

INSPECTION REPORT

Redborne Upper School and Community College
Amphill

LEA area : Bedfordshire

Unique Reference Number : 109643

Headteacher : Mr Nigel Croft

Reporting inspector : Mr Patrick Orr
T16007

Date of inspection : 6th December 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 708030

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Type of school : | Comprehensive |
| Type of control : | County |
| Age range of students : | 13 to 18 |
| Gender of students : | Mixed |
| School address : | Amphill Bedfordshire MK45 2NU |
| Telephone number : | 01525 404462 |
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| Appropriate authority : | Governing Body |
| Name of chair of governors : | Professor Joe Morris |
| Date of previous inspection : | 20 th March 1995 |

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

| Team members | Subject responsibilities | Aspect responsibilities |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| P. Orr, Register Inspector | Drama | Attainment & progress Teaching The curriculum & assessment Equal opportunities |
| M Chadwick, Lay Inspector | | Attitudes, behaviour & personal development Attendance Support, guidance & students' welfare Partnership with parents & the community Students' spiritual, moral, social & cultural development |
| J Watson | Design technology Information and communications technology | |
| S Daniel | Science | |
| R Grogan | History | In-service training and staff development |
| D Adams | Music | |
| R Prescott | English Literacy | Library |
| R Meakin | Mathematics Numeracy | |
| C Whitham | Modern Languages | Accommodation |
| K Boniface | Geography | Careers |
| M McGregor | Art | Resources for learning |
| A Blow | Special educational needs | |
| J Hardy | Sixth form, Key Stage 4, Business Studies | |
| M Davidson | Religious education | Leadership & management The efficiency of the school Staffing |
| F Herbert | Physical education. Dance | |

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MAIN FINDINGS

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The school is very well led and managed.

- Teaching is good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- Students make good progress throughout the age range.
- The governing body provides strong and well-informed support .
- Pastoral care is very good.
- The school promotes students' personal development very effectively.
- The sixth form A-level curriculum is broad .
- The collection of data for monitoring students' progress and setting targets is very good.
- Behaviour is excellent.
- Planning for development is good.
 - Financial planning is excellent: for example, remarkable improvements in accommodation have been achieved in a relatively short time.
- Relationships between students and staff are very good
- Specialist support for students with special educational needs is good.
- The school benefits from a well-organised library and its own well-run farm.
- There is an excellent programme of extra-curricular activities.

WHERE THE SCHOOL HAS WEAKNESSES

- I. Standards in the key skills of information and communications technology are not as high as they should be across the curriculum.
- II. Standards in resistant materials (work with metals, plastic and wood) are low.
- III. The use of assessment data by departments varies in quality across the curriculum.
- IV. Despite extensive recent improvements, there are continuing weaknesses in the accommodation .
- V. Curriculum breadth is limited for low attainers at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- VI. Teachers and students are not always punctual to lessons.

Strengths far outweigh weaknesses. The weaknesses will form the basis of an action plan governors will produce and circulate to all parents and carers.

The school has a lot of enthusiastic and capable staff, many of them relatively new to the profession, and is well placed to build on the improvements already achieved.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE THE LAST INSPECTION

The school has improved in most areas since the last inspection. The headteacher, senior managers and governors have tackled head on the most significant weaknesses in teaching and organisation, at the same time managing skilfully the rapid growth in the size of the school. Management has been made more effective and leadership has been strengthened further. Teaching is better. Considerable improvement has been achieved in subjects where weaknesses were identified in 1995. Good standards of work have been reinforced and extended. Clear and appropriate targets for further development have been identified. Monitoring of teachers' work is more effective. There has been a marked improvement in the accommodation. Support for students with special educational needs has been extended and made more effective. The personal, social and health education programme has been reviewed and very successfully co-ordinated. The curriculum has been improved and further developments are anticipated. Provision for religious education and for modern languages has been improved. Financial planning has improved, is now excellent and underpins the school's development planning. There has also been a significant improvement in self-evaluation by the school.

Much work remains to be done to make the teaching of information and communications technology effective. There are continuing weaknesses in standards of work in a few subjects. Standards in the sixth form GNVQ courses are not always as high as they should be. The very good monitoring at school level is not yet fully reflected within faculties and subjects. Extensive information gathered through detailed analysis of test and examination results is not yet used to its full potential across the curriculum, to set expectations and so raise standards. Further

improvement is needed in assessment and marking. Punctuality is not always as good as it should be. There are some weaknesses in the curriculum, which is shortly to be reviewed. Statutory requirements for collective worship are still not met. Additional and essential measures to improve the accommodation are necessary, particularly with regard to the shortage of laboratories.

STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS

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

| Performance in: | Compared with all schools | Compared with similar schools | Key well above average A |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Key Stage 3 | A | B | |
| GCSE examinations | A | C | |
| A/AS – levels | B | N/A | |

Notes:

- a. “Similar” schools are comprehensive schools with a similar percentage of pupils taking free school meals. The free school meals rate is used as an indicator of pupils’ socio-economic circumstances. The rate at Redborne is slightly higher than the recorded figures because a minority of students do not claim their entitlement.
- b. Attainment on entry to Redborne in Year 9 is above average overall.
- c. The grades for Key Stage 3 are for performance in the National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science only. The grades for GCSE are for performance at GCSE in all subjects. It is not, therefore, possible to make direct comparisons between the Key Stage 3 grades and those for the GCSE examinations.
- d. Standards at GSCE in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are good.
- e. The most successful subjects at GCSE in 1999 were mathematics, science, history, music, physical education and drama. The least successful were modern languages, resistant materials and agricultural science.
- f. A-level results are above national averages largely because of the school’s extensive success in general studies. Overall, the 1999 A-level results were lower than in the previous two years, when results would have warranted an A grade.

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QUALITY OF TEACHING

| | Overall quality | Most effective in: | Least effective in: |
|-------------|--|--|---|
| Years 7-9 | Satisfactory | Of relatively even quality across the curriculum | Information and communications technology; resistant materials (work with wood, plastics and metal) |
| Years 10-11 | Good | Mainly of good quality across the curriculum | Information and communications technology; resistant materials (work with wood, plastics and metal) |
| Sixth form | Good | Mainly of good quality across the curriculum | |
| English | Good | | |
| Mathematics | Good overall, and often very good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form | | |

Notes:

- a. The quality of teaching in two-thirds of the lessons seen was at least good. A fifth of lessons were very good or excellent. Just under a third of lessons were satisfactory. Seven lessons out of the 220 seen were unsatisfactory. The quality of teaching is better at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form than at Key Stage 3.
- b. It is difficult to identify the most and least effective subjects because differences in the quality of teaching are more often associated with individual teachers than with subjects.

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

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

| Aspect | Comment |
|---|--|
| Behaviour | Excellent overall. Almost always mature and responsible. Behaviour unhelpful in a few lessons at Key Stage 3. |
| Attendance | Good in Years 9 to 11 and satisfactory in the sixth form. Punctuality often unsatisfactory between lessons and at the end of morning break. |
| Ethos* | Very good. Relationships are very good and staff and most students are committed to achieving highly. |
| Leadership and management | Very good overall. Excellent financial planning. A very good governing body working closely with the headteacher and senior staff. |
| Curriculum | Good at Key Stage 3 and satisfactory at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Some weaknesses in vocational provision. Insufficient time for careers guidance. Extra-curricular provision is excellent. |
| Students with special educational needs | Good. Well organised. Good specialist support at Key Stages 3 and 4. Some weaknesses in support within subjects. |
| Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development | Very good overall. Provision is excellent for moral development, very good for social development and good for spiritual and cultural development. More preparation needed for life in a multi-cultural society. |
| Staffing, resources and accommodation | Good overall. Shortages of books in a few subjects. Provision of computers is improving rapidly from a low base. Very good library. Some weaknesses in accommodation. Good staff development and induction of new staff. |
| Value for money | Good. Good progress academically and personally in response to good teaching. |

THE PARENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

| What most parents like about the school | What some parents are not happy about |
|--|--|
| VII. Their children like school | XII. The way the school handles complaints |
| VIII. The behaviour is good | XIII. The information about students' progress |
| IX. Teachers are approachable with problems | XIV. Homework |
| X. The school encourages extra-curricular activities | |
| XI. Standards of work are good | |

Inspectors agreed with most of the parents' perceptions. However, they found no evidence that the school handles complaints in an unsatisfactory manner. Nor did they feel that the information about progress and what students study was unsatisfactory. Arrangements for homework were found to be satisfactory.

Key issues for action

In order to raise further the standards of pupils' work, and improve the quality of their education, the governors and staff should take action in the following areas, many of which are already priorities for development:

1. Standards

XV. Continue to increase and improve provision for information and communications technology, in order to raise standards. (Paragraphs 52, 190-198).

XVI. Raise standards in resistant materials by improving the quality of teaching in this subject (Paragraphs 158, 159, 164)

XVII. Improve the quality of support for students with special educational needs by ensuring that all staff have the expertise to meet their needs, and are able through their subject teaching to implement the requirements of the students' individual education plans (Paragraphs 9, 21)

- Ensure that sixth formers starting GNVQ courses are appropriately qualified to do so (Paragraph 233)

2. Teaching

XVIII. Build on existing arrangements to share and develop good practice. In this context, pay particular attention to:

the need to set tasks that stretch all pupils (Paragraph 42)

the need for assessment and recapitulation in lessons to ensure that learning has taken place (Paragraph 41, 47)

the improvement of questioning techniques (Paragraph 43, 47)

the use of marking to explain to students what they should do to improve (Paragraph 45)

3. Curriculum

- Make full provision for information and communications technology, and for religious education in the sixth form, in order to meet statutory requirements (Paragraph 87)
- Improve the breadth, continuity and depth of pre-vocational opportunities for low-attaining students at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form (Paragraphs 53, 54)
- Increase the provision of careers guidance at Key Stage 4 (Paragraph 52)

4. Assessment

- Ensure that the extensive data dispersed throughout the school on the progress students' are making is equally well collated, analysed and used in all areas of the curriculum. (Paragraphs 60, 63)
- Establish clear baselines for setting targets and monitoring progress at Key Stage 3 (Paragraph 61)

5. Punctuality

XIX. Improve punctuality at the beginning of lessons, and seek ways of reducing the difficulties for students and staff of moving between the two school sites (Paragraphs 35, 50)

6. Health and safety

- Ensure that the gas isolation taps in the old science laboratories are made safe (Paragraph 74)

7. Accommodation

- Continue to make necessary improvements to the accommodation, in particular in relation to the shortage of science laboratories (Paragraph 97)

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

- a. The development of a cross-curricular policy for raising standards in reading, writing and spoken English, with particular reference to: the implications of practice in these areas in the contributory middle schools; and the need to raise further standards of writing across the curriculum, especially among boys (Paragraphs 10, 16, 80)
- b. Lack of private study facilities in the sixth form centre (Paragraph 106)
- c. The need to broaden the range of books available for students' personal use, including homework, in science, geography and religious education (Paragraph 99)
- d. The need for more frequent visits by governors to subject departments (Paragraph 85)

- e. A few omissions in development planning (Paragraph 85)
- f. The need to meet all statutory requirements for reporting to parents (Paragraph 87)
- g. Possible imbalances in the use of time for the co-ordination of special educational needs. (Paragraph 106)
 - h. The school's continuing failure to meet statutory requirements for collective worship (Paragraph 66)

• **Introduction**

• **Characteristics of the school**

- 1 The school opened originally as a secondary modern school, but became a split-site 13 to 18 upper school in 1974. Since the last inspection in 1995 the school has grown greatly in size, from 860 to 1322. The numbers of boys and girls are broadly the same in the main school, but girls outnumber boys in the sixth form. The school is now over-subscribed. The sixth form has grown in proportion to the main school and now includes 153 boys and 187 girls. In socio-economic terms, the intake is advantaged, though not markedly so. The percentage of students with special educational needs, including those with statements, is below average, as it was at the time of the last inspection. It is difficult to determine precisely the proportion of students entitled to free school meals, since a small but significant proportion of students do not claim them. Available evidence indicates that the proportion is about six per cent, well below the national average.
- 2 Although the full attainment range is represented at the school, the results of the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum taken at the contributory middle schools indicate that the overall attainment profile of the intake is above average. Most students come from the local area; about 10% come from further afield, some from as far away as Milton Keynes. There are very few students from minority ethnic groups. The growing size of the school has caused particular problems for accommodation. Although new buildings have been added since the last inspection from the school's own budget, there are continuing difficulties, particularly in science.
- 3 In 1999 about 80% of the Year 11 leavers stayed on in full-time education, 65% moving into the school sixth form. The proportion leaving Year 13 to go into higher education was above average, as in previous years.
- 4 The school's "basic" aims, as set out in the prospectus, are:
 - To foster each student's full potential in all areas of school life.
 - To enable all students to approach adult life with confidence.
- 1 Current school priorities are:
 - Curriculum review
 - Student monitoring and target setting
 - New building project
 - Improved monitoring and evaluation
 - New appraisal system
 - Revision of personal and social education programme
 - Implementation of plans for information and communications technology
- 1 Since the last inspection target-setting has been established for Years 10 and 11 and introduced at Key Stage 3 and for A-levels. Targets for the current Year 11 are:
 - 5+A*-C: 63%
 - 1+A*-G: 99%
 - Average points score: 48.

Attainment at Key Stage 3¹

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

| Year | Boys | Girls | Total |
|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1999 | 170 | 164 | 334 |
| (1988) | (157) | (159) | (316) |

| National Curriculum Test Results | | English | Mathematics | Science |
|---|----------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| Number of students at NC Level 5 or above | Boys | 80 (123) | 144 (122) | 144 (120) |
| | Girls | 130 (151) | 130 (131) | 126 (126) |
| | Total | 210 (274) | 274 (253) | 270 (246) |
| Percentage at NC Level 5 or above | School | 63 (87) | 82 (80) | 81 (78) |
| | National | (65) | (60) | (56) |
| Percentage at NC Level 6 or above | School | 20 (64) | 64 (56) | 43 (48) |
| | National | (35) | (36) | (27) |

| Teacher Assessments | | English | Mathematics | Science |
|---|----------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| Number of students at NC Level 5 or above | Boys | 140 (N/A) | 138 (99) | 141 (119) |
| | Girls | 150 (N/A) | 135 (118) | 127 (135) |
| | Total | 290 (0) | 273 (217) | 268 (254) |
| Percentage at NC Level 5 or above | School | 87 (N/A) | 82 (70) | 81 (82) |
| | National | (62) | (64) | (62) |
| Percentage at NC Level 6 or above | School | 43 (N/A) | 59 (49) | 48 (50) |
| | National | (31) | (37) | (31) |

¹ Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

Attainment at Key Stage 4²

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

| Year | Boys | Girls | Total |
|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1999 | 143 | 122 | 265 |
| (1998) | (152) | (148) | (300) |

| GCSE Results | | 5 or more grades A* to C | 5 or more grades A* to G | 1 or more grades A* to G |
|---|----------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Number of students achieving standard specified | Boys | 77 (82) | 139 (144) | 142 (148) |
| | Girls | 82 (93) | 118 (147) | 121 (147) |
| | Total | 159 (175) | 257 (291) | 263 (295) |
| Percentage achieving standard specified | School | 59 (58) | 95 (97) | 99 (98) |
| | National | 47.9 (44.6) | 88.5 (89.8) | (95.2) |

Attainment in the Sixth Form³

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

| Year | Male | Female | Total |
|--------|------|--------|-------|
| 1999 | 51 | 60 | 111 |
| (1998) | (52) | (55) | (107) |

| Average A/AS points score per candidate | For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent | | | For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent | | |
|---|---|-------------|-------------|--|---------|---------|
| | Male | Female | All | Male | Female | All |
| School | 20 (21.6) | 19.5 (21.8) | 19.8 (21.7) | 0 (5.0) | 0 (4.9) | 0 (4.9) |
| National | N/A | N/A | --(17.6) | N/A | N/A | (2.8) |

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

| | Number | % Success Rate |
|----------|--------|----------------|
| School | 13 | 77 |
| National | | N/A |

Attendance

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

| | | % |
|--------------------|---------------------------|-----|
| Authorised Absence | School | 6.3 |
| | National comparative data | 7.9 |
| Unauthorised | School | 0.9 |

² Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

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

| | | |
|---------|---------------------------|-----|
| Absence | National comparative data | 1.1 |
|---------|---------------------------|-----|

Exclusions

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

| | Number |
|--------------|--------|
| Fixed period | 17 |
| Permanent | 0 |

Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is :

| | % |
|------------------------|----|
| Very good or better | 21 |
| Satisfactory or better | 97 |
| Less than satisfactory | 3 |

PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

6

Attainment and progress

2 According to the results of the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum tests at age 11 the attainment of students who come to Redborne is above average in English, mathematics and science. At the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is well above average in the three core subjects taken together. Over the curriculum as a whole, attainment is above average at Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form. Students make good progress throughout the age range.

7

7 Key Stage 3

3 At the end of Key Stage 3, the results of the National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science have in recent years been well above the national averages for all maintained schools and above the averages for similar schools. In 1999, there was a sharp dip in the English results but relatively little change in science, and the mathematics results improved. The school cannot explain the decline in English in 1999, which ran counter to its own assessments. The 1999 scores for the three subjects taken together remained well above the average for all maintained schools, and were above the average for similar schools. Since the last inspection, the test results have improved at a rate broadly in line with the national improvement. Performance has generally been higher in mathematics and science than in English. Overall, girls' results have been higher than boys', although the difference has been less than is the case nationally, except in English in 1999, when the boys' results dipped sharply. Overall, the quality of work observed in lessons in English, mathematics and science confirms the picture of good attainment at the end of the key stage and good progress during it. No sharp difference in attainment between boys and girls was evident in the lessons seen, though girls' writing was often more accomplished than boys', and better presented.

4 Higher-attaining students do well and achieve appropriately in relation to their prior attainment. Most students with special educational needs make good progress during the key stage, particularly when they receive additional support, which is provided more frequently than at the time of the last inspection. Students with statements of special educational need are helped to work effectively towards the targets in their individual education plans (IEPs). However, a significant number of the lowest attainers do less well when they are not supported, mainly because subject teachers lack the expertise to meet their needs.

5 Standards in English at the end of the key stage are slightly lower than in mathematics and science. Nevertheless, standards of literacy are satisfactory. Most Key Stage 3 students read poems, plays and stories with good understanding of content and style. They learn to use the library to widen their reading and are confident with dictionaries. A significant minority of students, mainly but far from exclusively, girls, read widely, even though time for silent reading in tutorial periods is not used as well as it should be. Almost all those who find reading difficult make good progress. As at the time of the last inspection, most students become competent writers according to their abilities. Students learn to write in a variety of ways, in notes, reports, drafts and by word processing. Erratic spelling remains a weakness, however, particularly among lower-attaining students, both girls and boys. Most students present their work neatly and legibly. However, as at the time of the last inspection, there is too much copying, in science, for example. Students willingly take part in discussion and debate in the classroom. Many answer questions thoughtfully, particularly when the questions challenge them to think, which is not always the case. Boys are often more willing to answer questions than girls, and in some classes they receive more encouragement from teachers to do so. Students make broadly satisfactory progress in their knowledge of Standard English, their use and understanding of vocabulary and their awareness of the need to adapt the way they speak to meet the needs of different situations. In the last respect, however, their progress across the curriculum is not as rapid as it should be.

6 Numeracy is of a good standard, as it was at the time of the last inspection. Key Stage 3 students make good progress in mathematics. Number work is very secure and students are not permitted to become over-dependent on calculators. Lower-attaining students make good progress as a result of appropriate

opportunities for consolidation and development of their skills and understanding. The most able make good progress in spatial awareness and confidence with symbols.

7 In science, students acquire a good factual knowledge of the material in the programmes of study of the National Curriculum, and a satisfactory understanding of underlying ideas. Standards are much improved since the last inspection. Students enjoy practical work, and they show clear gains in knowledge, understanding and skills.

8 In other subjects, standards and progress vary, but are mainly at least satisfactory except in information and communications technology, where there are widespread weaknesses. When students make good progress at Key Stage 3 in information and communications technology, it is usually because they have extensive experience of using computers at home. Most students' limited strengths are in word processing, desktop publishing and the use of simple spreadsheets. Although in other subjects standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are mainly at least in line with expectations, there are some weaknesses in modern languages, music and drama, where the lack of consistent experience in the middle schools has not yet been entirely overcome.

13

13 **Key Stage 4**

9 The foundations laid in Year 9 are built on and extended at Key Stage 4. The work becomes progressively more demanding. The school achieves well at GCSE, although there are variations from year to year and across subjects. The average points score in the 1999 GCSE examinations was well above the average for all maintained schools and broadly in line with the average for similar schools. Nevertheless, the 1999 results were slightly weaker than in 1998. In 1999 the school did not reach their overall points score target, although the majority of individual subjects did reach the targets set by the school itself for the percentage of students achieving grades A*-C. In 1998, the results improved considerably on those in the previous two years. Overall, GCSE results have improved since the last inspection, but at a rate slower than the national improvement. However, relatively high standards have been maintained and the school's GCSE results represent good progress in relation to students' attainment on entry to the school. There is, nevertheless, room for further improvement in most subjects, including English, modern languages, art and design and technology (resistant materials). In national terms, the results of lower attainers are slightly better than those of higher attainers. The school is right to adopt challenging targets for the proportion of students achieving five or more grades A*-C at GCSE.

10 The 1999 GCSE results were well above average in a range of subjects including mathematics, history, drama, music, physical education and business studies. Results were weaker than elsewhere in art, modern languages, agricultural science and resistant materials. Since the last inspection, the difference between boys and girls' results has, overall, been less than the national difference although in English and art the gap remains relatively wide.

11 The strengths in students' learning in English, mathematics and science are consolidated during Key Stage 4. Most students read well and easily. They show increasing skill in reading specialist texts and appreciating literature. Voluntary reading declines in popularity, as in most schools with this age group, although the school has taken some interesting and productive initiatives in this area. Most students become more confident in collating information, as in population studies in geography. Across the curriculum standards of written work improve and the best writing is polished and fluent. In English by the end of the key stage, many students produce written work that is extensive, accurate and generally well spelt. They gain increasing skill in re-drafting their work and make good use of word processing. In history, many write persuasively and at length, marshalling arguments with skill. There is still too much copying, however, in science, agricultural science, physical education and a few other subjects. There are still some unnecessary weaknesses in spelling and the organisation of written work. Across the curriculum, most students listen well. They become increasingly confident in using technical vocabulary. Many become fluent and articulate and they speak confidently in informal settings. A few manage the formal skills of analysis very well and learn to develop and sustain quite complex arguments. However, many students continue to find it difficult to give extended answers and take part in complex discussion.

12 Proficiency in numeracy continues to improve. Students are helped to keep their basic skills sharpened. They demonstrate that they can apply their skills in a variety of contexts and their experience in other

subjects is often enhanced because of the level of their numerical competence. In science, skills in numeracy are adequate to meet the needs of students at all levels and the application of algebraic skills is particularly effective. In design and technology, number and measurement skills are accurately used in preparing materials. In geography, a wide range of data handling skills is regularly employed and the quality of graphs is of a good standard.

- 13 In science, most students continue to do well and to consolidate knowledge, skills and understanding.
- 14 In information and communications technology at Key Stage 4, work in control and measuring is very much under-developed, although the school is taking action to remedy this situation. As at Key Stage 3, students develop skills on a relatively narrow front. Students do, however, make some use of CD-ROM and the Internet in research and retrieval work.
- 15 The pattern of progress in students' learning across the curriculum is broadly similar during both key stages, though more consistent at Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. At the end of Key Stage 4, standards match or exceed those expected nationally in all subjects except information and communications technology. Insufficient time is allocated to this subject. Progress is good in most subjects. Students do particularly well in mathematics.
- 16 High-attaining students make progress in line with their prior attainment. Students who receive specialist support for special needs make good progress. Many of these students do well at GCSE. As at Key Stage 3, however, those low attainers who do not have support often make less progress.
- 21 **The sixth form**
- 17 Entry requirements to A-level courses are fairly flexible. In practice, almost all students start their A-levels with at least a grade C in the subjects they are taking. A few exceptions are made where students are felt to have the right attitudes and potential, and records show that these students often justify the faith placed in them. The drop out rate from A-level courses is no higher than usual. Overall, most students make good progress during their sixth form years. Although A-level results are below national figures unless one takes account of general studies, they represent at least satisfactory added value in relation to students' prior attainment.
- 18 The school's own analyses show that in most years most students do as well as might be predicted from their GCSE results. There was a blip in 1999, but the school anticipated the weaknesses in this year long before the examinations were taken. Boys do slightly better than girls, particularly at the highest grade levels. Students do well in A-level English and in chemistry and physics. A good degree of success is achieved in most subjects.
- 19 As might be expected from the pattern of examination results, progress in lessons is mainly good and, occasionally, very good. In two-thirds of the lessons seen students' progress was at least good; in over a fifth it was very good.
- 20 Students learn to work independently, to contribute to discussion, to ask as well as answer questions and, in some cases, to debate energetically and perceptively. The best written work is mature, convincing and fluent. High-attaining students organise abstract material well and write to a good standard. Most students cope well with complex texts, but few read widely round the subjects they are studying.
- 21 Students' good levels of understanding of numeracy have a positive impact on project work in the sixth form. In GNVQ art and design, for example, students appreciate the relevance of the application of the numerical elements of the course as they competently collect, analyse and represent business data relating to the organisation of an art exhibition.
- 22 Sixth formers often use information and communications technology when working at home. Most do not, however, yet communicate in this medium in line with the standards expected of the age group.
- 23 Overall, standards in the GNVQ courses are not as high as they should be. Progress in advanced art and

design is satisfactory, and often good, but in business studies students do less well than students on the mainstream A-level course. In land and environment, progress is unsatisfactory. A significant minority find the course too difficult to cope with. The school is reviewing these areas at present.

Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

- 24 Students at Redborne come to school with very positive attitudes to their work. In lessons they are motivated to do well, involved in their work and concentrate for long periods of time. Students of all ages show the capacity to work successfully on their own and develop effective strategies for independent study. Many classes, including both higher and lower ability groups, are characterised by enthusiasm and a willingness to learn which contribute significantly to the school's high levels of attainment. Students contribute well to group discussions, showing the ability to listen and respond to others' opinions. In the sixth form most students make good use of their personal study time. Those taking GNVQ courses manage their time effectively and have well-developed approaches to independent learning.
- 25 Behaviour in the school is excellent. The atmosphere in classes and around the school at breaks and lunchtimes is harmonious and pleasant. Students are courteous to each other and to adults, and support each other on a personal level. Students with special educational needs are well integrated and welcomed in the school. There is very little bullying, and students are intolerant of unpleasant or threatening behaviour. The school premises are well cared for and there is no vandalism or graffiti. Students respond well to being trusted with unsupervised access to classrooms during breaks. In lessons they are mature and responsible when undertaking practical activities.
- 26 Strong and constructive relationships between staff and students underpin the positive ethos in the school. There is a clear respect on both sides and a willingness to see other people's point of view. Collaborative work in class is of a high standard, with students sharing knowledge and helping each other with difficult tasks. They respond well to the opportunity to share ideas and express opinions, and most listen well to views or beliefs which differ from their own. Their capacity to consider moral and social issues in depth is very well developed and, in many instances, mature beyond their years.
- 27 There are many opportunities for students to take on responsibilities around the school and they do this with great enthusiasm. Year councils meet regularly and are active in organising social and fund-raising activities. Many sixth form students are involved in the "buddy" scheme with Year 9 form groups or in paired reading, and several have committed a large proportion of their own time to training with the Peer Education group to participate in drugs education for younger students.

Attendance

- 28 Attendance at the school in 1998/99 and for the first month of the autumn term was above the national average at 93.7%. This is similar to the rate of attendance noted in the last inspection report. Unauthorised absence in 1998/99, at 0.9%, was below the national average. Absence rates vary little across the three year groups. Registers are taken in each class and there is no evidence of internal truancy. All form registers meet statutory requirements.
- 29 Sixth form students can, with agreement from staff, spend some of their private study periods working at home. Sixth form attendance in lessons is satisfactory.
- 30 Punctuality at morning registration is good; only a small proportion of students arrive late. However, movement between the two school sites delays the start of a significant number of lessons by between five and ten minutes. This is true even after morning break, when students should have time to change sites. Persistent lateness is cutting into curriculum time in a number of subject areas.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

Teaching

- 31 The quality of teaching is good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, and satisfactory at Key Stage 3. Overall, the teaching was at least good in two thirds of the 220 lessons seen, and at least satisfactory in all but seven lessons. A fifth of the lessons were very good or excellent. In contrast to the situation at the time of the last inspection, the teaching was better at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form than at Key Stage 3. Almost seven-tenths of the lessons at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form were good or better, but only just over half at Key Stage 3. On the whole, the students' response and their attitudes to learning were more positive in the older age groups, and this made it easier for teachers to teach effectively. Also, teachers' objectives for students' learning were sharper at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, and students' learning was monitored and reinforced more carefully. Overall, differences in the quality of teaching are more likely to be associated with individual teachers than with subjects. There is a satisfactory level of consistency in the quality of teaching across subjects.
- 32 The teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection. There is a higher proportion of good and very good teaching and much less unsatisfactory teaching. The reduction in unsatisfactory teaching is mainly the result of improvements in science, where new staff have joined the department. Unsatisfactory teaching continues in resistant materials. Otherwise, the very small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching reflects weaknesses in individual lessons, or inexperience on the part of the teacher.
- 33 There are examples of good teaching throughout the age range and in every subject, and of very good teaching in almost every subject. Very good teaching was seen most frequently in mathematics and science.
- 34 Teachers' subject knowledge is almost universally good, and most teachers are able to transmit their expertise effectively to the students. In mathematics, good subject knowledge is evident in teachers' ability to simplify concepts and break them down into their essential components. In science, teachers are very secure in their specialist knowledge at A-level, but less secure when they have to teach outside their specialism at Key Stages 3 and 4. Subject expertise is good throughout the English department and is particularly evident at A-level. Religious education benefits from a good level of subject expertise, as does music at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. At Key Stage 3, however, there is some non-specialist music teaching and the work loses depth and range in consequence.
- 35 Students are well managed in lessons. In English lessons, for example, there is very little need for "corrections" to students' behaviour. Discipline is managed smoothly and unobtrusively, and this is generally the case across the curriculum. The quality of students' work benefits. Year 9 students referred to "friendly" teaching that made mathematics fun, and to their appreciation of the supportiveness of teachers in all subjects. Physical education was enjoyed by Year 11 students because of the good facilities and the skilful and easy management of classes. Students said they liked English and drama because of the opportunities these subjects provided for purposeful and well-ordered group work. Students felt that teachers were almost always approachable and friendly, and willing to encourage the more reticent students to contribute to lessons. Where there are problems of unhelpful behaviour, for example in the unnecessary boisterousness of an art class in Year 9, the school is quick to respond and seek improvement.
- 36 At the time of the last inspection it was pointed out that, in some cases, students were not aware of intended learning outcomes of a lesson or series of lessons. This was less frequently the case in the lessons seen in this inspection. Lessons are generally well planned in relation to schemes of work and the progress made by students. Teachers usually have clear objectives and strategies for reaching them. Where there are weaknesses, they are most often associated with a failure to assess in sufficient depth the extent to which learning is actually taking place. In a significant minority of the lessons seen in all age groups, but particularly at Key Stage 3, teachers did not give sufficient time to finding out precisely what students had learnt. There are, nevertheless, many instances of good practice in this regard. For example, in art a teacher planned a slide presentation and discussion to broaden understanding as a result of assessment in lessons of progress to date.

- 37 The main criticism in the last inspection concerned the failure of teachers across the school to ensure that tasks were well matched to students' abilities. Matters have definitely improved, but there are continuing weaknesses. Extending setting arrangements and increasing the support for students with special educational needs have achieved a better match. In mathematics, the match is now good overall. In science, expectations are generally high and especially so of high and low-attaining groups at Key Stages 3 and 4. In English, differentiation is achieved by setting by attainment, grouping students for particular purposes, providing additional support for those who experience difficulty in learning and, most frequently, by work that allows students to respond at different levels. The help provided by learning support assistants is of good quality, in English and other subjects. Students with special educational needs fare less well in lessons where this support is not available. In most such lessons, insufficient account is taken of the particular requirements of these students, although awareness of the content of their IEPs is satisfactory. However, the IEPs are prepared by the learning support staff and subject departments do little to adapt or extend them. Modification of teaching approaches and materials to meet the needs of low and indeed high-attaining students remains more rare than it should be across the curriculum (Key Issue). For example, in information and communications technology lessons, high attainers and those with computers at home (more than half the class in many cases) are not challenged enough. Opportunities for open-ended tasks in information processing do not increase to match the development of students' skills.
- 38 Expectations of students' performance are generally high and usually appropriate. Students' time is rarely wasted. Pace and variety are good in most lessons. There are exceptions. For example, students spend time "colouring-in" to little purpose in some religious education lessons, or for the homework that follows the lesson. In some lessons in a variety of subjects students spend too much time listening to the teacher and too little learning to think for themselves. Unsatisfactory questioning – that is asking for the obvious – occasionally exacerbates the situation. Some of the best questioning observed was in sixth form general studies lessons. Students were challenged to think, to re-phrase or extend answers to difficult questions ("If not that, then what if...?") and to ask questions themselves. Even in these high quality lessons, however, the discussion often involved only a proportion of the class.
- 39 Resources are mainly well used to support the teaching. For example, work in design and technology is very effective in bringing out the creative talents of students. Audio-visual resources including overhead projectors are often well used in English and modern languages to improve the quality of students' learning. The library is well used to support learning. Instrumental teaching in music is often of excellent quality and a major support for the school's highly successful programme of extra-curricular activities.
- 40 The marking of students' work has improved since the last inspection. In English, comments, especially on coursework, are full and helpful. In mathematics, marking is regular and incorporates encouraging, but also critical, comment. Marking is generally good in science, but can vary unhelpfully across the department. Too little attention is paid to heavily derivative and often copied notes and other writing. History provides detailed feedback, with suggestions for improvement. The monitoring and assessment of students' work are good in design and technology at Key Stage 4. Nevertheless, although there is much less bland encouragement in the marking than at the time of the last inspection, it is still the case that students are often not given clear enough indications about what they need to do to improve.
- 41 The quality of homework has also improved. It is set more regularly, completed more consistently and designed more thoughtfully. There are, nevertheless, quite a few gaps in the homework of average and low-attaining students, for example in science. In several subjects including, again, science, homework sometimes suffers from low expectations because textbooks cannot be taken home. Despite this, and occasional inconsistencies in the setting and checking of homework, the quality, overall, is satisfactory.
- 42 Priorities for further improvement in teaching should include an intention to increase the proportion of very good and excellent lessons. In this context, two linked areas would repay attention: the use of questions that extend students' thinking and understanding; and the monitoring and reinforcement, during and at the close of lessons, of what students' are actually learning.

The curriculum and assessment

47 The curriculum

43 The curriculum makes a satisfactory contribution to the standards and quality of students' work. Although there are weaknesses they are outweighed by strengths.

44 Several improvements have been made since the last inspection. Access for students with special educational needs has been extended and provision made more effective by the introduction of support option groups at Key Stage 4. The programme for personal, social and health education has been reviewed, revised, co-ordinated and linked more closely with equivalent provision in the middle schools. It is now much more effective. The fifteen-minute tutorial periods on four days a week are used more profitably. Time for religious education has been increased and statutory requirements are now met except in the sixth form. The amount of time for modern languages has been increased. The extension of setting by attainment ensures that the more able are challenged more consistently. There are a few continuing difficulties in this regard, however. For example, the intention to identify clearly the most talented students across the curriculum and to monitor their progress has not yet been realised although it is an area of current development. The linked setting at Key Stage 4 across physical education, religious education and personal, social and health education results in a broader distribution of attainment in religious education classes than is desirable. The school has sought to link drama more closely with the National Curriculum for English but more needs to be done in this regard.

45 The organisation of the curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4 is, in most respects, helpful to the maintenance of good standards of work. As at the time of the last inspection, the taught week consists of twenty-five one-hour lessons, which are timetabled in fortnightly cycles to allow greater flexibility in the distribution of lessons. In Year 9, classes are set by attainment in mathematics and modern languages, and broadly grouped on similar principles in science. Other classes are of mixed ability, except that students identified as having special educational needs are grouped in certain classes to facilitate the organisation of support for them. The good progress made by these students indicates that the arrangement is successful. At Key Stage 4, setting is extended to English, and is made more precise in science. The setting arrangements are generally helpful in matching provision to students' needs. Other subjects at Key Stage 4 are organised to different criteria and there are difficulties in three respects. First, the awkward groupings for religious education, physical education and personal, social and health education have already been mentioned. Second, teaching in some option groups is made difficult by the wide range of attainment in the class. Third, (and this applies to all age groups in the school), at four times during the school day the length of the lesson can be reduced because of the time it takes staff and students to transfer between the two sites. Many lessons do not start punctually. Furthermore, at breaks many students do not start to move between sites until the bell goes. The timetable does not allow for movement between buildings and, in practice, this leads to an overall reduction in the length of the teaching day, which has a negative effect on standards. The school is aware of the problem and has discussed it at length. Staff argue that in order to provide time for movement between lessons it would be necessary to curtail the lunch hour, so reducing time for the extensive range of extra-curricular activities which make a crucial contribution to school life. Extension to the school day in the afternoon, or an earlier start in the morning, is felt not to be possible because of the arrival and departure times of school buses. These are important matters for governors to pursue with the LEA.

46 At Key Stage 3, the curriculum is broad and balanced and, overall, meets statutory requirements for the National Curriculum and religious education. Personal, social and health education includes sex and drugs education and builds on the programme at the contributory middle schools. All students have access to the curriculum, with effective support for students with special educational needs. Provision is generally balanced. Information and communications technology is taught as a separate subject throughout the key stage, but this is not sufficient to compensate for inadequacies in the teaching of the subject across the curriculum. All but about 20 percent of students study a second modern language in Year 9. The relatively late start of second language study makes it difficult for the school to achieve good standards in two languages in the teaching time available. The lower-attaining students, who study only French in Year 9, receive extra English lessons. The arrangements made by the English department to accommodate these students are satisfactory, but the lessons are not always well timetabled. On occasions, an English lesson is followed immediately by an extra English lesson. In other respects, the timetable generally serves the

curriculum well.

- 47 At Key Stage 4, the curriculum meets national requirements in all areas except information and communications technology, and in most respects provides a good basis for students' aspirations and experience beyond the age of sixteen. Students take a broad core of subjects, together with three choices from a good range of options. Careful guidance ensures that students make realistic and appropriate choices. Apart from a few difficulties in finding places for all those who wish to take graphics, a nice balance is achieved between students' wishes and the need for the school to maintain an economical curriculum. Most students work towards ten GCSEs and well-organised support options are provided for the minority (about 20 percent) for whom this number is felt to be excessive. All students do full courses in design and technology, and all follow a short course in religious education. Separate provision continues in information and communications technology though this is limited. As at Key Stage 3, there is insufficient reinforcement across the curriculum and National Curriculum requirements are not met. The well-organised personal, social and health education programme continues from Key Stage 3. Careers education is included within this programme and is of satisfactory quality. However, the careers co-ordinator has too little time for the effective management of the subject and for giving personal guidance at a time when local careers service provision is being reduced.
- 48 A well-organised school farm enhances the range of curricular possibilities for lower-attaining students. Overall, however, pre-vocational opportunities for low-attaining students at Key Stage 4 are unsatisfactory. Apart from the business skills course which can lead to Royal Society of Arts (RSA) accreditation, there are no opportunities for students to gain alternative accreditation through GNVQ or NVQ courses, and so a broader basis for post-16 choices. Present provision, comprising, in addition to the mainstream GCSE subjects, child development, agricultural science and business skills (which concentrates on the application of computers in business), although the individual subjects have value, lacks coherence.

Sixth form

- 49 The A-level curriculum is broad and mostly well organised, but there are also some weaknesses in sixth form curricular provision. The school offers a wide range of courses leading to A-level, supplemented by a small range of AS levels and GNVQ options. A-levels are taken by the great majority of students. There are no restrictions on students' A-level choices and this leads to some subject selections that lack balance – for example English combined with communication studies and theatre studies. Two courses are offered at Advanced level GNVQ and two at Intermediate level, but in different subjects. The GNVQ course in land and environment is not suitable for the cohort. There are no courses at foundation or entry level, which restricts post-16 opportunities for low-attaining students. The school does not offer NVQs. There is a small amount of combined Year 12 and 13 teaching at A-level and within the GNVQ courses, as a means of reducing costs. In the work seen in this context, the Year 13 students were not being taken forward sufficiently.
- 50 Almost all sixth formers follow a well-organised and successful general studies course, leading to A-level accreditation. Apart from the fact that the examination results are generally good, students benefit considerably from general studies in terms of personal development and increased general knowledge. The course includes elements of religious education, but the time allocated to them is not sufficient to meet statutory requirements. In order to give it greater status, the course is taught mainly by senior staff including the headteacher. Curricular opportunities for sixth formers are further enhanced by complementary studies, offering a range of useful opportunities in "lifeskills" activities.
- 51 Provision for physical education in the sixth form, apart from a reasonably well supported A-level course, is voluntary, but popular with and useful for those who take part. There is no co-ordinated provision for the development of skills in information and communications technology, except as a component of the GNVQs. Students can re-take GCSEs in English and mathematics, and the majority who do so are successful. Careers guidance is available for individual students, and careers education is provided for the GNVQ students through the content of their courses and their preparation for work experience placements. In addition, good support is given by the head of sixth, and by the careers service throughout the year.

General

57 The curriculum throughout the school is supplemented by an excellent range of extra-curricular activities. Participation levels are high. A wide range of sporting activities is available including team games in all age groups. Students are particularly successful in cross-country running and athletics. Drama and music provision is ambitious and successful. The Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme attracts more students than in any other school in England. It is long-established, very well run and has enabled large numbers of students to achieve awards at all levels, including many gold awards.

57

57 **Assessment**

52 The school has maintained the strengths in assessment identified at the time of the last inspection and built on them. Assessment is more accurate and consistent and departmental practice in interpreting school policy more coherent. The regular analyses of test and examination results to measure the amount of value the school adds to students' achievements have been extended to provide a broader indication of performance from year to year. These data are used to generate challenging targets for different age groups, for the whole school, for subjects and for individual students.

53 The school's policy for assessment is comprehensive and well written, yet sufficiently flexible to allow for a necessary variety of practice across the curriculum and in different aspects of the school's life and work. Students' achievements are identified and recorded within and beyond the National Curriculum, as the school intends, and students have good opportunities to reflect on and review their own progress. This monitoring contributes to a well-organised system of records of achievement. Nevertheless, within the overall picture of good practice there are weaknesses.

54 Departments are expected to develop their own policies for assessment on the basis of the school policy, and this they mostly do well. There are variations in quality, however. The extensive data dispersed throughout the school on the progress students' are making are not equally well collated, analysed and used in all areas of the curriculum. In consequence, insufficient use is made of assessment to inform planning or teaching.

55 The identification of "baselines" for improvement lacks sophistication at Key Stage 3. Attainment on entry to the school in Year 9 is not measured in terms that can easily be related to students' earlier performance in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 2, or their later performance at the end of Key Stage 3. In consequence, the school finds it difficult to define precisely the amount of progress students make in national terms during Year 9.

56 The targets set within departments for GCSE do not easily relate to the overall school targets agreed with the LEA. For example, in 1999 most departments reached their targets for students achieving grades A*-C, yet the school as a whole fell short of its targets for students gaining five or more grades A*-C and students' average points score.

57 Assessment within departments is mostly good in science, history, geography, modern languages, design and technology, physical education and religious education. There are good features, but also weaknesses, in English, mathematics, art and music. Assessment in information and communications technology is unsatisfactory: it is both inaccurate and insufficient. In mathematics, a great deal of potentially useful data has been amassed, but it is not used to its full potential; and day-to-day assessment is weak. At Key Stage 3 in mathematics, assessment is not expressed in terms of Levels or grades and is not fully understood by students. In art there is no self-assessment, although such practice is established in most other subjects. Nor are examination results analysed in sufficient detail in art. Marking is good in English but some broader concerns, such as the evaluation of Key Stage 3 test data to set expectations and so raise standards, receive limited attention. In music too little is done to establish accurately students' musical competence on entry to the school. More is done in most other subjects in this context.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

58 The school places great importance on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its students. This is promoted through regular assemblies, a carefully planned programme of personal and social education, a wide range of extra-curricular activities, and in most areas of the school curriculum. The success of this policy is reflected in excellent standards of behaviour, the quality of relationships, and

students' mature and responsible attitudes.

- 59 Spiritual development is fostered in many subject areas by allowing students the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and explore different values and beliefs. A good lead is given in religious education lessons, where students reflect on a variety of belief systems and their approach to life. Other subjects provide opportunities for spiritual experiences that develop students' capacity to think more deeply about their role in the world and to wonder at and appreciate beauty. The birth of fourteen piglets on the school's farm – and the death of one of them – provided a moving example of how students deal with and reflect on issues of life and death.
- 60 All students attend at least one assembly each week, and the whole school gathers four times a year. Assemblies are planned around themes, often related to current events or to topics in the personal, social and health education programme. Most do not constitute an act of collective worship, and the school is therefore not meeting its statutory requirements. However, assemblies do offer opportunities for reflection on moral dilemmas and contribute to the development of students' strong social conscience.
- 61 Redborne students have a well-developed sense of right and wrong, both at a personal level and in the wider community. This moral awareness is promoted through the school's code of conduct, by example from teaching staff, and in the curriculum, where they are encouraged to discuss and debate many difficult and controversial issues. Teachers expect honesty, tolerance and a sense of fairness from their students and are not usually disappointed. The school raises many thousands of pounds annually for charity, and students are often motivated by strong feelings about poverty, third world debt and the effects of war. This is reflected in students' response to appeals for Christmas boxes for east European children and in the school's ongoing sponsorship of Romanian orphans. In lessons, students display a growing understanding of a range of moral issues related to the curriculum, such as racial discrimination, genetics, and exploitation of developing countries. Sixth form students were able to debate confidently the meaning of absolute and relative morality and how it relates to everyday decisions.
- 62 Students have many opportunities to work together and to take on positions of responsibility. Strong working relationships, based on mutual respect, encourage good social interaction and constructive group work in lessons. Students of all ages are encouraged to work independently and to take responsibility for reviewing their own progress. Many sixth form students help Year 9 tutor groups through the "buddy" system, offering informal personal support and organising social events. Several students are also involved in the Peer Education group, which offers the opportunity to undergo training to support younger students in the problems of drugs and alcohol abuse. Lower down the school, year councils give students the chance to work together in committees and present their views about the school to staff. Substantial numbers are also involved at all levels in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, which promotes social awareness through community service and self-confidence through the personal challenge.
- 63 An excellent range of extra-curricular activities, in which the majority participate, contributes to students' cultural development. In particular, drama productions, dance programmes and music groups draw in large numbers of students from all year groups. Students have the opportunity to take part in visits to the theatre, art galleries and the opera, and visiting poets and artists expand their artistic horizons. Although they study aspects of life from different cultures in many parts of the curriculum, students' awareness of other ethnic groups in society is limited and needs to be extended.
- 64 Since the last inspection the school has successfully introduced a timetabled programme for personal and social education, including health education, citizenship and equal opportunities. The programme is well organised to ensure that students' knowledge and understanding of issues progresses as they get older, and that they enter post-16 education with a well-informed and responsible view of the world they live in and the way in which they relate to others. Personal, social and health education is effectively taught by a small number of specialist staff and its emphasis on discussion and role play is enjoyed by students. Personal and social education makes a significant contribution to the excellent standards of behaviour and personal development in the school.
- 65 Daily time with form tutors is now used more effectively to monitor students' progress and to discuss issues arising from the PSHE programme or from assemblies. Year 9 tutors make good use of these short periods

to foster strong relationships with their group. In other year groups the time is effectively used as part of the careers programme, for example in helping students with post-16 applications.

Support, guidance and students' welfare

- 66 The school cares for its students well. A strong pastoral team provides an effective network of support which gives students throughout the school a sense of security and contributes to the excellent behaviour and community spirit which prevails in the school. Despite the large number on roll, tutors and heads of year know students well and offer personal support where it is most needed. Staff give a high level of commitment to their students, many of them using their own time to help with personal and work-related problems. Confidential counselling is also available from the school nurse, who holds lunchtime drop-in sessions for students. The police provide drop-in sessions once a fortnight and these are reported by students to be helpful.
- 67 The effectiveness of the school's discipline policy is reflected in the high standards of behaviour and the pleasant relationships observed both in and out of the classroom. Discipline is applied consistently and fairly across year groups and faculties, and students know what to expect if they break rules or misbehave. There is no serious bullying. An ethos of respect and care for others is successfully promoted in the school, and most students are intolerant of bullying or harassment, however minor. All incidents are recorded by heads of year, and centrally, and are sensibly dealt with. Attendance in Years 9 to 11 is carefully monitored and is consistently well above the national average for secondary schools. The few poor attenders are well supported with the assistance of the educational welfare officer. Sixth form students may be given leave to spend some of their private study periods working at home. Registers are taken in sixth form lessons.
- 68 Child protection procedures are well documented and effectively implemented. Guidelines for recognising symptoms of abuse and procedures for dealing with disclosures are clearly set out in the staff handbook. All newly qualified teachers and those new to the school undergo training. This has not yet been extended to earning support assistants. In addition to the designated teacher – one of the deputy heads – four members of staff are fully trained in child protection procedures. Students currently on the at risk register, and those designated cause for concern, are given personal support in confidence by pastoral staff. Heads of year attend case conferences. The school's arrangements for sick or injured students are satisfactory. Fully trained first aiders are available in all parts of the school, including practical areas. All staff have undergone training to recognise and deal with medical ailments such as meningitis and anaphylactic shock, and students with long-term medical conditions are known to staff. As part of the Healthy Schools Initiative, awareness of both students and staff is being raised about day-to-day health issues. A small number of health and safety issues are in need of attention, in particular the gas isolation taps in the old science laboratories.
- 69 The school has developed several effective strategies for monitoring students' academic progress across all year groups. These include regular progress reviews, individual interviews with form tutors, personal mentoring, and comparing attainment with predicted end of key stage grades. The success of these schemes is continually evaluated, and pastoral staff play a key role in monitoring individual students. Tutors also chart personal development through detailed recording of students' activities and achievements both in and out of school. This programme of monitoring contributes strongly to the high standards that the school has consistently achieved in recent years.

Partnership with parents and the community

- 70 The school enjoys a wide measure of support from parents and the community. The Redborne Association raises substantial sums of money – last year around £8000 – which are used to enlarge the school's resource base. Parents also provide good support for their children at home through access to resources for homework. Attendance at parents' evenings and at annual reviews for students with special educational needs is very high.
- 71 Parents receive a range of information from the school about curricular and social events, as well as about students' individual achievements. Information about the requirements for GCSE coursework is particularly useful. In addition to full end-of-year reports, interim reports allow parents to keep track of their children's progress throughout the year. The quality of written reports has improved since the last inspection.

Estimated grades are now closely linked to national curriculum and external exam standards, and constructive teacher comments highlight students' strengths and weaknesses.

- 72 Students have several strong links with the local community through community service and extensive fund-raising for charity. All year groups participate in a range of fund-raising activities, including this term sponsored aerobics for Help the Aged, Christmas boxes for local elderly people, and door-to-door collection for the Royal British Legion. A large number of students undertake locally based community service as part of the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme; and several do voluntary work during Year 9 and Year 10's challenge days in the summer term. The school's status as a Community College brings large numbers of adults onto the premises for a range of courses throughout the year.
- 73 Some useful industry links have been established through the successful work experience programme for Year 10. Local employers visit the school to participate in both preparation and feedback for the scheme. Some also take part in the careers programme in Key Stage 4 as visiting speakers. Sixth form students have the opportunity to work with local businesses as part of the Young Enterprise and Young Engineer schemes in which school teams have successfully competed recently. Direct links with industry through individual departments are still somewhat under-developed and do not make a large contribution to the curriculum.
- 74 Liaison with middle schools is good and continues to improve. Senior staff and teachers from all subject areas meet regularly to discuss curricular content and progression. The transition from Year 8 to Year 9 is particularly smooth in the core subjects, aided by joint curricular planning and assessment. In other subjects liaison is mostly effective. There is room for improvement in relation to the teaching of literacy and spoken English across the curriculum. For example, students starting drama at the upper school lack experience and skills in planning, improvisation and role-play, and in presenting material before others in a disciplined and unselfconscious way. Considerable effort is made to ensure that students move confidently and happily from middle schools to Redborne. Pastoral and special needs staff liaise closely to ensure that all relevant information about individual students is passed on. A regular programme of joint activities, contact with upper school staff and visits to Redborne contribute to the successful transfer of most students into Year 9.

THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

Leadership and management

- 75 The leadership and management of the school are very good. The governing body is well organised, knowledgeable and effective. It has a clear vision for the school's continuing development and works hard to achieve it, as shown by the improvements in the accommodation, which the school itself has managed. Governors work closely with the headteacher and other senior staff who ensure that governors have the information they need. The headteacher provides strong leadership and has skilfully managed the enlargement of the school while maintaining unswerving attention to standards in the classroom. Half the teaching staff has been appointed in the last five years, without any loss of drive throughout the school for continuing improvement. Many weaknesses have been remedied and standards have risen in a number of subjects. However, more still needs to be done in several areas, particularly information and communications technology. This area is now receiving the concerted attention of the governing body and the headteacher. The other members of the senior management team who each undertake key management roles, namely the management of resources, the pastoral system, the sixth form and target setting, ably support him. The senior managers work very well together as a team.
- 76 The headteacher continues to operate an open, consultative style of management, principally through the senior consultative group of senior and middle managers. This results in effective communication and well-considered advice to the headteacher from across the staff team. Decisions made at the senior level are quickly passed to faculty and year teams so that all teachers are kept in touch with the way the headteacher intends to move the school forward. Heads of faculty and department have clear job descriptions which the majority carry out effectively, as shown by the good standards of work in subjects. Heads of year, who work with heads of faculty in the senior consultative group, foster team working in their form tutors and are taking an increasing role in monitoring the progress of students. The line management system, whereby members of the senior management team are linked to faculties, is generally working well, though not all the weaknesses identified in several subjects at the time of the last inspection have been fully dealt with. The

school is aware of weaknesses where they exist and is successfully promoting improvement.

- 77 The support provided for teaching and curriculum development, and their monitoring and evaluation, are very good. Procedures for carrying out these tasks are well embedded in the school's systems, with a good balance between support and monitoring. A sharp focus is kept on students' attainment so that, for example, each head of faculty and department is expected to account to the headteacher for discrepancies between the grades expected at GCSE and A-level and those actually achieved: here the focus is on teaching and the quality of the subject curriculum. A recent initiative, the formation of a school improvement group, has considerable potential for developing further the school's skills in self-evaluation, as with the current study of teaching strategies being used at Key Stage 4. The school has also initiated its "mutual observation and support programme" in which a good number of teachers have volunteered to engage in helping each other to improve their teaching. This is another indication of the willingness of many staff to enhance their skills. Initiatives such as these show why the school has a very good capacity to keep improving.
- 78 The school's aims, values and policies are evident in its day-to-day life. Students' behaviour is excellent, procedures for their support and guidance are very good, as is the quality of relationships. Great care is taken with making provision for students' moral development, through the ethos of the school generally, and also through such aspects of the curriculum as the personal, social and health education programme and religious education. The attention given to helping students to be aware of each other and of the needs of those much less well provided for is also very good. The school is effective in achieving its two main aims, to foster students' full potential and to prepare them to approach adult life confidently. The school's policies and procedures underpin this success. One aspect of the school's policy framework is less developed than others, that is assessment. The extensive data dispersed throughout the school on the progress students' are making is not equally well collated, analysed and used in all areas of the curriculum.
- 79 Planning for development is good. Governors and all staff are able to play their respective roles in contributing to identifying what needs to be done next to maintain high standards and remedy weaknesses. All teachers can add to their department and faculty plans which, when approved by their senior management line managers, become part of the school development plan. Governors and the senior management team identify school priorities, which each department is expected to implement. Priorities for action are mainly appropriate, though there are some gaps in the plans for English and business education. The planning process is helped by a common format for plans, be they for the school or for a faculty. The format is generally useful though lacks success indicators for measuring the impact on students' attainment of the priorities identified. Progress towards achieving the actions is monitored at school level by governors, helped by the headteacher's very informative reports to them, and by senior staff through the line management arrangements. Governors are planning to become more fully involved in learning about the curriculum firsthand through a programme of visits, so that their decisions can be informed by current knowledge of the curriculum.
- 80 The ethos of the school is very good. Governors, the headteacher and the great majority of staff are working very hard to maintain what already are strengths and to remove weaknesses. The school is a calm, orderly place where students and staff work together, strongly focused on achievement in a broad range of areas: academic, cultural, sporting, and personal as with the strong Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. The high quality and extent of the extra-curricular life of the school demonstrates its ethos well. Relationships throughout are very good. Equality of opportunity and access are provided for the majority of aspects of the life of the school. However, opportunities for students with special educational needs to follow the most appropriate levels of accreditation at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form are very limited, and religious education in the sixth form does not fully meet requirements.
- 81 The great majority of statutory requirements are met. The following failures to comply need to be addressed:
- lack of daily collective worship for all students, a weakness also identified at the previous inspection;
 - the requirements for information and communications technology are not met at Key Stages 3 and 4;
 - teacher assessments for English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 3 are not reported to parents annually by governors in their written report;
 - some students in the sixth form receive no religious education and those who do, the majority, do not have enough curriculum time.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

Staffing

- 1 The school has sufficient teachers for the number of students and the needs of the present curriculum at each key stage. Teachers are well qualified for their work and there is a very good match between their teaching assignments and qualifications, thereby having a positive impact on students' progress. Only in music does this close match not apply fully. As the school has grown, a high proportion of teachers new or relatively new to the profession has been appointed. In the majority of departments, these teachers are able to work alongside more experienced teachers, sharing the teaching of the different age groups of students. In this way they can benefit from the experience of colleagues and develop skills for teaching the whole age range. When planning the deployment of teachers, careful account is taken of their other responsibilities, such as leadership of faculties or heads of year. Occasionally, however, insufficient non-teaching time is allocated for these other tasks, notably for special educational needs and careers education and guidance. The lack of time for special educational needs is largely the result of decisions about priorities made within the department.
- 2 The work in lessons is enhanced by support staff who work with teachers and students in a number of areas: special educational needs, science, including staff on the farm, art, design and technology and information and communications technology. Support for art has improved since the previous inspection. The school also benefits from a well qualified fulltime librarian and an assistant, and from modern foreign languages assistants. Support staff are well prepared for their respective roles and take a significant part in contributing to the progress students make. They are better integrated into the work of their respective areas through faculty management than was reported previously. This contributes to their effectiveness and sense of team working.
- 3 The school makes good provision for the induction and professional development of staff. All new teachers are involved in a well-planned induction programme and newly qualified teachers are assigned mentors to offer them professional guidance in their first year of teaching. The staff appraisal system is not operating at present, but over half the staff have taken part in the school's own mutual support and observation programme of sharing good practice. This year it has been extended to include a project on collaborative teaching. The school is also involved in a local school improvement project, carrying out its own research into issues of classroom practice.
- 4 A staff development group representing the different faculties receives requests for attendance at external courses and makes its recommendations according to the extent to which they meet priorities in the school and departmental development plans. In this way, fair and efficient use is made of the "standards fund" for staff development. The school's policy is to make greater use of the expertise available amongst its own staff to develop the skills of all. It is successfully mobilising the talents of its teachers to improve the general quality of education it provides for students.

Accommodation

- 5 Aspects identified at the time of the last inspection, namely the school's attractive situation, its cleanliness, the landscaped grounds free from litter, the farm, good accommodation for the library and the use of wall space for display, all continue to be strengths. Since the last inspection the school's roll has increased greatly, and the school envisages that the trend will continue. The rapid growth has caused significant problems with regard to the provision of specialist facilities.
- 6 While the school was not full, the LEA did not provide funding for school improvement and the school had to allocate its own resources to develop the relevant accommodation. The school management team has been very imaginative in dealing with the issues identified in the last inspection, as well as those which have arisen as a result of the growth in the school population.
- 7 Over £400,000 has been spent over the last four years on the buildings, resulting in a new sixth form centre, a new business studies centre, a new music centre, a new farm building, three new science laboratories, two new food technology rooms and two new textiles rooms. These developments represent extremely good

value for money. The LEA has now provided the school with an agreed overdraft facility to complete the business studies centre. The LEA has also given the school £180,000 in this financial year to finance the building of a new drama studio.

- 8 The school is justifiably proud of what has been achieved in the improvement of the accommodation, and the impact of these developments on students' achievement. Accommodation is now adequate or good in a majority of subject departments. The school has made its own arrangements for cleaning, and the building is cleaned to a high standard. The help of students has been enlisted to plant shrubs to improve areas where 'shortcuts' would otherwise damage grass verges. Students recently raised £2,000 to pay for the creation of a memorial garden to commemorate four students who lost their lives during the last academic year.
- 9 The school leadership has a clear vision of how to cope with the remaining deficiencies which have arisen as a result of the increase in the school population and the shortcomings of the original design and fabric of some of its older buildings. It is battling with the problems caused by the frequent submergence under water of electricity cables and heating pipes underneath the south school site, the recurrent heating breakdowns which result, and the programme of asbestos removal from the underground pipes.
- 10 The school is still desperately short of science laboratories, and there are severe shortages of storage space in the history and design and technology departments. The school has detailed plans to deal with these and other problems, involving ingenious proposals to switch accommodation between departments as well as to build new accommodation and divide and refurbish areas where space is redundant, such as in the toilets in the south site, using the space gained to enhance departmental accommodation.

97 **Learning resources**

- 11 Since the time of the last inspection when resources were described as inadequate the school has worked hard to ensure that resources are sufficient to support the curriculum. In most respects, provision has kept pace with the rapid increase in student numbers.
- 12 With the exception of information and communications technology, resources are now broadly adequate in all areas of the curriculum apart from design and technology where much of the machinery and equipment is old. Resources are mainly good in English, mathematics, science, art, history, business education, physical education and special educational needs. In science, geography and religious education, it is still the case that there are too few textbooks for students' personal use, such as homework. The provision of additional funding from the Redborne Association has made a significant contribution to the school's resources.
- 13 The school has produced a well-considered four-year strategic plan for the improvement of information and communications technology and this is already having a positive impact within the mathematics and business education departments, where provision is now very good. Other areas of the curriculum await new computers and software as part of the plan. Good use is made of resources beyond the school to broaden the curriculum, such as visits to galleries, museums and field centres. Visiting speakers are used for a variety of purposes to aid students' learning, in addition to links with local and national organisations and businesses.

Library

- 14 The library is a strong feature of the school. It is a spacious and welcoming area, managed by a full-time librarian in a very efficient and productive way. Ample documentation and leaflets help both staff and students to make full use of the facility. The range of books, fiction and non-fiction, covers all necessary areas. Magazines, newspapers and reference books are in good supply. The number of books per student is higher than average. Issues per week are high and students make excellent use of the library throughout the day. The librarian has recently introduced a successful initiative to encourage wider reading by boys. Twelve computers (six with Internet access) and a good supply of CD-ROMs add to research facilities.
- 15 A new security system has been introduced and no books are now lost. Students treat the library with great respect and sixth-formers especially appreciate its research facilities. All Year 9 students have a programme of induction in English lessons and are well trained.

- 16 A committee of staff and students help in the running of the library. The librarian is fully aware of departmental needs and orders. She has recently built up stocks of books likely to attract boys to reading. The initiative has enjoyed some success.
- 17 The careers library has recently moved to a separate building, and provides good information for students at most ages, although provision of options information for Key Stage 3 students is on the thin side. The use of the careers library for private research is not promoted widely enough at Key Stage 4.

The efficiency of the school

- 18 The procedures used for planning the budget are excellent. The curriculum, and the resources needed for delivering the curriculum, including improved accommodation, underpin financial planning. The weakness identified at the previous inspection, on matching spending decisions with development priorities at whole school and faculty levels, has been addressed: school and faculty development plans are seen as key to the budget setting process. The bids which faculties make for budgets are based upon their plans which are scrutinised by members of the senior management team and the results are widely shared. In this way, all teachers can know the basis on which budgets are allocated to faculties, which was reported not to have been the case at the time of the last inspection. Governors, in turn, are fully involved in setting the school budget, linking their decisions to school priorities, including at present the need to move forward decisively on improvements in provision for information and communications technology. Skilful management of the budget over the past few years has enabled the school to expand the accommodation and to bring together departments, both to accommodate the increased roll and to make for more efficient working arrangements. The consequent small overspend has been agreed with the LEA so that improvements in information and communications technology are not delayed by a further year. The budget for special educational needs, to which the school adds substantially from its own budget, is used appropriately. The money allocated by central government for teachers' continuing professional development is similarly well used, with in-service development opportunities linked to development plans. The substantial funds raised by parents are carefully deployed for resources for students.
- 19 Very good use is made of teaching and education support staff and good use is made of the accommodation and learning resources. The deployment of teachers results in an average amount of time spent teaching, with the more senior members of staff having, in the main, fairly apportioned non-teaching time for leadership responsibilities. There is an exception in relation to special educational needs. Provision is generally well organised but the co-ordinator has allowed herself too little time for managerial and advisory responsibilities. Although she provides strong leadership, almost all her time during the timetabled week is allocated to specific support or teaching. The teacher:student ratio also is broadly average, with the larger sixth form groups resulting in more efficient use of teaching time. Educational support staff are now managed within faculties, so that their contribution is more fully integrated with that of teachers. The arrangement for concentrating students with special educational needs in a number of classes in Year 9, rather than across the whole year group, leads to more efficient use being made of learning support assistants. The system is working well, as shown by the progress made by students with special educational needs. Good use is made of the accommodation, both during the school day and afterwards: the many extra-curricular activities are a strong feature of the school. The need for both some teachers and students to move between buildings results in numbers of lessons starting late, though this happens also after breaktimes when lateness could be avoided. Given the need for study facilities for the growing sixth form, not enough use is made of the sixth form centre: much of the space is not furnished and more could be made of it for study, as well as for social, purposes. Resources for learning are generally efficiently used. Good storage facilities in most areas, the organisation of subjects into suites of rooms and effective curriculum planning lead to their efficient use.
- 20 Financial controls are effective. The chair of the governing body also chairs the finance committee and, together with the other members of the committee, is kept well informed by the school about their budget decisions and any variations. A deputy head teacher manages the budget and maintains detailed records of income and spending: financial resources are very carefully husbanded. The finance committee and the head teacher prepare briefings for the full governing body on the school's finances. Knowledge of resource providers, as well as scrutiny of several quotations for major items, help to ensure that best value is obtained for purchases. The school was last audited by the Local Authority early in 1998. All the recommendations

have been addressed. Further scrutiny of the accounts was undertaken more recently in view of the budget deficit and the accounting systems met requirements fully. School administration is efficient and low-key. The team of staff in the offices supports the work of the school effectively and provides a very favourable first impression of the school to visitors. Day to day, the school runs very smoothly, and meticulous longer-term planning for the annual cycle of events ensures that they are thoroughly prepared. The comprehensive staff handbook contributes to this very good organisation and administration.

- 21 The school provides good value for money: overall good teaching is enabling students to make good progress as they move up through the school. This represents an improvement on the position reported at the time of the last inspection when the school was judged to provide “reasonable value for money”.

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

English

- 22 Standards of English throughout the school are above average. At the end of Key Stage 3, results in the National Curriculum tests for 1998 were well above the national average and higher than the mathematics and science results in the school. The average grade for the three years to 1998 was also well above the national average and boys were not far behind girls. This maintained the high standards found at the time of the last inspection. An unexpected drop occurred in 1999 to around the national average, although teacher assessments were much higher. Boys' results were much weaker than girls' in 1999. Results were lower than in mathematics and science.
- 23 The English GCSE results in 1998 were above the national average for the higher grades A* to C. Girls outperformed boys by a considerable margin. The English literature results were well above the national average. The trend in both examinations for the three years 1996 to 1998 was consistently above the national average, a good improvement since the last inspection. In 1999 the results in English remained above average and boys narrowed the gap. A broader range of candidates was entered for English literature and the proportion of higher grades was around the national average. Compared with national averages, GCSE results in English have been broadly similar to those in mathematics and science. High standards have been maintained at A-level since the last inspection. From 1996 to 1998 the pass rate was 100% and above the course expectations. The top grades (A/B) have fluctuated in number. Results for 1999 were not as high, but those taking English did better than in most of the other subjects they took.
- 24 Speaking and listening skills are good. By the end of Key Stage 3, most students can speak clearly and confidently and to the point. Some are able to provide perceptive answers and contribute at length in discussion. Students listen attentively to each other and their teacher. At Key Stage 4, students express their ideas well in group and class discussion and are able to analyse topics in literature and the media. They read aloud from play texts with clarity and expression. Both higher attainers and students with special educational needs have enough confidence to sustain an argument. In listening students show a quick response and respect for others. By the sixth form, students have developed a mature and fluent style of speech, and use emphasis and expression effectively. Some are more forthcoming than others. All listen carefully and most respond in a lively and positive way.
- 25 Reading skills are good. At the end of Key Stage 3, students tackle a range of prose and poetry, with most showing good understanding of style and content. They use dictionaries competently and widen their reading with visits to the library. At Key Stage 4, students read GCSE texts and anthologies with good understanding. They enjoy reading poetry from other cultures and many appreciate the subtleties of style and language. They respond well to poets like Ted Hughes, and Year 11's visit to a Poetry Day highlighted their interest. Most sixth formers handle difficult texts with close analysis and good understanding. They make good use of the library for research.
- 26 Writing skills are more varied. At the end of Key Stage 3, high attainers are fluent and accurate, with a wide vocabulary and good use of syntax. Others are able to express their ideas well but with less neatness and accuracy, especially in spelling. Most students can re-draft work and word process effectively. Their folders of longer work are sometimes thin, however. At Key Stage 4, higher attainers produce a good range of imaginative and critical writing, and their course work can be very impressive in style and content. Lower attainers take longer to re-draft and are often held back by poor spelling and punctuation. In the sixth form, lack of accuracy and neatness still hamper some at the start of the course, but by the end of Year 13 the higher attainers produce examples of highly polished writing with good use of quotations and effective argument.
- 27 Progress during both key stages and in the sixth form is good. Students cover their set texts in good time and complete their coursework as required. Attitudes to English lessons are very positive. Students co-operate well in group work and settle into new tasks quickly.

- 28 Almost all the teaching is satisfactory or better, and over half is good or very good. A fifth is very good. At Key Stage 3, teachers have a secure grasp of subject matter and use regular questioning to challenge students' ideas. Planning is thorough, but could be linked more closely with the National Curriculum programmes of study. On occasions, individual work is not adapted to students' varied needs. This is especially true of the lower attainers. There are good examples of suitably modified tasks in group work. Class discussion is lively. Teachers have good control and normally lessons are well paced. The library period is a very useful resource. Feedback in class is good and marking gives helpful comments. Self-evaluation by students, when used, is very constructive. At Key Stage 4, the teachers have very close knowledge of the set texts and GCSE requirements. They challenge students and draw out ideas and concepts. Planning through different activities is carefully managed to ensure continuity. Methods are suitably varied through class and group work. As at Key Stage 3, discussions are often lively and good use is made of video and other audio-visual resources. Where methods fail, which is very rare, exposition is laboured and resources not well deployed. With lower attainers, there remains a need for some work to be tailored more precisely to meet individual needs. Discipline is generally very good and time well used. Teachers give positive feedback in class and mark written work with constructive comments. Homework usefully backs up classwork. Sixth form teaching is based on a very fine grasp of the texts studied. Clear explanations are given and questioning is lively and teases out ideas. Work is often related to topical issues and feedback is warm and encouraging. Not all students are drawn into discussion, and more varied approaches, as recommended at the time of the last inspection, would be worthwhile.
- 29 The English curriculum is broad and challenging, except that there is relatively little use of computers by students. The teaching and use of skills in information and communications technology is an area for development. Links with middle schools have been strengthened, to improve curricular continuity. The department holds regular meetings and a good team spirit prevails. Ideas and activities to support differentiated learning, referred to at the time of the last inspection, still require co-ordination. Good schemes of work exist for Year 9 and need extension to other years. GCSE and A-level results are evaluated systematically, but not the results of Key Stage 3 tests or attainment tests on or before entry to the school. Staffs are very well qualified with a good mixture of experience. Overall, the department has many strengths and makes a major contribution to the standards and ethos of the school.

Mathematics

- 30 Results in the Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests for fourteen year olds are consistently well above the national average. In recent years there has been a small underlying trend of improvement and in 1999 there was a significant increase in the proportion of students achieving the higher Levels. On average over the three years 1996 to 1998, results were above those in similar schools and above the school's results in English and science. Students generally sustain their level of performance into Key Stage 4 and, since the last inspection, annual results in GCSE mathematics have remained almost constant with almost six out of ten students each year attaining within the A*-C grade range. Most students perform at least as well in mathematics as they do in their other subjects and almost every student obtains GCSE certification within the A*-G range. There has been no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls in either the GCSE examinations or the end of Key Stage 3 tests. Although the 1999 A-level results were slightly below the national average, when account is taken of the predicted performance of students opting to take A-level mathematics, results compare satisfactorily with those in most other subjects. In most years since the last inspection, A-level results in mathematics have been above national averages and in each year there has been a 100% pass rate in A-level further mathematics.
- 31 Students' level of attainment on entry to the school is above average. At the end of Key Stage 3 their attainment is well above the national average and their test results match the standards of work observed in lessons. Students show that they have an understanding of the various aspects of their work in mathematics. Most are competent in the manipulation of algebraic symbols, interpret and illustrate statistical data, are familiar with the names and properties of the commoner geometrical shapes and carry out calculations with confidence. Liaison with contributory middle schools ensures that when students transfer to Year 9 there is continuity of provision and avoidance of the unnecessary replication of work. Induction arrangements provide for the effective grouping of Year 9 students so that work is pitched at appropriate levels for lower, average and higher-attaining students. The effectiveness of these arrangements is reflected in the end of Key Stage 3 test scores.

- 32 Most students sustain their standards of attainment into Key Stage 4 and continue to produce work that is well above the national average. By the end of the Key Stage most students have an extensive repertoire of mathematical vocabulary, solve equations of varying and increasing complexity, construct and interpret algebraic and statistical graphs, carry out investigative work and consolidate their computational skills. All groups of students, whether higher, average or lower attainers, experience appropriate levels of work in each of the mathematics attainment targets. Except for a small minority of average-attaining students, who under-achieve, students' attainment in lessons at least matches the national averages of students with similar prior attainment.
- 33 Standards of A-level work are generally good and by the end of Year 13 most students are at ease with the formal processes of the various aspects of the subject. Students build on the significant strengths of their Key Stage 4 experience and the minority of students who take the subject who did not study at the higher GCSE level quickly compensate for deficiencies in their earlier learning. In lessons, abler students demonstrate that they have a comprehensive grasp of the inter-relating elements of the subject, and they produce standards of work that meet the rigorous requirements of the course. Students make good progress in the sixth form and this is shown in their increasing levels of confidence in discussing ideas and problems.
- 34 Students make good progress during Key Stage 3. The content of lessons invariably has a structure that builds on previous learning, and consolidation and practice are usually accompanied by the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. Higher, average and lower-attaining students make good progress because, when they are working on the same topics, explanations and exercises are formulated to match the range of individual students' needs. For example, when working on the laws of indices, higher-attaining students carry out calculations involving negative indices, average attainers evaluate questions involving brackets, and lower attainers successfully work out basic multiplication and division examples. Standards of presentation of work vary, however, and progress is sometimes impeded because written work lacks structure and therefore fails to foster understanding and retention.
- 35 During Key Stage 4, students maintain their standards of work and make progress that is at least satisfactory. Their knowledge increases steadily and their skills develop through the provision of carefully constructed schemes of work. Continued arrangements for grouping students according to their needs in mathematics are effective and support progress. Teachers provide each particular group of students with challenging work that ensures that all experience the same range of mathematical topics at an appropriate level. Higher-attaining students, using information and communications technology, make rapid progress as they show that they have a comprehensive and thorough understanding of functions when they construct and describe a wide range of algebraic graphs. Average-attaining students use correct vocabulary to describe the gradients and intercepts of straight line algebraic graphs and accurately calculate or observe their values. Lower attainers accurately construct and interpret distance-time graphs. Standards of written work are mostly satisfactory, and often excellent, but the quality of solutions, particularly in algebra, is sometimes lacking in rigorous, systematic and structured presentation.
- 36 A combination of appropriate schemes of work, sensitive and informed teacher explanation, and additional classroom support, ensure that students with special educational needs make good progress. Work is usually tailored to match their needs and their self-esteem is enhanced because they are given opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills; students with special educational needs are well integrated into mainstream classes.
- 37 Students are very well motivated and, with the exception of some average-attaining Key Stage 4 students, adopt a mature, positive and studious attitude to their work. Their conduct is rarely other than exemplary and they usually display a healthy regard and respect for the subject. Levels of sustained concentration are generally high and the relationship between teachers and students is positive and characterised by cooperation and harmony.
- 38 The overall quality and strength of teaching is good. It is very good in more than two in five lessons, good in almost one third of lessons, satisfactory in one in five lessons and rarely unsatisfactory. In half the Key Stage 4 and sixth form lessons the teaching is very good; there is more very good teaching at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form than at Key Stage 3. Teachers have a thorough command of the subject and

thoroughly prepare lessons. In the best lessons, the teacher fully involves the students in the exposition, engenders a brisk pace, sets challenging and realistic tasks and continually assesses their understanding. For example, a group of above average-attaining Key Stage 4 students were fully engaged with the teacher in a process of systematically building up strategies for carrying out an investigation. The teacher punctuated the lesson with short-term targets and appropriate time limits that matched each level of increased difficulty, checked the progress of students on an individual basis, and shared the objectives of the lesson with a collective focus that involved all the students; the pace was brisk and the degree of challenge well matched to the group. In less successful lessons, the teacher does not fully involve all the students during the process of exposition, relying on responses from a limited range of students, and does not vary the activities in order to sustain the lesson's momentum. For example, a group of below average attaining Year 10 students, working on equations, was inadequately challenged as the teacher used the textbook as an instrument of teaching rather than as a learning resource. The students' concentration was divided between teacher and textbook and consequently there was insufficient dialogue to ensure that interest and understanding were achieved.

- 39 The department is efficiently managed and a great deal of energy has been invested into generating a data bank of student performance. Although the department is well on the way to using the data to plan curriculum development, track student performance, identify under-achievement, and set targets, the fruits of these labours have yet to be fully realised. Its potential for enhancing attainment, and the need to develop more rigorous and consistently applied day-to-day assessment procedures, are already recognised and included in the department's development plan.
- 40 Since the last inspection, standards of achievement have been maintained at levels well above the national average and, in most years, external examination results have been well above the national average. Teaching and the response of students in lessons remain significant strengths, and students take a more active part in the conduct of lessons than at the time of the last inspection. The increased use of information and communications technology in mathematics has enriched the experience of students in lessons and enhanced their progress and understanding.

Science.

- 41 Results in the National Curriculum tests for fourteen year olds have improved steadily since the last inspection. In 1998 and 1999, they were well above national averages with girls and boys performing equally well. Results in English and mathematics were better than in science in 1998. In 1999, however, the science results were above those in English, though below the mathematics results. Results were above the average for similar schools in 1998 and improved further in 1999. Results in the double award GCSE (taken by the majority) have remained fairly constant in recent years, well above national averages since 1995. Small numbers of students take the single award science and agricultural science GCSE. Results have improved and are above the national average in single science although not in agricultural science. There is no gender difference in the double science GCSE results, but girls do better in single science. Overall, GCSE science results compare well with those in other subjects. At A-level, biology results are in line with national figures although they have declined since 1997. Chemistry results are above average and have remained good over several years. Physics results have improved significantly and are well above average; they have maintained an upward trend in recent years.
- 42 At the end of Key Stage 3, high-attaining students have a good understanding of the nature of light. They explain that images are caused by light travelling in straight lines and describe the size and nature of the image. They carry out investigations making and testing model helicopters for the effect of wingspan and weight. They understand how to make this a fair test and repeat it to improve accuracy. Average-attaining students understand many factors that affect the efficiency of a fuel and test it for ease of ignition and duration of burning. Lower-attaining students know the difference between elements and compounds and can identify them easily.
- 128 At the end of Key Stage 4, standards are securely above national expectations. In Year 11, students' understanding of biology, chemistry and physics represents good progress in relation to their prior attainment. High-attaining students understand factors that affect population numbers, such as food, space, predators, climate and disease, with particular emphasis on the effect of humans destroying habitats. Most average-attaining students can balance chemical equations and identify physical and chemical changes from

reactions they carry out confidently. Lower-attaining students label parts of the reproductive system. In agricultural science, most understand the differences in the structure of this system in farm animals. Students' investigative skills are well developed and most understand how force and distance affect the deflection of a cantilever. The quality of analysis and evaluation are good across the attainment range.

- 129 Standards in Year 13 show that most students understand the principles and specialist terminology required by the syllabuses in biology, chemistry and physics. They carry out experiments to find out the order of reactions in chemistry. Most students understand how magnetic resonance imaging works in physics. They use microscope skills well to identify cilia and a range of cells related to lung function. Understanding of the demands of the syllabus is good in relation to students' prior attainment, and students' investigative skills are well beyond GCSE level.
- 130 All students record observations well in tables and graphical forms and high-attaining students in all years use mathematics well to solve problems involving formulae. Some good opportunities for extended writing are provided. However, many students copy notes in lessons because they do not have text books. Furthermore, text is often copied in the writing of essays, particularly in Key Stages 3 and 4. A-level students often adapt information appropriately for their essays. Information and communications technology skills are not yet used in a systematic enough way to retrieve, store and present data. However, data logging equipment is now in school and is being used.
- 131 Students enter Year 9 with attainment above national expectations and in one year gain knowledge, understanding and skills to reach levels well above the national averages. This is good progress. They start by knowing fuels provide heat energy but quickly understand the energy changes involved and high attainers carry out investigations to compare several properties of fuels.
- 132 At Key Stage 4, higher and average-attaining students are tracked and monitored individually and make good gains across all four attainment targets. From understanding characteristics of light they quickly learn to describe the parts of the electromagnetic spectrum and know the relationship between wavelength and frequency. In the sixth form, progress in A-level physics is very good. It is good in chemistry and satisfactory in biology. High expectations and challenging demands are in part responsible for this difference. Very large groups in A-level biology, practical lessons split between two teachers and several lessons taught in ordinary classrooms, in addition to variations in the quality and frequency of marked homework, all combine to affect progress adversely.
- 133 Students with special educational needs make good progress during Key Stages 3 and 4, as a result of well-informed individual support and effective teaching approaches, as exemplified when students gained understanding of the reactivity of alkali metals and how kinetic theory explains changes of state.
- 134 Progress is unsatisfactory in the Year 12 GNVQ Intermediate land and environment course, where the majority of students do not meet the accreditation requirements.
- 135 Students' response is very positive in almost all lessons, except that a small minority are too quiet in some lessons and lack concentration. Students work individually and in groups sharing and organising tasks well. Low-attaining students concentrate during the one-hour lessons because of the good variety of well-organised activities provided for them. All students handle equipment with care and follow safety rules effectively. A-level students carry out risk assessments well. Students' improving attitudes to science are shown by the dramatic increase in the number choosing all three sciences at A-level, but there are still very few girls in physics.
- 136 The quality of teaching is now a strength in this department. Almost all the lessons seen were satisfactory or better. Seven out of ten were good and half of these had very good features. Teaching was best at Key Stage 4. Very good features observed included the study of birth and treatment of newborn piglets through handling them. Teachers use a wide range of approaches effectively, including individual, group and class teaching. Almost all prepare lessons well, share objectives with students and use investigations to develop scientific understanding. They promote a very good learning environment. In very good lessons – but not always in the generality of lessons - teachers use assessment of students' work to inform their teaching. For example, when high-attaining students could not use the line of "best fit" the class was taught this skill

immediately. Homework is set and marked effectively in Years 9 to 11 but practice is less consistent in the sixth form.

- 137 The department is well led, particularly through monitoring and support of teaching, and through the development of a strong, committed team using improved schemes of work. Technical support is very good in managing the increasing requirements of a growing department. Accommodation is inadequate - 15 percent of lessons are taught in classrooms. Six laboratories are unsatisfactory in not having gas isolators. Equipment and books are adequate and used well in lessons to raise attainment. However, as most students do not have textbooks to use at home too much time is spent copying notes. Some students who do not complete class work cannot finish their homework.
- 138 The most significant improvement since the last inspection is in the quality of teaching. Unsatisfactory teaching has almost been eliminated. The teaching now matches students' attainment and needs. Banding and setting by attainment are used effectively. There are more opportunities for students to ask and answer questions. There is now no evidence of disaffection in Year 9. The attainment of girls has improved. Although there are three new laboratories they are quite small for large groups and still inadequate to meet the increasing demands of a very popular subject. There has been no improvement in the use of information and communications technology. Recently acquired resources cannot be used effectively or stored properly because of continuing limitations in the accommodation.

OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES

Art

139 The GCSE examination results for art in 1998 were well above the national average for the higher grades A* to C for both boys and girls in maintained schools. In 1998 and 1999 the overall GCSE pass rate for grades A* to G was in line with the national average, but it fell below for A* to C grades in 1999. Girls' performance is much better than boys' and the difference widened in 1999. Since the last inspection the number of students gaining the higher A and B grades at A-level has declined, but the overall A to E pass rate has been maintained. Students can also follow a GNVQ advanced art and design course, but there were no students taking the course in 1999. In earlier years there have been some excellent results.

140 At the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is broadly in line with national expectations for both boys and girls. They develop skills of observation and recording through painting, drawing, simple printmaking, collage and construction work. They make use of a sketch book to record what they see, to develop ideas and also for homework, as was clear in some carefully observed tonal and colour studies of sea shells. Students in some cases have a limited range of experience when they start in Year 9 but they broaden their knowledge and skills, particularly in drawing and painting. By the end of the key stage they can use a range of media and processes to express confidently their ideas in both two-dimensional and three-dimensional work. Their knowledge and understanding of the work of artists is widened. For example, Year 9 students developed their own ideas for papier mache based on studies of an artist's three-dimensional work. Students do not have opportunities to learn and apply the skills of information and communications technology in art.

141 At the end of Key Stage 4, skills in painting, drawing and ceramics are at least in line with, and in many cases above, national expectations. Students' knowledge is in line with subject expectations in most cases and, although students' discussion skills are sometimes weak, the majority develop their art vocabulary. For example, Year 10 students looked at, handled and could describe - using appropriate technical language - ceramic work by a local artist. Students are increasingly able to create imaginative and personal work at home and in class that is inspired by research, observation and visits to galleries. GCSE coursework is above average in many cases and includes, for example, bold and imaginative painting compositions of people from a variety of viewpoints. The best sketchbooks are also of good quality and show that many boys and girls are able to explore ideas appropriately through notes and sketches. Although a few students make use of CD ROM for their research, skills in using information and communications technology to develop artwork remain low.

142 Students in the sixth follow either an Advanced GNVQ or an A-level art and design course, both of which build on the skills and experiences developed in Key Stage 4. Standards are broadly in line with expectations and reflect the attainment range of students joining the courses. Currently, the GNVQ students are working at appropriate levels and in most cases independently. They can work with a wide range of materials and subject matter: for example, a Year 13 student developed drawings and colour images in paint and collage from her studies of a ruined building, and Year 12 students experimented with printing processes and developed ideas through well-executed etchings. A-level work is characterised by increasing independence as students engage in personal research with many high quality imaginative and expressive responses to subject matter. For example, one A-level student had developed surreal images of a face from her studies of the human figure, while another explored his experience of mountains through expressive drawings and paintings linked to studies of Japanese art.

143 Students make good progress during Key Stage 3, broadening their understanding and consolidating their "making" skills. They make satisfactory progress with their knowledge of a range of artwork and cultures, but no progress with the use of computers to develop their work in art because of the limited resources available. Very good progress is often the result of teaching that makes use of stimulating visual resources. For example, a teacher used actual examples of an artist's work to promote discussion and develop understanding of how the work had been made. Students with special education needs are enabled to make satisfactory and often good progress as a result of appropriate support from teachers.

144 Students make good progress during Key Stage 4, in painting and drawing skills in particular, and in their ability to make more personal and imaginative responses to subject matter. In the current Year 10, many students already display high standards in their painting and ceramics work based on a museum visit. Such visits and opportunities to look at artwork first hand result in good motivation and progress. Students are increasingly able to

work in two and three dimensions to realise their ideas, and in Year 11 many work independently to a high standard.

145 In the sixth form, students make good progress as they develop their independent learning skills. In most cases they can respond to a range of subject matter and develop themes and ideas imaginatively. They are able to build on their experiences during Key Stage 4 and express and discuss their ideas with greater confidence. A minority do not develop their art vocabulary and discussion skills sufficiently, and this inhibits their progress. The structured nature of the GNVQ course helps many students to manage their time effectively and so make good progress. GNVQ students make satisfactory progress with the use of information and communication technology as an integral part of their coursework.

146 Students respond well in lessons; behaviour is very good in the majority of lessons and relationships are generally very positive. Students co-operate well, sometimes in cramped conditions, learn to work in pairs and groups as well as individually, and show respect for the work and ideas of others. Art lessons almost always provide a productive working environment in which students of all abilities can make progress.

147 The majority of teaching is good and is sometimes very good. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen. Teaching is better at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form than at Key Stage 3. The teaching is predominantly good because teachers have secure specialist knowledge and they use a range of methods to communicate this effectively to students, which ensures good progress in most lessons. Good use is made of verbal comments to guide students, but at Key Stage 3 in particular teachers do not involve students sufficiently in assessment and evaluation of the work as it progresses. Teachers use resources well and make very good use of resources beyond the school through visits to galleries and visiting artists and speakers. An imaginative project for GNVQ students involved them in running a gallery and exhibition for local artists.

148 The team of teachers is well led by the head of department who has, through an extensive range of documentation and departmental review and evaluation, ensured that a broad and balanced art curriculum is taught. The addition of a mobile classroom has improved the accommodation criticised at the time of the last inspection. Planning has identified targets for the department and there is a good atmosphere of collaborative development. More use should be made of assessment and examination information to track progress and monitor students' performance, particularly that of boys. There is scope to revise schemes of work, particularly at Key Stage 3, to improve further the challenge in lessons and also to develop opportunities for students to make use of information and communications technology in all age groups.

Business Education

149 GCSE results in 1999 in business studies were good, with seven out of ten students achieving a grade C or higher and four out of ten gaining grades A* to B. These results were well above those achieved nationally in the subject in maintained schools. Results have shown an improving trend since the last inspection. Post-16 students have a choice of A-level economics or GNVQ Business. Results in economics were very high in 1997, and have been close to national figures since, with eight out of ten students in 1999 gaining a pass grade. The department is just entering the second year of the GNVQ Advanced course and, in consequence, no figures are available for national comparisons.

150 At the end of the Key Stage 4, attainment is above national expectations in GCSE business studies. In business skills, attainment is broadly appropriate. The highest attainers in business studies are able to explain motivational theory to an acceptable depth, and outline the legislation that has been introduced to protect employed workers. Most other students have a good grasp of payment systems, and can talk convincingly about the various forms of non-monetary reward given to employees. During an activity designed to consider the costs and benefits of airport developments, students were able to identify the various "stakeholders" and list possible advantages and disadvantages that the developments would have for the business community. Some students taking the business skills course were competent users of keyboards, but some had limited touch-typing skills. Working in groups, lower-attaining students and those with special educational needs made relevant and effective contributions within their capabilities. Sixth form students showed a good knowledge of markets and their characteristics. They were able, with reasonable confidence, to discuss the barriers to entry to markets and the impact on firms in the industry. Lower attainers did not have the same level of fluency when developing their thoughts. Average-attaining students were competent when working with formulae, calculating the multiplier effect. Students on the GNVQ programme were attaining below expected levels and were less secure in their knowledge and understanding of business studies.

Although most were able to talk about the importance of profit and the benefits of businesses forecasting cash flow, most had problems drawing “break-even charts” or explaining clearly their purpose. The lower attainers struggled to state where the area of profit was although they could distinguish between fixed and variable costs.

151 Students on the Key Stage 4 business studies courses make good progress. The progress of business skills students over time tends to be limited by the nature of the tasks in the course. The skills-based approach restricts those students who have less aptitude for keyboard manipulation and use of specific software. Students taking business studies in Years 10 and 11 have good investigational skills and a sound general knowledge that enables them to progress quickly in a subject area that is new to them at the start of the key stage. Knowledge and skills development is evident through their coursework and class work. Sixth form students also make good progress, including those following the GNVQ programme. The quality of written work in A-level files shows a good rate of progression, and portfolios seen from GNVQ students indicate a developing proficiency in ability to make action plans and to evaluate. However, the business understanding shown by GNVQ students is below that expected of students taking advanced business courses.

152 As at the time of the last inspection, attitudes to work are good. Almost without exception the students are well motivated and eager to learn. They are keen to explain the activities they are involved in as well as showing a willingness to assist their peers. This was particularly evident in business skills, where a system of “peer helpers” enables students to overcome problems rather than wait for the teacher to assist them. On occasions, particularly when the teacher mainly directs lessons, some students are reluctant to contribute unless they are specifically asked to do so.

153 Teachers are well qualified. The teaching is at least satisfactory, and most is good. Strengths observed include good class management and enthusiasm in presenting material. Teachers use a good range of current, relevant resources that are well prepared and in sufficient quantities for all students. Relationships between teachers and students are good: this is partly the result of the good knowledge teachers have of their students, which enables them to appreciate individual needs. Sound lesson planning and interesting introductions help to maintain students’ interest. However, teaching could be improved by clearer recognition of the fact that in all teaching groups there is a range of ability; at present, there is insufficient differentiation in the work set. Although questioning is used to reinforce learning as the lesson progresses, it is rarely used well to find out how much students actually understand. On occasions timing was not well managed in lessons, with the result that lesson objectives, where stated, were not reviewed and learning points reinforced before students moved to the next lesson. Strategies used in the teaching are varied, but within a relatively narrow range. The group work on the extension of Luton Airport was one successful example of a different approach, but most lessons are dominated by the teacher to too great an extent. In consequence, students have insufficient opportunities to show what they know, understand and can do. Independent working, in line with course requirements, is more evident in the GNVQ programme.

154 The teacher responsible for business education has only recently taken over and has not yet had time to make clear his vision for the future of the department. The immediate need is for curriculum development, and planning for the replacement of the business skills course which provides little challenge for the majority of students. Current development plans focus on the maintenance of the existing curriculum and give relatively little attention to the possibilities of future development. The department benefits from modern, well-equipped rooms. However, the computer facilities are not fully utilised to meet the needs of the all students because too much computer time is devoted to the limited demands of the business skill course. The department was not reported on at the time of the last inspection. However, the range of courses and, in most cases, achievement in them, have improved. There have been major improvements in accommodation and resources, which have brought benefits to both staff and students.

129 **Design and technology**

155 Standards of attainment are in line with national averages at Key Stage 3 and mostly above average at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Almost all aspects of attainment are much better than at the time of the last inspection.

156 Teacher assessment at the end of Key Stage 3 records attainment as above average in 1998 and average in 1999. Evidence from the inspection supports the 1999 assessment. By the end of the key stage, students have sound skills in designing and making. They embroider by hand or with a machine and use batik or appliqué to design a pattern on fabric from which they make a hat. They have a satisfactory knowledge of food preparation and cooking

skills and understand the function of basic ingredients. Students use a range of hand and machine tools to shape and finish items made from metal, wood and plastic. For example, they shape wood to make a pattern to use when vacuum-forming plastic and use a centre lathe to shape a metal pendulum bob.

157 GCSE results in 1998 were well above national averages in textiles, above average in graphics, average in food technology and below average in resistant materials. In 1999, the results improved significantly in food and graphics, declined in textiles but remained above average, and declined further in resistant materials. Results in the last area are poor. Girls attain more highly than boys, and by margins greater than national differences. Overall, students' achievement in design and technology GCSE subjects is similar to that in the other subjects they take, and there is an upward trend except in resistant materials, where results are amongst the lowest in the school and falling.

158 The quality of students' completed GCSE coursework is good. Drawing skills are a strength and the presentation of work is, generally, of a high standard. Students apply the technical skills they learn in graphics lessons to good effect when presenting their work in other subjects. Many students use information and communications technology to produce templates, scan images and word process text for their portfolios. Construction skills are good in textiles where students make items of soft furnishing such as curtains or wall hangings that are creatively designed and well finished. They design and make artefacts such as an electronically operated cat flap or a jewellery box that demonstrates well-researched designs and good practical skills. Students taking food technology GCSE plan and make dishes adapted to suit specific dietary needs such as diabetes and have a good understanding of nutrition. Only in resistant materials is the quality of coursework poor in terms of both designing and making.

159 A-level design and technology results are good and high standards have been maintained for several years. However, numbers are too small to make valid national comparisons. Some of the major projects completed by A-level students are excellent and innovative, such as a rowing bicycle or a desk with revolving storage areas to fit into a small space. Results were good in the pilot AS level textiles course in 1999 and the students, all of whom were successful, are staying on to complete an A-level course.

160 Students come into Year 9 with below average skills in and knowledge of design and technology and they make satisfactory progress during the year. In textiles, they learn to sew by hand and with a machine. In food technology they become familiar with the basic skills of making dishes from mince pies to quick meals. Students develop a broad range of skills including use of a basic computer graphics package, and simple pneumatics using syringes to begin to understand control technology. By the end of Year 9 they know how to use practical rooms safely and have a satisfactory grounding in all aspects of design and technology. Progress has improved significantly since the last inspection.

161 Progress during Key Stage 4 is good in all subjects except resistant materials, where some of the teaching is very weak. Good progress continues in the sixth form in design and technology and textiles. A particular strength across the age range is the good development of designing skills. Not only do students learn to draw well, but their research and application of technical knowledge to design ideas is good.

162 Students' response to design and technology is good. They behave very well, treat each other, staff and resources with respect and enjoy practical work. They come to lessons ready to listen and learn. They collaborate with each other well, share ideas, give each other constructive criticism and help when they can. Each pupil chooses a GCSE subject from the five on offer and more than 30 choose two options. Numbers in A-level groups are increasing. Although students' choice of course continues to reflect gender stereotypes to a large extent, both boys and girls are beginning to make alternative choices at both GCSE and A-level.

163 The quality of teaching is at least satisfactory in nine out of ten lessons. Most lessons have good features and two in every ten are very good or excellent. There has been much improvement since the last inspection. Class management and the organisation of students in practical work are good. A feature of the best lessons is the teachers' ability to draw out creative talent and give students the confidence to be innovative and achieve their potential. When this happens some excellent work results at GCSE and in A-level individual coursework. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects and are able to support students in their work at the highest level. The individual target-setting and careful monitoring of progress during Key Stage 4 enable students who are not doing their best to be identified early. The many opportunities for individual feedback to students of all ages is well used to help with the development of ideas or to teach a new skill at the time it is needed. There is poor teaching in resistant

materials. Some concerns raised by parents are endorsed by the inspection. Students' in resistant materials are not well managed and behaviour is sometimes unsatisfactory. There is insufficient teaching and students spend too much time in working without guidance or instruction. The quality of coursework in Year 11 is very poor and students' work is not marked.

164 The workshop accommodation for design and technology is in urgent need of refurbishment. Storage space is insufficient in several areas and there is little space for the display of work. The department makes a satisfactory contribution to the development of skills in information and communications technology and the forthcoming upgrading of computer facilities will make it possible to include computer graphics and control technology in the curriculum.

129 **Drama**

166 Drama is part of the expressive arts faculty and is taught as a separate subject from English throughout the school. Overall, GCSE drama results have varied since the last inspection but have been predominantly above national averages, with very good results in 1999 that were well above average and compared well with results in other subjects. Girls achieve more highly than boys at GCSE. A-level theatre studies results have also varied but are good and show consistent signs of improvement. However, the relatively small numbers involved at A-level in most years make national comparisons unreliable.

167 Students enter the school with very little previous experience of drama. Although they make good progress during Year 9 standards at the end of the key stage are slightly below national expectations. Students do not make up entirely for weaknesses in role-play, voice projection and use of movement, space, facial expression and gesture. However, they do demonstrate excellent skills in collaborative work. They listen carefully to one another and to the teacher, and most contribute confidently in discussion and evaluation. Drama is a popular option at Key Stage 4 and students continue to make good progress. The highest attainers learn to comment perceptively and at length when evaluating one another's work. They speak out clearly and convincingly in role-play and draw on a range of appropriate techniques in improvisation. The work of average and lower attainers is weaker but reflects commitment to and enthusiasm for the subject in most instances. Average and lower attainers' progress in technical competence and understanding is occasionally marred by lapses into self-consciousness. Nevertheless, by the end of the key stage most students can meet well the requirements of the GCSE course; and all benefit considerably in terms of developing self-esteem and the ability to cope with a range of situations demanding effective use of dramatic skills to convey feelings and opinions. Overall, standards in the Year 11 lessons seen matched or exceeded national expectations, although girls' work was of a higher standard than boys'. Students with special educational needs make good progress in the practical sessions. They work very well with others and rise to the challenges set for the class. There is often no indication that they have special needs. Students taking theatre studies at A-level make good progress although there is a wide range of attainment in each group. A Year 13 class taking part in a well-planned revision lesson was very quick to appreciate and respond to the subtleties of an A-level text. They used it, with varying degrees of success, as a basis for their own group presentations and commentaries. The last group to make a presentation achieved very high standards of analysis and interpretation. Although most students find the transition from GCSE to A-level difficult, particularly where written work is concerned, standards in Year 13 now match and in many cases exceed A-level expectations.

168 Students' response to drama and theatre studies is very positive. In some lessons they show huge energy and enthusiasm. In almost all they are quick to respond to the tasks set and anxious to learn. Standards of self-discipline improve rapidly from Year 9 and are good overall. Nevertheless, a few students in Key Stages 3 and 4 do not appreciate sufficiently the degree of concentration needed for successful drama.

169 The quality of teaching in the lessons seen was at least good. In over a quarter of lessons it was very good. Teachers are committed, hard-working and successful. They transmit their enthusiasm effectively to the students. They maintain consistently good standards of class discipline and provide a very good range of activities in lessons. They know the subject well. The scheme of work incorporates a step-by-step approach to the development of dramatic skills and understanding of dramatic concepts, and so provides a sound basis for work in the classroom. Learning objectives for lessons are precise and in most cases carefully explained at the beginning of the lesson and reviewed at the end. Lessons in all age groups are well structured. Expectations are in most instances high. Lessons move at a brisk pace, even too briskly at times: when this occurs, opportunities for reflective evaluation are lost. Time and resources are mostly well managed, but a persistent weakness is the late start to some lessons as a result of

the teacher having to change sites. Because of this one excellent sixth form lesson was cut short in its prime: there was insufficient time for necessary recapitulation and reinforcement of learning.

170 Drama was not reported on as a separate subject at the time of the last inspection, but it is clear from the GCSE and A-level results that good standards have been built on since then. The subject makes a major contribution to the life and work of the school, and to students' personal development. Extra-curricular drama is vibrant and successful. The subject is well managed and the school will benefit greatly from the imminent completion of a new drama studio.

Geography

171 Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are rising. In the 1998 teacher assessments they were slightly below national figures, and in 1999 broadly in line with them, a level of attainment confirmed by lesson observation. Girls have marginally outperformed boys in the assessments. Standards, although rising, are below those in the core subjects in the school.

172 The highest attainers at Key Stage 3 are well able to demonstrate their increasing knowledge of place to interpret the world around them, and their developing mapping and graphical skills. Lower attainers are able to use these skills at an appropriate level to describe their surroundings.

173 By the end of Key Stage 4 standards are above average, which represents an improvement since the last inspection. GCSE results have improved significantly since then. GCSE results in 1999 were close to the school's average. Girls outperformed boys. Most Key Stage 4 students show developing skills in interpreting the environment, at the global, national and local levels. Globally, they understand the impact of fossil fuels as an energy source compared with renewable energy sources. Locally, in urban studies of Hitchin, most are able to interpret more immediate environmental issues.

174 The strengths at Key Stage 4 are built on at A-level, where attainment has been rising since 1997 although, overall, A-level standards since the last inspection have been variable, reflecting fluctuations in the uptake of geography as an A-level option. The subject's popularity is now increasing rapidly. A-level results are still below the national average but have generally represented good progress when compared with the students' earlier GCSE results. Students display confidence in using geographical terminology to interpret complex issues such as the interlinking problems facing developing countries, or issues about flooding, control and management on the Mississippi River. Lower attainers reach towards understanding these ideas.

175 Progress is mostly good, both in individual lessons and over time. During Key Stage 3, students learn good organisational skills, and make considerable efforts to spell and punctuate correctly, and to develop fluency in extended descriptions and explanations. High, average and low-attaining students develop their skills well. During Key Stage 4, students progress well in line with their attainment targets, although within the spread of attainment there are considerable differences of competence in understanding the complexities of interrelated global issues. Sixth form students develop complex skills in learning to understand and use technical material and statistical techniques to solve problems.

176 Across the attainment range, including students with special educational needs, students' progress is aided by teaching that extends technical vocabulary, increases reasoning powers and improves independent learning through research and investigation.

177 The great majority of students at all key stages are well motivated, and most contribute to an atmosphere of purposeful learning. They generally maintain concentration well, although at Key stage 3 in a small minority of the lessons seen, concentration trailed off among lower attainers at the end of practical periods spent analysing field work data from Ampthill Park. At Key stage 4 students sustain their interest in geography, and are cheerfully willing to work independently, or with each other to further the task in hand. The higher attainers make relevant links between subjects, as in a lesson on electricity supplies when material learnt in science was applied to describe the functioning of a turbine. Sixth form students maintain good working relationships, both with teachers and peers, and support one another well, as in role play dealing with the problems of development in poor countries.

178 The quality of the teaching is satisfactory or better. Almost all is good or very good, and a small proportion

is excellent, as when the teacher's detailed knowledge of the subject combined with extremely effective organisation and timely interventions using a variety of resources, to enable students to make very good progress in learning, in groups, about the causes and management of flooding. A wide range of teaching methods is used, which challenge students and set high expectations, but are well matched to the needs of students at most levels of attainment. Lower attainers, however, although they receive much teacher support, are not given modified teaching materials to use, and this sometimes limits their progress. Students with special educational needs make good progress when they are able to benefit from the unobtrusive but effective help provided by support staff. Most lessons are well paced, although occasionally time management is insufficiently rigorous, resulting in unfinished tasks. Work is marked thoroughly, often with encouraging comment, but could occasionally be accompanied by more suggestions for improvement. Homework is used sensibly to reinforce learning. Students are very well managed in lessons, with gentle but effective discipline, which is aided by the teachers' ability to communicate their enthusiasm for the subject.

179 The curriculum is generally broad and balanced, although use of information and communications technology is insufficient. There are plans for improvement in this regard. Leadership is very good, creates an atmosphere of enthusiastic co-operation and promotes the aim of high achievement and the raising of standards. Teachers work well together.

180 Many of the weaknesses identified at the time of the last inspection have been overcome. Standards in all age groups have been raised, teaching methods and resources have been diversified and improved, and homework is now set and marked consistently. However, the provision of information and communications technology remains inadequate, and the textbooks at Key Stages 3 and 4 are still insufficient in number for students to take them home, although materials developed within the department remedy this problem to some extent. This is a successful, well-led department that has made significant progress since the last inspection.

History

181 Since the last inspection, there has been an upward trend in the history results at GCSE from being in line with the national average to a position well above the national average in 1998. The percentage of students gaining grades A* to C increased still further in 1999. At A-level the percentage of candidates gaining grades A and B has fluctuated in the last four years, reaching a high point in 1998, when the results were above the national average and all candidates passed. Performance at A-level in 1999 was much lower.

182 Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with national expectations. This is borne out by the teacher assessments for 1999 that were the same as the national average for history. Students' performance in history largely matched that in other word-based subjects. Year 9 students have a broad overview of the economic changes that took place in the nineteenth century. In their lessons on the social history of the period, students show good understanding of the causes of poverty and the principles behind the workhouse system of poor relief. They make good use of historical sources to produce a report on living conditions in towns, reaching judgements and making recommendations. The quality of their written work is good, helped by a "writing frame" to plan their report and a drafting stage before the final version is produced.

183 At the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is well above national expectations. In recent coursework assignments on Stalin, students show an ability to write a good historical essay, explaining in detail reasons for Stalin's rise to power and substantiating their arguments and conclusions with the requisite, relevant evidence. In lessons on America in the "boom and bust" years before the war, students make intelligent use of historical sources in learning to understand the international consequences of the collapse of the American economy. The standard of note-taking is generally high, though some students settle for a lower standard, judging by the superior quality of their assessed work. Discussion in lessons is informed by many students' efficient recall of factual information and, in a few cases, considerable fluency in expressing quite complex ideas.

184 In the sixth form, attainment is in line with national expectations for the course. Year 13 students organise their work efficiently and research their personal projects in sufficient detail. In a lesson on the effects of war with France on the industrial revolution in England, most students demonstrated good understanding of difficult sources and an ability to take account of the debate among historians on the subject, and reach their own conclusions.

185 Students make good progress during Key Stage 3, helped by the teachers' close liaison with the middle schools. This has led to a common scheme of work to ensure continuity in studies over the key stage. Higher-

attaining students make particularly good progress in their assignments, which allow them to write at length. However, some of the class exercises they are set to do are not so challenging. Lower-attaining students make good progress in the majority of lessons, which start with easy tasks and then increase in difficulty. There is little matching of textual materials to students' levels of attainment, but subject teachers and support staff work successfully to adapt or explain work in progress.

186 At Key Stage 4, Year 10 students make good progress in their understanding of international relations between the wars. They are taught in groups of similar attainment, which allows teachers to pitch their material at the right level. A highly structured, formal approach in the lower sets is proving successful in raising students' attainment in examinations, but not in developing their ability to learn for themselves. Teachers make good use of target setting in a process of individual review at the end of Year 10, and arrange extra assistance for students who are bordering on higher grades. In Year 11, students make good progress in essay writing, source analysis and examination technique. In the sixth form progress was good in two lessons, where seminar methods were used to make demands on students and engage them in discussion. Progress was unsatisfactory in one lesson where students remained listening passively to the teacher for much of the time.

187 Across the school, students have positive attitudes towards their work in history. They show interest in the topics and participate willingly in discussion, asking as well as answering questions. Some are content to remain passive in lessons where little is demanded of them. The number of students choosing to take history for GCSE has doubled in the last two years. Motivation is high on the course and students put in a lot of effort on assignments. Behaviour is very good in lessons. Teachers and students enjoy good working relationships that promote learning. The students work well together on tasks and respect one another's views. Year 11 students showed a keen sense of justice in their study of discrimination against black Americans in the twenties.

188 The quality of teaching was good in two thirds of the lessons observed. It was unsatisfactory in just one lesson where exposition went on too long and students had little to do. There is a range of teaching styles in the department, but not all the teachers employ the same variety of methods to give all students, including sixth form students, the opportunity to learn in different ways. All have a good command of the subject and present their lessons with enthusiasm. The schemes of work are excellent and lesson planning is sound. Teachers have high expectations in terms of examination success, but some tasks in lessons are not sufficiently challenging or closely matched to students' needs. Marking of students' work is done well, helping them to improve by detailed, constructive criticism. Procedures for assessment of students' progress are thorough and accurate and carried out in a way that promotes improved learning.

189 The department has relocated since the last inspection and has gained an extra teacher, but the accommodation is inadequate, because the head of department does not have her own teaching room and there is not enough storage space for stock. Information and communications technology is still not used in the teaching of history; staff await the imminent improvement of computing facilities available to the humanities faculty. The test will be the extent to which teachers who are achieving a good measure of success with conventional methods can extend their repertoire to give students opportunities to learn in new ways and from new technology

Information and communications technology

190 Overall attainment in information and communications technology is below average because students have, until very recently, had insufficient access to computers.

191 Teacher assessment at the end of Key Stage 3 indicates that students' attainment was in line with national expectations in 1998 and well above this level in 1999. The school agrees that these figures are incorrect. By the end of the key stage most students can use a desktop publishing program to present their work to a professional standard. They can use a spreadsheet program to compare the value of a range of currencies. Students develop elementary skills in text processing. Beyond this range of applications in information and communications technology, students' use of computers is limited. The situation was similar at the time of the last inspection. However, an extensive network infra-structure has just been completed. The school has taken delivery of hardware for computer control, sensing and data logging. The Internet is available on some machines and there is a growing stock of CD ROM's. Plans are in hand to ensure that students will use all these to broaden their experience of using information and communications technology and raise attainment. This process has already begun.

192 Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is similar to that at the end of Key Stage 3, for the same reasons. The curriculum followed by Key Stage 4 students is similar to that for Key Stage 3 because they began to use industry standard applications only at the same time. The school plans to begin formal assessment at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2000.

193 Sixth form students following a GNVQ course have regular information and communications technology lessons and their skills are in line with course requirements. They use text processing and desktop publishing well when presenting assignments, and business studies students use spreadsheets to calculate balance sheets accurately. Standards achieved by other sixth form students do not match expectations for the age group.

194 Students come into Year 9 with different experiences of information and communications technology, depending on the computers and expertise available in their middle schools. Some are familiar with using personal computers, some have used other platforms and some have almost no experience. Those students completing Key Stage 3 last year made unsatisfactory progress and continue in Key Stage 4 to make slow progress from a low base line. Students in the current Year 9 are making satisfactory progress in lessons: for example they learned how to make a text box as part of a page set-up so that they could separate items in a "hand out" or a record of achievement. Over time, however, their progress is too slow because they have only one lesson in two weeks, and the gap between lessons is too long for them to remember new skills. Cross curricular information and communications technology is at an early stage and is starting to make a contribution to students' progress but this is as yet far from sufficient. Students use computers to support their work in mathematics, business studies and design and technology, but other subjects are not yet making enough use of information and communications technology.

195 Students who have special educational needs use computers as a part of the support curriculum and make satisfactory progress in learning the information and communications technology skills they need. In information and communications technology lessons where learning support assistants are with them they make good progress. Where these students have no additional support their progress is similar to that of the rest of the class. Work is not matched to different attainment levels. Some students make slower progress, not only because of ability but also because of poor key boarding skills and unfamiliarity with computers. Students with better skills are often those with access to computers at home - these represent more than half the students overall - and they have an advantage over the rest of the class. Many use home computers to present homework and coursework and a significant number use the Internet to research their school work.

196 Students enjoy using computers and they concentrate well in lessons. Both boys and girls ask questions confidently when they do not understand, and they seek assistance from the teacher or other students. They are very good at sharing expertise and help each other readily. Students listen attentively when being taught a new skill and their behaviour is always very good.

197 In the specialist information and communications technology lessons, teaching is satisfactory at both key stages and in the sixth form, and is good in one lesson in six. Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the subject and this is well used to respond to questions from students. Written plans set out objectives for lessons and teaching proceeds at a satisfactory pace to meet these objectives. Relationships and class management are good and resources are well used. Assessment is weak. There is no assessment of students' skills and knowledge on entry to Year 9, nor tracking of progress against National Curriculum level descriptions. Work in Key Stage 4 is not assessed. Teaching and assessing of information and communications key skills for GNVQ is satisfactory in the sixth form.

198 Managing the installation of the new network and equipping the school with computers to meet the growing needs of students as well as the demands from subject teachers, has occupied a great deal of management time. The school has, to its great credit, achieved this and appointed a network manager and a technician to support the development of information and communications technology. There are many aspects of curriculum management, however, which are unsatisfactory. Some of these were identified in the inspection of 1995, for example co-ordination of cross-curricular information and communications technology is not significantly different and there is still no assessment system. The scheme of work for discrete information and communications technology is not satisfactory. It lists programs to be used but not learning outcomes and there is no reference to the National Curriculum. The development plan is mainly concerned with resources and gives insufficient attention to the curriculum. Since the last inspection the school has moved from a system based on Acorn machines to a school PC network and plans to capitalise on this major investment are good.

Modern languages

199 At the end of Key Stage 3 in 1998 the percentage of students achieving Levels 4 and above in the teacher assessments in French was slightly below the national average. In 1999 the percentage rose to significantly above the national average. Work seen in lessons in the current Year 9 was not at this level: standards were broadly average. At Key Stage 4 in GCSE French results in the range A*-C since 1995 have fluctuated. Results were on line with the national average in one year (1997), above in two years (1998 and 1995) and below in one (1999). The average over this period is slightly higher than the national figures. Pupils' performance in French was better than in most other subjects in 1998 and broadly in line with other subjects in 1997. The dip in performance in 1999 in French is attributed by the department to a change in the school's Key Stage 4 curriculum organisation, which resulted in a much wider range of attainment within each set. German GCSE examination results in the range A*-C since 1995 have also fluctuated. Results were above the national average in the years 1995 to 1998 but declined to match national figures in 1999. Pupils' performance in German was weaker than in the other subjects they took in 1997 and 1998. Spanish results have varied widely, but have been significantly above the national average in all years except 1997. Five out of the six candidates taking A-level French in 1999 were successful, but four of the nine candidates for A-level German or Spanish failed the examination. All three languages were below the school average A-level pass rate in 1999 and French was significantly below it in 1998. The school's own value-added analysis for 1999 shows French as neutral and German as a weaker subject. There have been considerable difficulties over the past year in staffing German. Overall, standards across the age range and different languages have improved since the last inspection. Even so, they are not yet as high as they should be.

200 Attainment in lessons is broadly in line with national expectations at the end of each key stage and in the sixth form. At Key Stage 3, higher attainers in French are able to respond readily to the teacher's questions on topics relating to their personal circumstances. The highest attainers demonstrate appropriate knowledge of French grammar in the course of oral work. In Spanish, students are able to take part in a short dialogue after less than one term of learning the language. In German, most students are able to answer simple questions about family members and ages, higher attainers with facility, lower attainers hesitantly when supported by the teacher. All students are able to extract relevant information from a listening passage. Students are able to read and understand simple printed texts and respond appropriately. Their written responses are generally accurate. At the end of Key Stage 4, higher-attaining students in French are able to extract information from higher-level GCSE-style reading passages and record their answers in writing. They successfully undertake extended writing exercises on a range of topics, such as work experience, using past and future tenses. Some Year 11 students write extensively on advanced topics such as AIDS, the environment and adolescence, giving and justifying opinions, the highest attainers with considerable fluency and accuracy. Lower-attaining students can extract information from challenging printed texts when given considerable support by the teacher. They are able to take part in simple conversations relating to themselves but find it difficult to move beyond the topic areas of name, age and locality. Most German learners in Year 11 are able to extract information from a listening exercise on a single topic, but some students have difficulty with all but the simplest questions. They do little or no extended writing. At A-level, Year 12 students of Spanish are able to form the subjunctive of regular and irregular verbs, and use it appropriately in realistic contexts. Year 13 students of French recount and summarise with confidence the content of articles they have read in French on a range of topic and are able to respond to questions from the teacher about what they have said, stating, justifying and developing arguments for their opinions. They show good understanding of spoken French containing a wide range of structures, vocabulary and idioms, and successfully undertake extended writing on a variety of subjects. Year 13 students of German are able to understand advanced texts on subjects of contemporary interest with the support of the teacher. Most students' responses take the form of short phrases or sentences and students are reluctant to use German for class communication.

201 Progress in lessons during Key Stage 3 is good. Higher-attaining Year 9 students in French make progress in their ability to listen and respond. Students learning Spanish make good progress in speaking, pronunciation and reading. Progress in lessons during Key Stage 4 is satisfactory. Higher-attaining students develop their ability to use the future tense in French, but lower attainers are often limited to passive recognition of single words and phrases. Year 10 students learning Spanish make good progress in their knowledge and understanding of vocabulary and phrases and the development of their listening and speaking skills. Students learning German quickly grasp the meaning of new vocabulary and develop their listening skills, but the progress of some students is limited by the low level nature of some tasks, such as copying. Progress in sixth form lessons is good. Year 12 students of French develop their reading and speaking skills effectively. Students of Spanish make good progress in their knowledge

and application of Spanish grammar. Year 13 students of French make very good progress in their ability to understand and respond to spoken French. Students of German expand their knowledge and range of vocabulary relating to the topics studied in preparation for more in-depth work.

202 Behaviour is very good in nearly all classes. Most students concentrate well in lessons and appear interested in what they are doing. They respond particularly well when engaged in active learning such as team games. Students collaborate well with each other, for example when they work in pairs to practise dialogues

203 The teaching is nearly always at least satisfactory. A third of lessons are good and a fifth are very good. Teachers' subject knowledge is always good or very good. Lessons are carefully and thoroughly prepared and taught at a fast pace. They normally consist of a variety of appropriate activities with a good balance between listening, speaking, reading and writing practice. Teachers use textbooks and a variety of other resources and equipment to good effect. Students are managed firmly but sympathetically. Teachers have high expectations of students in most lessons. They nearly always use the foreign language extensively for class communication, but do not encourage or require students sufficiently to use the language themselves for routine class communication. Teachers monitor and support students well, both in class work and when students are working individually or in pairs. In Year 11 insufficient attention is paid to extended writing in German. In many classes considerable time is devoted to the learning of grammar, but this is not always followed up with sufficient practice relating to the topics studied. Teachers in the department have a wealth of collective experience and expertise across the full range of teaching techniques that can be used for teaching modern foreign languages, but there is still too much variation between individual teachers in terms of the breadth of teaching approaches employed. The middle and higher-attaining students are not given enough challenging tasks, for example extended writing using a range of tenses and other structures. Students' work is marked regularly. Teachers constantly assess pupils' progress in lessons and keep detailed records of their progress. The French, German and Spanish assistants are used to good effect and contribute to the standards achieved by students.

204 The curriculum is appropriate for French and Spanish, but German schemes of work are unsatisfactory, especially for sixth form work. Students now have an extra hour per fortnight for French in Year 9. The department works closely with contributory middle schools to ascertain the level students have reached by the end of Year 8. The more delicate issue – of how these standards might be raised to match those in the core subjects- has not been tackled.

205 In many respects, the department has improved since the last inspection. Standards are generally higher, teaching is better and all students now take a modern language, apart from a small number who are disapplied. The head of department has worked hard to overcome difficulties caused by staffing problems during the last year. She is aware of the areas requiring attention if standards are to be raised further. In particular, an important issue raised at the time of the last inspection has not been resolved: teachers do not work together closely enough to achieve the consistency in teaching approaches that is necessary if students are to make maximum progress.

Music

206 At the end of Key Stage 3 there is a wide span of attainment with a substantial majority of students still working towards the national expectation for fourteen year olds. Many show some embarrassment (even at this stage) in presenting and recording their compositions and, occasionally, some inability to listen attentively to one another's work. For most, composing tends to be based on very simple structures with little development of melodic or rhythmic motifs and, when performing, little attention is paid to the finer details of diction, pitch, rhythmic co-ordination and dynamic control. Many also find it difficult to hold an individual part and to develop any depth of comment when referring to music heard or played. Much of this follows from their wide diversity of previous musical experiences. For some, however, such experiences have included specific instrumental tuition and thus the proportion of those working beyond expectation and exhibiting exceptional performance is more in line with the national average. The scheme of work allows for students with special educational needs to be fully integrated into all tasks and achieve standards commensurate with their general ability.

207 The GCSE course is attracting more candidates than at the time of the last inspection, although numbers vary from year to year. The previous two years' results have been above the national average for A* - C grades, as has been the number of candidates entered for the examination. Key Stage 4 work in hand suggests that the department's expectations for future success are realistic.

208 A-level entries have been too small to make meaningful comparisons with national figures, but results have been good and the present cohort, again small in number, are motivated and work with some confidence, though some are struggling with the changes from the GCSE course - especially the more advanced aural requirements.

209 A good level of achievement in instrumental work is reflected in the number of students who are successfully entered for external examinations, play at county level and, in one or two instances, attend national music college junior courses. Together with the influence of substantial extra-curricular activities this all contributes to a good overall standard of attainment across the key stages, as was the position at the time of the last inspection.

210 Progress is generally satisfactory during Key Stage 3 but better during Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. In lessons, Year 9 students of all abilities are able to go some way in completing, performing and composing tasks using simple staff notation and practising for performance albeit at a fairly elementary level. More able students progress quickly to produce finished work which is then refined after they have recognised or been told how it could be improved. This process could be more fully extended and developed. Older students make good progress, as was observed in a Year 11 lesson on world music where all the students demonstrated the ability to put together a performance of an Indonesian gamelan piece in one practical session. Those who had experienced an earlier workshop consolidated their skills and then supported others who were meeting the challenges of this genre for the first time. Students with special educational needs progress equally well, as was seen when one pupil completed a notational task which, for support purposes, had been adapted by a computer-generated score. Progress in creative and practical skills could be extended further by access to a wider variety and range of instruments and regular, practical music-making being the mainstay of every lesson in Year 9.

211 There is a welcoming atmosphere and a sense of purpose in the department, and most students enjoy their work in music. They are generally well behaved and their attitudes are positive, especially amongst the older students and in extra-curricular activities. Collaborative work is good and students take care of equipment, help each other and are quick to support what they think is another's good idea. An impressive, regular programme of extra-curricular activities involves approximately 200 students and staff.

212 The quality of teaching is generally satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and better, mostly good, at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Most lessons proceed at a good pace with suitable points for review. Time is used well, but over the year much valuable music-making time is being lost because of late arrival of students at most lessons. Expectations are high, though sometimes a little unrealistic as in some Year 9 lessons, when students are asked to complete tasks without sufficient background knowledge and experience or adequate introduction to proceed at anything but a superficial level. Least successful are those lessons, such as some in the Year 9 vocal module, in which too much time is taken up talking or writing about the peripheries of the topic rather than getting down to learning and developing the skills and understanding of the objectives by practical music making. The best lessons are in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form where they feature proficient management of time and resources for work at stylistic exercises, encouraging and supportive help to individual students in the grammatical points of formal harmony, and differentiated tasks in performing so that all can work to their strengths. The quality of instrumental teaching is very good, even excellent at times, as evidenced from examination success and the standards achieved in extra-curricular performance.

213 The day-to-day leadership and organisation of the subject is good. Music accommodation has much improved since the last inspection. Curriculum time is satisfactory and supportive documentation includes a scheme of work that covers National Curriculum and examinations requirements. The assessment scheme (which includes opportunities for students' self-assessment) is manageable and appropriate for monitoring progress, although as yet it has had no direct impact on curricular planning. Reports for parents lack depth of information and should refer in more detail to the end of key stage descriptions for Year 9 students. Although improvements are being introduced, singing as a class activity is very much under-developed. The use of music technology is being introduced slowly, but there is a need for this to be supported by appropriate staff training. Consideration needs to be given to increasing the provision of classroom instruments in order to make both music rooms self-sufficient for all types of musical activities.

Physical education

214 During the week of the inspection the only lessons on the physical education programme at Key Stage 3 were

for running; in consequence, it is not possible to make a definitive judgement on standards except in that activity. The first lesson seen was with a class of lower-attaining students and they performed well for their abilities, though below national expectations. The second lesson involved a large group of students from three tutor classes and, overall, their attainment exceeded expectations.

215 At the end of Key Stage 4, students' attainment in practical work is generally quite high and, in the games seen, hockey, netball and badminton, at least matched or, more usually, bettered national expectations. Key Stage 4 students have a good mastery of basic skills and a sound knowledge and understanding of the principles of play in those games. In movement work, students have good body management skills and control and produce imaginative sequences in dance lessons. These outcomes indicate a clear improvement on the standards reported at the time of the last inspection.

216 There has been a very marked improvement in the physical education GCSE examination results since the last inspection. They are now considerably higher than the national average for all schools. These results are part of a continuing trend in the last few years. GCSE dance results are just below the national average, as they have been for the last three years. The very few students taking A-level dance are obtaining good results, though the small numbers make comparisons with national figures unreliable. The physical education A-level had a first cohort take the examination in 1999 with a satisfactory 80 percent pass rate.

217 Students' progress during both key stages is good and sometimes very good. Students at all levels of attainment, including those with special education needs, do well; they learn new skills and consolidate them; they acquire a good knowledge and understanding of a wide range of physical activities. The behaviour and response of students at both key stages is good and they have very positive attitudes. They work well individually and co-operate productively in groups and teams, where they are mutually supportive. When opportunities arise in lessons, they use their initiative and take responsibility well.

218 The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection and there is now more pace and challenge and expectations are higher. The teaching is consistently good in both key stages. Teachers are secure in their knowledge of the subject. They have a good rapport with students and classes are very competently managed. Lessons are well prepared and include appropriately structured practices to develop the work. Much of the teaching is direct, positive and effective. At the same time in many lessons students are given opportunities and positively encouraged, to use their initiative and take responsibility. Appropriate grouping and individual help satisfactorily cater for students of different abilities.

219 Very good practice was exemplified in a Year 9 running lesson. Here the teacher's encouraging, supportive and motivating manner, the setting of realistic and achievable individual targets, and the variety in the approaches adopted produced a marked change in the attitudes of a low-attaining group (which included students with special educational needs) and enabled them to enjoy the satisfaction of real achievement in a demanding physical activity.

220 The curriculum meets National Curriculum requirements in respect of the range of activities offered. However, in Year 9, limited weighting is given to gymnastics and dance and the arrangements for liaison with the middle schools do not provide sufficient information regarding the progress of individual students towards meeting the criteria given in the end of key stage statements. An opportunity is provided in the timetable for some sixth form students to participate in recreational games and sports. Those who take part value the provision.

221 The very extensive and successful extra-curricular sports programme augments the physical education curriculum and helps to raise standards; a very large number of students, boys and girls, benefit from this provision. The accommodation for physical education is satisfactory although the hard court provision is very limited; there are expectations that an imminent response to a lottery bid will resolve this issue.

222 The department is effectively led and managed and the staff have created a positive learning environment. There have been many important changes since the last inspection. In addition to the developments in the teaching, the marked improvement at Key Stage 4, particularly in GCSE examination results, and the introduction of A-level physical education, there have been improvements in the curriculum and the appointment of two new members of staff. The department has for some years been making a very valuable contribution to the initial teacher training of students from the local university.

Religious education

223 Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with the expectations of the local agreed syllabus. In their current work on Buddhism, for example, students have sound knowledge and understanding of symbols used in shrines and can relate these to Buddhist teaching. In this way, students show better understanding of the relationship between religious traditions and practices than was reported to be the case at the time of the last inspection. This holds true also at the end of Key Stage 4. All students now follow a course that prepares them for GCSE (short course), although only a third of the year enters for the examination. The course content gives students the chance to develop further their understanding of moral issues and related religious beliefs in Christianity and Islam. In 1999, the quarter of the year group that took the examination achieved a well above average number of grades A* to C, as students also did in 1998, the first year the examination was taken. Many other students in 1999 were awarded the school's own religious education certificate, nine at distinction level. There were 70 merits and 60 passes. In this way, the school is working effectively to enhance the status of religious education in the curriculum and to raise students' attainments. Overall, attainment in the present Year 11 is average with respect to the GCSE standard, with higher-attaining students working at a well above average standard. For example, understanding of the various approaches to abortion is firmly based on knowledge of the law and the different religious attitudes, while higher-attaining students were able to express clearly some of the moral dilemmas associated with euthanasia. In Year 13, students have started to study religious education within the A-level general studies course. Although the time allocated for this is below the minimum expected in the local agreed syllabus, attainment is in line with the course expectation in the study of religion and ethics. However, attainment is below that of the agreed syllabus in terms of the breadth of areas expected to be studied.

224 Progress during Key Stage 3, both in lessons and over longer periods of time, is generally satisfactory and is occasionally good. Good progress was made in a lesson when students researched information on Buddhism, using textbooks. Key Stage 4 progress is similarly satisfactory overall, with occasional very good progress. Students progressed satisfactorily in a Year 10 lesson on Islam, when they studied pilgrimage and its relation to the Muslim belief on equality. Very good progress was made as Year 11 students listened very attentively to each other as they argued about the moral principles involved in euthanasia. The majority of sixth form students progress satisfactorily in lessons, but not over longer periods: lack of curriculum time is the cause. A small number of students do not have religious education in their curriculum and make no progress beyond Year 11. This is a breach of the statutory requirement. Higher-attaining students throughout the school often make better progress than do others, because of their ability to write more fluently and at greater length as they develop their personal responses. Students with special educational needs generally make satisfactory progress; their progress is good when learning support assistance is available, as is generally the case in Year 9.

225 Students' responses to the teaching they receive in religious education are good overall. The great majority are interested, concentrate in lessons, and present their work carefully, though some over-emphasise presentation, especially colouring, at the expense of content. This leads to written answers that are too brief to develop personal responses. Almost all students are very well behaved, but a small number occasionally are a distraction. Many students can work together in groups productively, though when tasks are not explained clearly enough some quickly drift into casual conversation. Students, usually a minority, readily try to answer oral questions, but many are content to sit back and not to get involved in discussion.

226 The quality of teaching in the lessons observed ranged from satisfactory to very good, and was mainly satisfactory. There are no significant differences between the key stages. Strengths in teaching relate to secure knowledge of the content of the agreed syllabus, lesson planning which is firmly based on the good scheme of work, and mainly satisfactory expectations of the quantity of work which students should do. The teaching methods used are effective in maintaining students' interest through using a variety of activities, including effective use of video. Relationships are friendly and purposeful, and discipline is mainly very successfully maintained. Lessons are taught at a good pace, and often begin with useful revision through questioning. Homework tasks relate to lessons' content. There are some weaknesses, however: expectations are not always high enough, as evidenced particularly in the use of drawing and colouring at the expense of personal written work; lesson planning does not always give enough attention to the range of attainment in a class; questioning to review previous learning and to consolidate the new bypasses many students who are not brought into the discussion; homework is often not challenging enough as a result, in part, of the lack of textbook resources. Despite these weaknesses, which are capable of being quickly addressed, teaching enables students to progress at least satisfactorily.

227 The subject is making a good contribution to students' personal development. Spiritual development is promoted well, for example through developing understanding of others' beliefs and a respectful attitude towards them. A strong theme running through much of the curriculum is the relationship between religious beliefs and morals. This is supporting students' growing understanding of the ethical basis of behaviour. Social and cultural development are helped by the study of religion as activities of communities, as well as of individuals, particularly the Christian, Muslim and Buddhist.

228 The religious education curriculum is well established at Key Stages 3 and 4, helped by the good scheme of work, though it needs more resources to enhance students' experiences: the need for more textbooks, for the whole attainment range, artefacts and computer software have already been identified by the recently appointed head of department. The inclusion of religious education in the sixth form curriculum is an improvement since the previous inspection, but more needs to be done to meet fully the agreed syllabus requirements for this age group. The head of department has identified appropriate priorities for the next stage of development. To these should be added the points summarised above under teaching. The subject is well placed to improve further by increasing the rate at which students' progress. Lack of teaching of religious education for some sixth form students needs to be remedied.

Vocational Education

229 Only a small proportion of the school population is involved in GNVQ courses, which are available to sixth form students only. Vocational areas include business, art and design and land and environment, the last at intermediate level whereas the other two are advanced level courses. Attainment is varied. Students taking the art and design programme have generally performed well, with half of those completing the course in 1998 gaining a distinction. No students were following the course in 1999. The business course will see the first group of students complete in the summer of 2000. Land and environment, which is an intermediate level course, has not been as successful as in most other schools that provide this course nationally. Except in 1998, when half of the students achieved a pass, the completion rate has been below 50 percent. In previous years the school has run leisure and tourism with success – for example in 1999 all the students completed and well over half gained a merit or distinction.

230 Students taking art and design reach standards at least in line with A-level, and some exceed that standard. Those taking the business course attain standards below what is expected of A-level business studies students: their knowledge and understanding fall short of expectations in Year 13. The working farm, which provides the focus for those taking land and environment, is undoubtedly an asset for the students. However, although a small number of students are working at intermediate level, many would benefit from being on a foundation level programme. Attainment for the majority of the students on the land and environment course is below expectations.

231 Progress is satisfactory and often good in both business and art and design. In land and environment progress in lessons is satisfactory for those who attend the course regularly, but progress over time is mainly unsatisfactory. No differences were identified in the performance of boys and girls.

232 Teaching across all of the vocational areas is at least satisfactory, with some good and very good teaching. Teachers involved in different aspects of the courses have a sound knowledge of the procedures involved, support students well and keep records appropriately. Key skills provision is of variable quality, however, although very good examples of the application of number were seen in the work of the art and design students.

233 Despite the intermittent nature of courses and the difficulty in recruitment to some, the vocational areas have been effectively co-ordinated and organised. External verification reports are positive, commending the good work the school is doing. However, the range of opportunities is limited and students wishing to take alternatives to A-level are restricted if they wish to remain in the school. Furthermore, as is the case on the land and environment course, students are sometimes inappropriately placed at a level beyond their capacities. Although the school has an extremely good facility in the working farm, the lack of a range of relevant accreditation is surprising - for example NVQs for the land-based industries. Overall, the school has a sound base of expertise, but this is under-utilised to the detriment of some students.

129 General Studies

234 Teaching in general studies is at least satisfactory and often good or very good. The work is well planned

and good use is made of resources to provide students with considerable amounts of information in a relatively short time. Students are receptive and appreciative of the efforts of the staff including the senior staff who provide most of the teaching. The A-level results in general studies since the last inspection have been good. Project work completed by students links in with work undertaken in personal, social and health education and the pastoral programme.

129

Communication Studies

235 Students benefit from satisfactory teaching to which they respond well. Boys are often quicker to answer questions than girls although all students take part in the lesson. Attainment and progress are at least satisfactory. In A-level examinations since the last inspection at least 80 percent of students have achieved a pass grade.

Law

236 A small number of students take the subject, which has been most successful in the last two years with approximately three quarters of the students achieving a pass grade. The teaching is always at least satisfactory and often good, with competent use of equipment supporting good materials from relevant and recent case law. Students are attentive and quite responsive to the questions of the teacher. They have a satisfactory knowledge of the basics of criminal law and draw on their background reading to inform the class discussions. Progress in the subject is satisfactory. Links with the community, including the police and the legal profession, are good.

129 Psychology

237 Psychology is a popular option, which is effectively taught by suitably qualified staff. Students are new to the subject in Year 12 and in some instances start from a relatively low academic base - for instance four C grades at GCSE. Those who complete the course, and most do, usually achieve a pass grade. Over the past four years results have remained constant. 1999 was the first where not everyone gained a pass grade. Students are strongly motivated and concentrate fully, they seek guidance as required and demonstrate confidence in their oral work.

PART C: INSPECTION DATA

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

238 The inspection was carried out by a team of 15 inspectors who spent a total of 52 days in the school. 220 lessons, or parts of lessons, were inspected. Representative samples of written and other work from each year group were examined, together with pupils' records and reports. A large amount of documentation provided by the school, including schemes of work, was analysed before, during and after the inspection. Many pupils were spoken to about aspects of their work in different subjects.

239 In addition, inspectors attended assemblies and registrations. Inspectors held a range of planned interviews with members of staff, and spoke informally with members of the teaching and non-teaching staff. The registered inspector met the Chair of Governors. Other governors met various members of the inspection team.

240 28 parents attended a meeting held by the registered inspector before the inspection, and 258 parents returned copies of a questionnaire giving their views of the work of the school.

DATA AND INDICATORS

Pupil data

| | Number of students on roll (full-time equivalent) | Number of students with statements of SEN | Number of students on school's register of SEN | Number of full-time students eligible for free school meals |
|----------|---|---|--|---|
| Y9 - Y13 | 1322 | 24 | 117 | 41 |

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers (Y9 - Y13)

| | |
|---|------|
| Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent) | 73 |
| Number of students per qualified teacher | 17.2 |

Education support staff (Y9 - Y13)

| | |
|---|-----|
| Total number of education support staff | 9 |
| Total aggregate hours worked each week | 276 |

| | |
|--|------|
| Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes: | 80.4 |
|--|------|

| | | |
|------------------------------|-----|------|
| Average teaching group size: | KS3 | 23.5 |
| | KS4 | 22.0 |

Financial data

Financial year:

1999

| | £ |
|--|-----------|
| Total Income | 2,954,601 |
| Total Expenditure | 3,072,265 |
| Expenditure per pupil | 2,541 |
| Balance brought forward from previous year | 49,646 |
| Balance carried forward to next year | -68018 |

PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out:

| |
|------|
| 1322 |
|------|

Number of questionnaires returned:

| |
|-----|
| 258 |
|-----|

Responses (percentage of answers in each category):

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| I feel the school encourages parents to play an active part in the life of the school | 9 | 64 | 19 | 7 | 0 |
| I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren) | 24 | 63 | 8 | 3 | 1 |
| The school handles complaints from parents well | 9 | 38 | 31 | 7 | 2 |
| The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught | 20 | 62 | 12 | 5 | 1 |
| The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress | 14 | 54 | 16 | 13 | 1 |
| The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work | 29 | 62 | 6 | 2 | 0 |
| The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons | 29 | 57 | 14 | 0 | 0 |
| I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home | 15 | 66 | 4 | 14 | 1 |
| The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren) | 21 | 59 | 15 | 3 | 0 |
| The school achieves high standards of good behaviour | 18 | 61 | 17 | 2 | 0 |
| My child(ren) like(s) school | 33 | 58 | 6 | 2 | 1 |