standards that the majority of students are making good progress beyond their achievement at the end of Key Stage 2. However, students withdrawn from geography lessons for additional literacy teaching make poorer progress from this discontinuous geography experience.
- 100 Overall teaching is good. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen in either key stage but the best teaching is seen in Key Stage 4 when it is sometimes very good. The teachers' knowledge of the subject matter at this level is secure. Planning is detailed and produces effectively structured lessons. Students are given a very clear idea of the direction of their learning and what is expected of them. The management of the learning and students' responses is particularly strong but this has the tendency to reduce student independence. Expectations of what students can achieve are high in most, but not all, lessons. The range of teaching methods deployed is quite narrow but students are encouraged to use interactively the resources provided. Marking and the use of oral and written feedback are consistently good across the department, but targets for improvement are insufficiently specific.
- 101 The quality of learning in Key Stage 4 is good, while it is satisfactory in Key Stage 3. Students are productive in all their lessons, notably so in Key Stage 4. Students work at a good pace although this is largely determined by the teacher. Students' interest in their work varies but is usually satisfactory and students work with considerable concentration. The degree of independence in their learning is comparatively underdeveloped, particularly in Key Stage 3.
- 102 Good recruitment into the GCSE course is a strong feature of the subject within this school. However, there is a continuing inability to recruit girls with the full range of

attainment, and partly accounts for girls gaining better GCSE results than boys. The popularity of the subject is in part due to a good fieldwork programme covering both key stages.

103 The principle areas for development are:

- to raise the profile of information technology within the subject; and
- to move to more criterion-referenced assessment items in Key Stage 3.

Now is also the time to look at strategies for enabling more independent learning, particularly in Key Stage 3.

## HISTORY

104 The standard of attainment in GCSE history has improved over the last two cycles of this examination syllabus to above the national average in the 1999 results. Notable has been the increase in the number of students gaining A\* to B grades. There has also been an improvement in the percentage of students gaining National Curriculum level 5 or above at the end of Key Stage 3. These improvements are due in part to a change in GCSE syllabus but also to an increased focus on developing students' literacy competence. The current standard of attainment seen in the scrutiny of Year 11 coursework shows it to be in line with the overall above-average attainment reached last year. The standard of attainment seen in Year 10 lessons and in students' work files indicate that overall it is in line with the national average, while work of higher-attaining students is well above this. Evidence from discussions with students and their written work indicates that by the end of Key Stage 3, the standard of attainment is just above the national expectation. Good literacy skills are seen with some very good extended writing within both key stages. Students show a good grasp of period and chronological thinking. Their use of a wide range of source material is very effective in developing their historical understanding. The majority of students make good progress, although in Key Stage 3, it is better in Years 8 and 9 than in Year 7.

105 Teaching is satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4. There is some very good teaching in Year 10. The teachers' knowledge of the various aspects of the subject in both key stages is very secure. Lessons are well structured to enable a good range of learning activities to take place. Learning is very well managed as are students' behaviour and response. The pace and challenge of most lessons is high and the learning is suitably demanding. Students are encouraged to be enquiring and many research opportunities are provided. Marking is frequent and consistent but written feedback is weak on setting targets for improvement, particularly in Key Stage 3.

106 The quality of students' learning is good overall and often very good in Key Stage 3. A good record of work exists in students' files in both key stages. Very little work is incomplete or missing. These work files are generally well organised around a useful contents page. The pace at which students work is good and there are occasions when this is driven by the students themselves rather than the teacher. The degree of self-management and independent research is a good feature of the learning in all years in this department. The interest that students show in the subject matter and resources provided is generally good, however, it is to some extent dependent on how it is presented by the teacher. In all the lessons seen the students worked purposefully and productively.

- 107 The department has a number of strengths. Notable are the various strategies staff have put in place to raise the standards of attainment in both key stages but particularly at GCSE level. The targeting of literacy has been effective in enabling students to talk and write about the subject confidently. Students' understanding of command words has certainly helped in improving examination performances. The provision of field visits both locally and abroad is a major strength. Consequently, the subject is becoming increasingly popular and is recruiting well in Key Stage 4.
- 108 Where the department is less strong is in its procedures for assessing students in Key Stage 3. The range of assessment tasks is very narrow. There is no systematic moderation of standards and there is no assessment portfolio of indicative work. Students are given few written feedback comments on how to improve their next level of attainment.
- 109 The department now needs to:
- make assessment procedures more rigorous and reliable;
  - share good classroom practice to encourage interactive learning opportunities; and
  - make increased use of information technology to support students' learning in lessons.

## **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

- 110 Standards of attainment in information technology (IT) at Key Stage 3 are well below national averages. In Key Stage 4, students do not greatly improve their levels of attainment beyond those acquired in Key Stage 3; standards remain low because there is little explicit teaching of higher-order IT skills. Students use IT to improve, support and extend their learning in curriculum subjects and in this respect IT is well planned. The English and mathematics departments use specific software for some Key Stage 3 students which is helping to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. However, there is no overall curriculum plan to ensure that students make sufficient progress in their acquisition of IT skills. This results in the low levels of attainment achieved.
- 111 Since the last inspection there is now good technician support. A new IT suite has recently been completed and its impact on provision and standards has yet to take effect. There is a recording system for IT, which has been developed by the local consortium of schools. However, this system does not align fully with National Curriculum standards so does not provide a good measure of students' achievement.
- 112 There is very little use of IT to teach new skills at increasingly sophisticated levels. Whilst all teachers are committed to using IT to support their subject and good examples were seen in Key Stage 4 art, mathematics and science, there is no planned coverage that identifies the IT Programme of Study or levels of attainment in subject schemes of work. Teachers do not assess students' work to National Curriculum standards so there is little sense of students' attainment or the steps needed to be taken next in order that students make progress and improve. Consequently, assessment does not inform curriculum planning in order to help raise IT standards. The low levels of attainment seen indicate that currently teachers' expectations are low and specific teaching of IT skills is poor.
- 113 When using IT, students are keen and work sensibly on the equipment. Students spend extra-curricular time accessing the computers in the library to support their work. The library has a variety of CD ROMs covering curriculum subjects such as

history and geography. However, there is no provision for access to the Internet for students to further learning and so their use of IT as a research tool is constrained.

- 114 There is no monitoring of provision across the curriculum to ensure that students are making adequate progress. The school and department development plans, while recognising the need for staff development, do not include targets for students' attainment so that overall there is little focus upon raising standards year on year. The priorities for action are:
- better planning for progress in students' learning of IT skills; and
  - improved procedures for assessing their attainment and progress.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

- 115 Standards in French and German are above average at both key stages. This is an improvement on the last inspection. Results in GCSE are above average in both languages and the difference in the achievement of boys and girls is relatively narrow. However, when compared with the other subjects they take, higher-attaining students achieve much better results while lower-attaining students fare relatively badly in French and German. At Key Stage 3, standards are also above the national average.
- 116 Students generally speak accurately and with good pronunciation. Their reading is precise and they write at some length with few mistakes. Few students, however, speak or write expressively. Students with special educational needs (SEN) do not make enough progress, especially in reading and writing, because they receive insufficient targeted support and because, for many, their learning in modern foreign languages is interrupted by withdrawal for literacy skills development.
- 117 The inspection coincided with the period of GCSE oral examinations and this presented some difficulties for the department. Nevertheless, the quality of teaching overall is good. It is sound at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4. There is no unsatisfactory teaching in either key stage and this is better than at the last inspection. Most teaching is satisfactory or good but there is some very good teaching in German at Key Stage 4; at the last inspection there was more very good and excellent teaching. Key Stage 4 lessons are generally tightly structured around GCSE criteria which is effective in promoting accuracy but is rather limiting of creative language use. The best lessons begin with a clear explanation to students of the aims of the lesson and proceed at a brisk pace through a series of progressive activities. The most effective teachers encourage students to think for themselves and give them opportunities to develop their skills of inference and deduction. Students in these lessons are therefore very clear about the direction of their learning, are fully engaged in the process and are developing a degree of independence. The range of teaching strategies is narrower than at the last inspection. In too many lessons, teachers restrict students' independent thought by prescribing too narrowly what they should say or write. Although students' attitudes and behaviour are very positive and they work at a brisk pace and with a high degree of productivity, many are much too dependent on the teachers' input rather than on their own thoughts and knowledge.
- 118 Assessment of students' attainment and progress is thorough and gives teachers a clear idea of what students have learned. However, this is not always clearly related to progress through the National Curriculum levels of attainment nor used well enough to plan appropriate work for students of differing levels of attainment.



- 119 The department is well organised but there is too little monitoring of the department's work to ensure that best practice is adequately shared. The accommodation is not conducive to effective language learning; rooms are too small for the size of many of the teaching groups and this restricts the range of activities that may be undertaken. The acoustics are poor and the ineffective blinds often prevent students seeing the board or screen properly. The state of the windows in some rooms constitutes a safety hazard. Despite some very effective home-produced material, the range of resources available is not sufficient to meet the needs of all the students, especially the lower attainers and those with SEN.
- 120 In order to improve standards further there is a need to:
- encourage more active and creative language use;
  - encourage students to think more for themselves by asking more pointed questions rather than always telling students what they need to know;
  - monitor teaching rigorously in order to spread best practice; and
  - link assessment more closely to the planning of appropriate learning objectives for the full range of attainment.

## **MUSIC**

- 121 Since the last inspection, GCSE results at grades A\* - C have improved to a level above the national average. Last year's results were lower but in line with students' results in other subjects. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards are in line with national expectations.
- 122 From Year 7, the students develop skills and understanding by practising keyboard skills regularly and following a structured course. This enables them to make good progress through the key stage, performing rhythmically and with good control both individually and in groups and whole-class ensembles. They also use the keyboard for composing in a variety of styles. In Year 8, for example, they composed a minuet which most students were then able to notate accurately. In addition, students use tuned percussion instruments effectively, for example when creating Gamelan music in Year 7. Higher-attaining students perform fluently and show a good sense of style in their compositions, extending their ideas and adding harmony. Lower-attaining students achieve well in tackling unfamiliar music and gaining a basic understanding of keyboard skills and concepts. Regular time is also devoted to singing in which teachers develop skills using their own expertise. Students show a good understanding of the musical elements and are able to appraise the music of others using musical vocabulary. In lessons, students concentrate when they are practising individually and in groups and persevere when developing their compositions. They show respect when listening to and appraising the music of other students. Behaviour is generally good but noisy behaviour in one or two lessons affects the quality of their work.
- 123 Students' response to music in Key Stage 4 is very good and their overall attainment is in line with the national average. In Year 10, higher-attaining students improvise confidently and make effective use of modulation and harmony in stylistic compositions. The first rehearsal of a Mozart arrangement in class demonstrated a range of attainment in performing from elementary keyboard to fluent string and woodwind playing. A mixed-ability group of boys and girls in Year 11 produced a very accomplished rock song called 'Millennium Bliss'. Students do not have the opportunity to achieve standards through the use of IT in music because of a lack of computers.

- 124 The quality of teaching is good at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4. Teachers' enthusiasm and musicianship encourage students to become involved in music making. They plan and organise well-structured lessons based on their understanding of what students need to do to learn, enabling them to make progress by developing musical skills and understanding. Relationships with students are good. Teachers know individuals well and encourage and help them so that students of all abilities can enjoy the success of musical achievement within the lesson. Clear presentation enables students to understand what they have to do and to work productively. Lessons are conducted at a good pace with a variety of musical activities to maintain momentum and interest. Occasionally, noise levels are tolerated which are too high. Very poor acoustics in the second music room contribute to this problem.
- 125 The Summer Concert demonstrated the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities which are provided and the high standards which are achieved by talented instrumental and vocal soloists and by the instrumental ensembles and choirs.
- 126 The department should continue to evaluate and refine the curriculum to match the full range of musical ability.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

- 127 Standards in physical education are average at both Key Stages 3 and 4. Students in Key Stage 3 demonstrate sound batting and fielding skills in cricket. A minority of students are above average in driving the ball and instances of good length accurate throwing and catching occur. Students in their first discus lesson quickly mastered the correct hand grip to roll the discus. Some are able to use the grip to execute correctly a standing throw. In rounders, students effectively use a hoop as a target to achieve a measure of accuracy in their bowling. Some students show an above average skill level when practising aiming for a space between the fielders. In Key Stage 4, rounders fielding skills are sometimes complemented by above-average striking and bowling skills. On a few occasions, standards are below average but students work hard to improve them. Students understand and try to apply basic technical features, such as what constitutes a good discus flight. When students are given the opportunity to evaluate their work using relevant technical terms, this results in good evaluations. Students attend carefully to the measurement of their jumps in athletics. In several lessons, students show a good understanding of warm-ups, as was reported in the previous inspection. This could be further improved by the mapping of progression in this across the years. There is little evidence of students being involved in planning of their work. There is some underachievement by higher-attaining students in their lessons because the expected outcomes for these students are not high enough.
- 128 The faculty has established good basic routines, such as class movement in the playing fields, so that the students are clear about what is expected of them. Students turn out in correct kit of good standard and know and abide by the rules for jewellery. Groupings of students are well thought through to provide appropriate learning experiences both in the setting arrangements and in individual lessons. Safety factors are given appropriate attention. Expectations of good behaviour are high and the good response to this by the students means that lessons are focused on learning. Provision of appropriate learning resources and high expectations result in good learning by lower-attaining students. Through students' work in evaluation of their activities, literacy is soundly addressed but it could be better highlighted in the

teachers' planning to ensure consistency and progression in students' use of terminology. Good use is made of resources, particularly when they are chosen to support specific needs to enable a measure of achievement.

- 129 The quality of teaching and learning has been maintained at the levels reported in the last inspection. Teaching is satisfactory and frequently good, and this, combined with students' positive attitudes, results in good learning. Time in lessons is generally well used so that students are properly warmed up and have sufficient time to practise and then apply the points learned. Once students have been introduced to the lesson tasks, they show good physical and intellectual efforts to achieve them and work at a good pace. The teaching does not give sufficient attention to the promotion of the higher-attaining students in the classes, some of which are set by ability. This was an issue raised in the last inspection. At its best, the teaching involves the students in the continuous process of planning, performing and evaluating their work. There is good involvement on the part of the students, thinking continuously about how to achieve the objectives and how to adapt their actions for the task. As a result, the students' skill and understanding of the activity are improved and they achieve good standards. The good progress made by some students of limited ability in Year 7, noted in the last inspection, now extends across Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4 progress is more variable but satisfactory overall.
- 130 While the use of ongoing assessment to ensure that students as well as staff know their individual successes has some weaknesses, the faculty has already planned to improve this. Formal assessment procedures are good but their implementation needs to be tighter. However, formal monitoring procedures of the quality of teaching and learning are poor and, consequently, good practice is not adequately shared amongst the members of the faculty.
- 131 Relationships amongst students and between students and staff are good and this contributes to the positive atmosphere in which lessons are held. Lessons are made up of interesting ranges of activities to support learning and to provide good motivation. The school has a good record of inter-school competitive sports results and several students have gained representative honours. The issue raised in the last inspection of depth of study as opposed to breadth of activities has been soundly resolved through the current schemes of work. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities. The introduction of GCSE physical education has broadened and enriched the curriculum at Key Stage 4. Students are insufficiently involved in the planning of their work which limits the extent of their achievements, but this is well addressed in the examination course. The indoor accommodation is unsatisfactory for the age of the students and the breadth of the curriculum. The indoor storage in the gymnasium has not improved since the previous inspection and continues to limit the range of indoor activities. Many of the gymnastic mats are in poor condition and should be removed from use.
- 132 Key action points are:
- the involvement of students in planning in their activities; and
  - the formal monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

- 133 Significant progress has been made in the provision for religious education (RE) since the last inspection. Recruitment to GCSE religious education has increased very substantially; GCSE results have improved; the staffing for the subject is now good;

and, the time allocation for statutory RE at Key Stage 4 has been doubled, although it is still low by national standards.

- 134 Results at GCSE in recent years have been in line with both national and school averages. The performance of boys taking GCSE is above the national average. While the proportion of students achieving the very highest grades is below average, close analysis shows most attained in line with their performance in other subjects. The attainment of students in the current GCSE groups is in line with expectations in relation to their ability to recall and restate what they have learnt and they are well prepared to take the examinations. Their ability to think independently within a framework of skills and understanding is below average and this constrains their progress. For example, students in Year 10 who were investigating Christian perspectives on poverty, were unable to locate their learning within a framework of basic Christian beliefs. There was insufficient evidence to make a judgement about attainment in the statutory RE programme at Key Stage 4 but it is evident that students value the work and that it makes a good contribution to their personal development. For example, the work includes good opportunities for students to work with young people with physical disability. The religious content of some of the statutory programme is, however, too thin and this limits students' achievements in RE.
- 135 In Year 7, attainment in RE is below expectations. Students make better progress across Years 8 and 9 but, by the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is still below expectations. The progress of students with SEN is hindered by their withdrawal from some lessons for additional help with literacy. Attainment is strongest in relation to the knowledge of features of religious belief and practice, the ability to ask questions about religion and the grasp of some basic concepts such as pilgrimage and symbolism. The students' ability to talk about religious material is much better than their writing because too many written tasks lack challenge. This is particularly apparent in Years 7 and 8. There are some exceptions to this, for example in the work on Stonehenge. Overall, students do not acquire a sufficiently clear understanding of fundamental religious ideas and their higher-order skills of speculation, interpretation and evaluation are not developed enough.
- 136 The quality of teaching and learning at both key stages is satisfactory overall. There are examples of very good and, very occasionally, unsatisfactory teaching. The strengths of the teaching include very positive relationships with students, good management of behaviour, careful organisation of lessons, very regular and detailed marking, good subject knowledge, some good questioning and discussion and, on some occasions, very effective adjustment of learning to take account of students' responses. These factors lead to the strengths in learning which include positive attitudes to the subject, glimpses of real interest and enthusiasm, very orderly working, consistently good behaviour and some effective participation in discussion. A number of key areas of teaching and learning are underdeveloped. There is a limitation in the range of strategies to involve students actively in their learning. Tasks and resources are sometimes not well matched to the students' ability. Teachers do not always provide sufficient opportunities for students to think for themselves or grasp the central purpose and direction of their learning.
- 137 There are some significant strengths in the department. The teachers are dedicated, work well together and have a balance of skills that will enable them to take the subject forward. They arrange a number of visits and other enrichment activities to enhance the students' learning. The subject is well led by a specialist who has been

actively involved in developing the new Swindon Agreed Syllabus. The implementation of this syllabus in September will provide the context in which to address areas that need to be improved. The current curriculum at Key Stage 3 does not always match the needs and capabilities of the students. The scheme of work for RE is not entirely clear in its structure. Students are often uncertain about what unit they are working within and the overarching objectives of their learning. The strategies planned to link the elements of investigating religion and expressing personal responses are not always effective. At present, the arrangements for assessment are weak. Too many short tasks are being assessed and the criteria used to judge attainment are often undefined. The resources to support teaching are limited and the annual allocation of funds is currently very low.

- 138 To improve attainment, the subject needs to focus on:
- extending the range of teaching and learning strategies;
  - developing more challenging learning activities; and
  - giving students a clearer picture of the objectives of their learning and how they can improve their performance.