

INSPECTION REPORT

St Gabriel's Roman Catholic High School
Bury

LEA area: Bury

Unique Reference Number: 105367

Headteacher: Mr P Hopkins

Reporting inspector: Mr C Glynn
2741

Dates of inspection: 22nd-26th November 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 708499

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:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	11 - 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Bridge Road Bury Lancashire BL9 0TZ
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr K Coen
Date of previous inspection:	May 1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mr C Glynn, Registered Inspector	Drama	Teaching Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
Mrs M Roscoe, Lay Inspector		Leadership and management Attitudes, behaviour and personal development Attendance Support, guidance and pupils' welfare Partnership with parents and the community
Mr C R Meakin	Mathematics	
Mrs M J Benwell	English	Staffing, accommodation and learning resources
Mr J N Pinkney	Equal opportunities	Curriculum and assessment
Mrs R Robinson	Science	Efficiency of the school
	Design and technology	
Mr C Campbell	Information technology	
Mr F Earle	Modern foreign languages	
Mrs H Boyle	History	
Mr M Lockey	Geography	
Mr F W Peacock	Art	
Mr O E Hughes	Music	
Mrs E Milroy	Physical education	Attainment and progress
	Special educational needs	

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The Office for Standards in Education
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London WC2B 6SE

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MAIN FINDINGS

What the school does well

- Pupils' attainments by the end of Key Stage 3 are above average and higher by the end of Key Stage 4. High standards have been maintained and improved since the last inspection.
- Teaching is a marked strength of the school, helping pupils to make very good progress
- Pupils are provided with a very good curriculum and their work is thoroughly assessed.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.
- The leadership and management of the school are highly effective and deeply committed to the welfare of the pupils in the school's care.
- The school promotes very good relationships.
- Pupils are very well behaved and work conscientiously.
- Attendance is very high.
- The school lives its mission statement.

Where the school has weaknesses

- I. Standards achieved by pupils in information technology are affected by lack of resources.
- II. The school's funding is very low and it has to manage with less specialist teachers than is desirable and with a minimum number of teachers.
- III. The school's accommodation is insufficient. Some is in poor condition and places great pressures on teaching and learning and in some cases narrows some of the curriculum opportunities. Many parts of the building require extension and refurbishment.

The previous inspection in 1995 judged St Gabriel's to be an 'outstandingly effective school.' It continues to be so, but the same concerns raised in 1995 about funding and the adequacy of the accommodation remain.

The school's considerable strengths outweigh its weaknesses. The governing body will address these weaknesses in an action plan, and parents and guardians of pupils will be informed of this.

How the school has improved since the last inspection

The school has made very good progress since the last inspection in the areas under its control. In spite of poor funding the school has raised the high level of attainment seen at the last inspection. Pressure on teachers has increased: the school still works with a high number of pupils for each teacher and teachers have to spend more time with classes than in many schools. The provision for information technology has improved and it is used more extensively, although further development is needed across the curriculum. Pupils with special educational needs are now very well served by the new information technology provision in the learning support area. All pupils have greater access through the new resources centre which is used well. At Key Stage 4, the school has successfully established a pre-vocational course which has broadened the opportunities available for low attaining pupils. The use of assessment data to monitor pupils' progress and develop target setting for individual pupils and subject areas has become increasingly effective. The school has managed to consolidate its success well since 1995 but at some cost. Pupil numbers have increased by 90, the equivalent of three classes, but accommodation has not followed suit and pressure is, at times, extreme. In its attempts to improve the situation, the school has converted most of its cloakrooms into teaching spaces and has divided its larger teaching areas. There is now no spare capacity, without additional accommodation, in which to maintain

and improve the already high standards. The school has done the best it can with scant resources.

Progress for boys has improved substantially and the gap between boys' and girls' attainments has been reduced significantly. Both boys and girls achieve standards higher than those achieved nationally.

The school's capacity to continue to improve is severely constrained by factors largely beyond its control.

• **Standards in subjects**

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

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

By the end of Key Stage 3 the results in 1999 in English, mathematics and science were well above average for similar schools and for all schools nationally. At GCSE in 1999 the proportion of pupils achieving 5 or more grades at A*-C was well above similar schools. Pupils achieve highly in many subjects at GCSE. In all the core subjects, English, mathematics and science, pupils achieve results well above the national average and well above those for similar schools. Other subjects where high results are achieved at GCSE are art, design technology business studies, drama, French, geography and history and religious studies.

• **Quality of teaching**

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 7-9	Very good	English, history, music and science, and good in art, modern foreign languages and physical education.	Information technology Geography
Years 10-11	Very good	English, history, modern foreign languages and science	
English	Very good		
Mathematics	Good		
Science	Good		

Teaching was at least satisfactory in 95 per cent of lessons and very good or better in 19 per cent. The very small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching occurred mainly in geography and less significantly in science. Teachers have a very good knowledge of their subjects and manage pupils very well. Pupils are told clearly what the lesson is about and teachers work hard to achieve these objectives which help pupils to make good progress.

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	Good. Pupils are friendly, polite and courteous.
Attendance	Well above average.
Ethos*	Very good. A strong mission statement, based on Christian values underpins a school-wide aim to achieve the highest standards for all pupils.
Leadership and management	Very good. Clear sighted, well focused, dedicated and very supportive.
Curriculum	Broad and balanced at both key stages. Good use of vocational courses and accreditation at Key Stage 4.
Pupils with special educational needs	Very good provision and facilities.
Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development	Good. Provision for spiritual and moral development is very good. There is scope to develop pupils' wider cultural awareness.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	Staffing: just sufficient teachers. Good number of support staff especially for special educational needs. Satisfactory level of technical staff, but little support in art, information technology. Under-resourced in clerical and administration. Accommodation: unsatisfactory: stretched to full capacity. Not enough specialist accommodation for science, drama, art and music. Insufficient dining space and storage. Learning resources satisfactory.
Value for money	High outcomes at well below average costs. Excellent value for money.

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

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

What most parents like about the school

- IV. The quality of the teaching staff and their concern and approachability.
- V. The school's ethos.
- VI. The provision and monitoring of homework.
- VII. The provision of extra-curricular activities – particularly in sport, music and drama.
- VIII. The way the school is managed.

What some parents are not happy about

- IX. The timing and frequency of meetings for
- X. The overcrowding of the school.
- XI. The supervision of pupils – especially at the
- XII. The arrangement for school lunches.
- XIII. The systems for informing parents about

The inspection confirmed the positive views expressed and shared some of the concerns raised, particularly in relation to the constraints in the accommodation and the problems with traffic. The school fulfils its statutory responsibilities with respect to reporting to parents, a large majority of whom expressed satisfaction with the information they received.

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

These stem from factors largely beyond the control of the school. They were identified in the previous report and the school has been assiduous in its attempts to counter them. To continue this process of improvement the Governing Body should maintain and develop its effort to

1. Improve the resourcing of equipment necessary for the delivery of information and communications technology (ICT) teaching by:

- increasing the number of computers and allied hardware and software;
- improving the skills of the teaching and support staff in the use of ICT.

(See paragraphs:- 37, 93, 94, 97, 187)

1. Aim to continue to reduce the amount of non-specialist teaching in some departments by:

- identifying key personnel needs;
- prioritising for new appointments when possible, those departments in which non-specialism most occurs;
- devising a long term budget strategy to effect the best return on teaching costs and teachers' professional experience.

(See paragraphs:- 34, 83, 155, 168, 209)

1. Seek to increase the adequacy and improve the quality and use of the accommodation by:

- continuing discussions with funding bodies and trustees to explore potential improvements in income;
- reviewing the timings during the school day and lunch hour arrangements to seek a reduction in the pressure on dining room spaces and in the serving of school meals;
- applying for appropriate capital and revenue grants.

(See paragraphs:- 53, 62, 64, 82, 86 - 90, 114, 140, 144, 153, 155, 172, 197, 203, 211)

The following are not Key Issues, but the governors should also consider:-

- improving the overall provision for geography by widening both the curriculum offered and the range of teaching strategies used (See paragraphs:- 8, 11, 156, 157, 159, 160, 161)
- ensuring the procedures for closing registers are followed and that authorised and unauthorised attendance are more carefully noted. (See paragraphs:- 31)

INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the school

- 1 St Gabriel's is a well established school which opened as a Roman Catholic Special Agreement secondary school in 1954. It is now a large mixed comprehensive school with Aided status serving some 1033 pupils principally from six Roman Catholic parishes to the north of Bury but also attracting pupils from a wider catchment. Almost all pupils are baptised Catholics but there is a very small number from other religious denominations. The school is popular and oversubscribed and continues to admit pupils beyond the standard number. Although the staff and governors have made great efforts to develop and extend the accommodation, the buildings remain under considerable pressure. The tests administered to pupils on entry show a comprehensive range of attainment but most pupils are of above average attainment. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic heritages and although around three per cent of pupils have English as an additional language, their competence in using English is such that their attainment is not markedly lower than other pupils. The Local Education Authority has provided statements with respect to 19 pupils (1.8 per cent) and 152 (14.7 per cent) of pupils are on the register for special educational needs; although more than half of these are at the first stage of identification.
- 2 The school's main aims are based on its Mission Statement which affirms that Christian values and traditions and the teachings of the Catholic faith are the basis of its hopes and ideals. These aims include the promotion of the physical, moral, mental and spiritual development of the pupils and the creation of a worshipping, tolerant, caring community where individual pupils are respected, safe and happy.
- 3 The school seeks to serve the pupils in its care by providing a broad and balanced curriculum, equality of opportunity, an ethos of high expectations and hard work, all provided within a set of positive relationships. In this way it seeks to produce good and responsible citizens, well prepared for adult life and the world of work.
- 4 The targets for the Year 2000 include a 60 per cent success rate in the number of pupils gaining five A* to C grades and a 98 per cent pass rate in the number of pupils gaining 5 A* to G grades and 1 A* to G grade.
- 5 The school's key priorities include:
 - Improving the pupil and teacher ratio from 18.4 to 1 to 18.0 to 1.
 - Consolidating high levels of attendance.
 - Continuing to improve the achievement of boys.
 - Continuing work in special educational needs.
 - Continuing to improve Key Stage 3 monitoring and target setting practices.
 - Improving the use of ICT and literacy development.

· **Key indicators**

Attainment at Key Stage 3²

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	107	97	204
	(1998	(100)	(96)	(196)
)			

· National Curriculum Test Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	77 (68)	85 (69)	72 (73)
	Girls	83 (87)	74 (70)	68 (60)
	Total	160 (155)	159 (139)	140 (133)
Percentage at NC	School	78.4 (79)	77.9 (71)	68.6 (68)
	National	63(65)	62(60)	55(56)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	42.6 (53)	48 (47)	32.9 (35)
	National	28(35)	38(36)	23(27)

· Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	78 (68)	86 (71)	77 (79)
	Girls	83 (86)	79 (71)	74 (69)
	Total	161 (154)	165 (142)	151 (148)
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	78.9 (79)	80.9 (73)	74 (76)
	National	64(62)	64(64)	60(62)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	43.6 (49)	49.5 (50)	38.2 (43)
	National	31(31)	37(37)	28(31)

.....

2

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

Attainment at Key Stage 4³

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	100	104	204
	(1998	109	77	186
)			

GCSE Results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A* to G	1 or more grades A* to G
Number of pupils achieving standard specified	Boys	61 (60)	100 (108)	100 (109)
	Girls	75 (59)	101 (74)	102 (75)
	Total	136 (119)	201 (182)	202 (184)
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	67 (64)	98.5 (98)	99 (99)
	National	46.3(44.6)	90.7(89.8)	95.7(95.2)

Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and percentage of <i>such pupils</i> who achieved all those they studied:		Number	% Success rate
	School	15	100
	National		N/a

.....
3

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

Attendance

Percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year:			%
	Authorised	School	5.8
	Absence	National comparative data	7.9
	Unauthorised	School	0.1
	Absence	National comparative data	1.1

- .
- .
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Exclusions

Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school age) during the previous year:		Number
	Fixed period	6
	Permanent	0

Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is:		%
	Very good or better	19
	Satisfactory or better	95
	Less than satisfactory	5

· **PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL**

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

· **Attainment and progress**

- 1 The school's intake remains very much as it was at the time of the last inspection. Although the full range of previous attainment is represented at entry in Year 7, about two thirds of the year group are above average in attainment and about one third are below. The school makes extensive analyses of the attainment of its pupils on entry to ensure that the process of setting pupils after the first half term is as accurate as possible. The Key Stage 2 results and detailed information from the linked primary schools about the attainment of pupils with special educational needs helps the school to provide additional support for them and promote their progress. The extensive analyses of external examinations and internal tests which began before the last inspection continue to give the school very good information to monitor its improvement, to consolidate its success and to assess whether the various groups are attaining as well as expected.
- 2 Attainment is very good overall. GCSE results are well above average. In 1994 64 per cent of pupils achieved 5 grades at A*-C. In 1999, 67 per cent of pupils gained these higher grades showing a trend of improvement, although slower than the national rise. The proportion of pupils gaining A*-G grades in 1994 was well above the national average and it remains well above average in 1999. Both boys and girls achieve well above the national average. The grade point scores for subjects, a reflection of the percentage changes, have risen for girls by about three points but for boys by about seven points. The gap between boys' and girls' examination results, overall, has narrowed. Boys' attainments have risen substantially, and faster than the national trends. Girls have sustained high achievement and still achieve higher results than boys.
- 3 By the end of Key Stage 4 in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science the school achieves well above the national average and, over a three year trend, well above average when compared with schools who have pupils of similar backgrounds. In art, business studies, some subjects related to design and technology, drama, French, history, music and religious education, achievements in examinations are high. High results are obtained in geography at GCSE and although proficient in examination skills, in lessons a narrow focus precludes attention from many important geographical skills. There are no GCSE examinations in information and communications technology, but in other subjects, results are at the national average and often show the achievements of lower attaining pupils, including pupils with special educational needs, who choose the subjects. Such subjects include child development, food studies (home economics) and single award science. These results, nevertheless, represent substantial achievements for the pupils who take them and are better than expected. The school's continuous analysis of performance enable it to predict expected results accurately so that appropriate guidance can be given to pupils to help them maintain progress.
- 4 When pupils' attainments in their foundation subjects at GCSE are compared with how they fare in their core subjects, differences emerge. Girls perform relatively less well in single award science, English language aspects and home economics subjects. Boys also perform less well in English language, in single award science, in art and in the design and technology subjects they take. These results represent their attainments in comparison with school standards

- 5 Results in the national tests for 1998 and 1999 in English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 3 are well above average for those who achieve level 5 or better, and level 6 or better. Pupils exceed the national grades by about half a grade in English, about a quarter of a grade above in mathematics and science. These subjects have been well above the national average for the last three years: standards have continued to rise.
- 6 By the end of Key Stage 3 in geography and information technology standards are average. In all other subjects standards are above average. In information technology pupils have just sufficient provision across the curriculum to improve their skills and achieve satisfactory levels. However, by the end of Year 9 many pupils with special educational needs do not have sufficient familiarity and dexterity with the keyboard to use two hands and identify essential keys. For those pupils who rely entirely on the school's provision, the lack of a course in keyboard skills slows progress. By the end of Key Stage 4, the intensive work on booster programmes and in their vocational course brings pupils to a satisfactory level of skill.
- 7 In the core subject of English attainment is high; above average by the end of Key Stage 3 and well above average by the end of Key Stage 4. Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 3 and progress increases at Key Stage 4, building on the newly-acquired skills. Pupils speak articulately and develop their confidence by making presentations in lessons and in assembly, although the size of the hall demands better skills in projecting their voices than many pupils possess. All pupils develop confidence including those with special educational needs. They speak confidently to visitors and can explain their work and how they appreciate it. Reading is fluent and competent and helps pupils to progress in their subjects. Most pupils write with technical accuracy. They use their note making skills in many subjects. Pupils are good at using a variety of sources for research, for example books, discussion within lessons and computers using CD ROM and the Internet.
- 8 Pupils are given good opportunities to listen to sources other than the teacher. In lessons they listen carefully to each other and to their teachers, and in assemblies they listen sensitively to the dramatic presentations made by other pupils of the same year group. Listening is good throughout the school and especially well developed in English and drama. Pupils speak confidently, and build up their ideas efficiently through talk. Teachers employ good questioning and answer techniques to help pupils to show what they know and understand. In some areas of the curriculum and in the morning form time pupils engage in silent reading and enjoy literature.
- 9 A good standard of written work is encouraged. The English department emphasises the need for good technical accuracy. Standards of spelling are satisfactory but in some subjects technical spelling is imprecise and lacks accuracy. Most subjects place an emphasis on the development of a good technical vocabulary. Technical terms and commonly misspelt words are displayed in the classroom to help pupils to check their work. Handwriting is generally good. There are weaknesses for some pupils of low attainment. For example, a few of the lowest attaining pupils place capital letters in the middle of a word and do not know how to begin and end a sentence. Most of the teachers mark pupils' work sympathetically to raise attainment although not all marking is specific enough to help pupils to improve.
- 10 Excellent provision for pupils needing learning support ensures their progress. It is the aim of all departments that all pupils should take their place in mainstream teaching Year 10. Lessons for high achievers are generally challenging and stimulating. Teachers' expectations are usually very high.

- 11 Concern about the under achievement of boys in the use of English has led to a whole school policy to improve boys' standards of literacy. Books, resources and teaching methods were examined to ensure that any bias against boys, their learning processes and their preferences was eliminated. It is to the credit of the departments and those responsible for stocking the Resource Area that this is being carried out without diminishing the provision which enables the girls to achieve so well.
- 12 In the core subject of mathematics, attainment is well above average by the end of Key Stage 3 and well above average by the end of Key Stage 4. Pupils gain secure foundations in arithmetic, algebra and geometry. They have good investigative skills well integrated into their work. Pupils acquire a good mathematical vocabulary to give precision to their work.
- 13 Numerical proficiency across the curriculum is good. Pupils demonstrate that they can apply their numeracy skills in a variety of contexts and their experience in other subjects is often enhanced because of the levels of numerical competence. In science, pupils accurately measure length, mass, time and volume and their use of number is generally sound. The use of graphical skills in Key Stage 3 science is not well developed but their proficiency is satisfactory in Key Stage 4. In design and technology coursework pupils show that they have well-developed data handling skills and they use bar graphs and pie charts to interpret and represent questionnaire research. In local history studies of Bury, pupils' ability to interpret and use census and population data enhances their historical perspectives. In geography, pupils' number and data handling skills are effectively used in Key Stage 4 coursework, but the overall use of their numerical skills is less than that normally seen. A more systematic and coordinated approach to numeracy across the whole school curriculum is incorporated into the mathematics department development plan.
- 14 In science attainment is above average by the end of Key Stage 3 and well above average by the end of Key Stage 4. Pupils have good factual knowledge and deepen their understanding well as they move throughout the school. They recall their previous knowledge and relate it successfully to new aspects of their work. Some aspects are well applied to social and moral aspects of society, for example in considering the impact of human beings on the ecology of the rainforest.
- 15 In the core skill of information and communication technology across the curriculum, pupils' attainments are average by the end of each key stage and by the end of Key Stage 3 some pupils with special educational needs achieve below average. Key Stage 3 pupils have sound word processing skills. Many pupils can use databases, for example, in history. In science, pupils use data logging sensors to record their experiments. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is well planned, well co-ordinated and well assessed. The new resources centre is very well used by some subjects to ensure planned progression in information technology, for example, in science.
- 16 Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 3 in all subjects except in information technology and geography where progress is satisfactory only. In most subjects at Key Stage 4 progress is very good, although the spurt sometimes takes place late in Year 11, as in art. In some subjects progress across both key stages is hampered by poor accommodation. For example, in art the very restricted space means that it is impossible to make large scale presentations within the cramped studio accommodation. Large classes and tables which fill most of the room mean that pupils have no room to move about in search of sources or to compare progress. In mathematics in some rooms for Year 11 pupils, there is only one passage for the teacher to supervise all 30 pupils who have no room at all in which to move about. The drama room can be used only after all the tables and chairs have been cleared and there are no specialist lighting or sound systems.

17 Nevertheless, overall attainment is above average by the end of Key Stage 3 and well above by the end of Key Stage 4. Progress is good at Key Stage 3 and accelerates at Key Stage 4 especially in English, mathematics, science, art and drama. This is a feature noted at the last inspection.

22 **Attitudes, behaviour and personal development**

18 In almost all lessons seen in both key stages pupils' attitudes to their learning are satisfactory to very good. On very rare occasions, pupils can become over talkative or boisterous and slide off the task set for them. This is the exception rather than the rule as pupils respond well to the high expectations and interesting work set for them by staff.

19 Pupils enjoy their learning. They eagerly join in discussions and ask and answer questions confidently in the classroom. In a Year 9 science lesson, for example, pupils greatly appreciated seeing the work of heart valves and the structure of the heart. Pupils' response here was typical of lessons in other subjects where alertness to the teacher, good concentration and a desire to do well were positive and regular features. These ingredients significantly enhance and support the quality of the learning that occurs.

20 Behaviour is good in lessons. Pupils are responsive to teachers' requests and co-operate easily with them. Often light-hearted banter arises naturally in class. This is the impact of the provision for social development and the very good relationships that pervade the school. Pupils use the school site well despite the problems posed by narrow circulation areas and the dispersed buildings on site. The potential for disruptive behaviour is great. This is not the case; pupils move purposefully between buildings and levels and are remarkably tolerant of the severely limited dining facilities and lack of appropriate relaxation areas. In spite of these drawbacks pupils are good humoured and patient. Most pupils demonstrate particularly mature behaviour whilst queuing for food at lunchtime and generally behave responsibly when away from adult supervision. Behaviour out of class is good. Parents are generally satisfied with their children's behaviour and describe the pupils they meet on their visits to school as being impeccably behaved and they comment on their outgoing, friendly nature. Parents are delighted with the high self-esteem they see in their own children. Inspectors find these views are justified. Should behaviour fall below that expected, positive and necessary strategies are used. Occasionally these include exclusion for a fixed period; this is a rare occurrence. Permanent exclusions are very rare and reserved for those serious offences which put others at risk.

21 Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated in the school and respond with eagerness to their learning. Concern was expressed in the previous report about poor behaviour in some of the lower ability sets. There were no indications that this was the case in this inspection. The school has now taken appropriate and effective action to resolve these concerns.

22 Relationships are very good at all levels in the school. A strong feature is the approachability of teachers. This results in pupils' loyalty to the school and the sense of pride pupils show when describing how staff treat them as "adults". Many pupils display initiative in completing homework, coursework, participating in work experience and school productions. Increasingly pupils are taking responsibility for completing Records of Achievement and setting their own targets for improvement in behaviour and attendance. There is, however, a reluctance on the part of the majority of pupils to reduce the considerable litter problem facing the school each day. Litterbins are provided on corridors and in the school precincts. These are often filled by staff, but rarely used by pupils themselves.

23 Pupils show interest in others' views and are respectful when listening to contributions in class, assemblies and tutor periods. Here they discuss a broad range of personal and social issues and reflect on the feelings and experiences of others. A good example of this was a thoughtful debate in a Year 9 assembly where pupils sat in judgement and decided that inappropriate behaviour should be forgiven.

24 Pupils' involvement in the communal life of the school is satisfactory. They show a remarkable capacity to work well together in pairs and groups in lessons. Many are responsible register monitors, participate well in assemblies and undertake work experience placements to a creditable degree. Some participate regularly in the spiritual life of the school in their role as ministers of the Eucharist. Other pupils respond well when opportunities to support others in the wider community are presented. Charities, for example, receive substantial sums each year and a group of Year 10 pupils helped to look after children at a centre in Collyhurst.

29 **Attendance**

25 Attendance levels are very good and through the conscientious efforts of school staff have been maintained well above the national average since the previous inspection. Levels of authorised absence are, to pupils' and parents' credit, significantly lower than those found countrywide. Unauthorised absence is relatively low and is always carefully followed up. Pupils are encouraged to set personal targets for improved attendance. Both improved and full attendance are rewarded and recognised by the school regularly.

26 Pastoral staff work well with the Education Welfare Officer who is closely involved in attendance issues. The school is alert to all patterns of absence which could affect learning and this responsible approach is bearing fruit. Form registers are often completed well but not all tutors recognise the requirements to determine absence as either authorised or unauthorised at the time set aside for registration. There is also some inconsistency in the use of the locally agreed supplementary register codes.

27 Pupils' punctuality is generally good. There is some lateness each day and pupils dutifully account for late arrival. Much of this is due to transport factors beyond the pupils' and the school's control. Staff challenge all late arrivals to school or lessons in a rigorous but courteous manner. Unpunctuality to lessons is rare, pupils move purposefully between lessons and co-operate with teachers to ensure lessons begin on time.

32 **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED**

32 **Teaching**

28 As reported in the judgements of the previous inspection, teaching is a strength of the school. In 95 per cent of the lessons seen it was at least satisfactory and in over 60 per cent of the lessons it was at least good. Very good teaching was found in 15 per cent of the lessons and excellent teaching in another 4 percent. The best teaching was observed in Years 7 and 11 and in English, history and science, although very good teaching occurred in all years and across most departments. In only geography and science was unsatisfactory teaching found, although very good teaching was also observed in science. There was no poor teaching in any lesson.

- 29 The success of the teaching is based on a number of factors found to some degree, in all subjects. Teachers are very secure in their knowledge of their specialist subjects. When asked to teach in a non-specialist area they are well supported by their colleagues and by the high quality of the planning and guidance produced by each department. Because most lessons have very clear objectives and teachers have good skills in managing classrooms and in motivating pupils, the outcomes intended at the start of each lesson are met by the end of it. What has to be taught and learnt, usually is in the time and manner needed.
- 30 Teachers expect highly of the pupils and have created an effective climate for learning in which pupils are challenged to produce their best work. Teachers make lessons enjoyable. The relationships between staff and pupils are mutually respectful, caring and friendly. This has a very positive impact on the teaching and learning and enables pupils to make the very good progress they do make. Pupils recognise the effort teachers make in preparing lessons thoroughly and they respond well to this. Because assessment and monitoring procedures are rigorous, pupils know where and what they are achieving. Some marking is insufficiently diagnostic and does not help pupils understand what they must do to improve. However, the very good oral communications between teachers and pupils enable an effective dialogue which helps pupils improve. The brisk pace of most lessons, the variety of teaching styles adopted, and the effective use made of homework leads to more efficient learning and particular attention is given to ensuring that pupils with special educational needs succeed well.
- 31 On rare occasions, when the teaching style is too narrow and when the learning needs of all abilities in a class are not being addressed, does the teaching become unsatisfactory. This is not typical. The general level of teaching is so high that its impact continues to be felt when key staff are absent from school for prolonged periods and when, as during the inspection, the services of several teachers are used to cover those absences. It is very significant that the impact of these arrangements did not have a negative effect on the pupils' learning.

36 **The curriculum and assessment**

- 32 Since the previous inspection the school has carried out a comprehensive review of the curriculum, with particular reference to Key Stage 4, to address the issues raised in the report, and good progress has been made in resolving them. The school now provides a very good curriculum. The range of options in Key Stage 4 has been revised and courses have been developed specifically to meet the needs of lower attaining pupils. A new major course, The Award Scheme for Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) is offered to low attaining pupils. This is normally offered as a double option and reduces the pressure of GCSE examinations on lower attaining pupils. The course programme presents pupils with a series of challenges. Opportunities are presented for pupils to develop personal core skills such as communication, application of number, working with others and problem solving. It also includes work experience. Pupils can achieve Bronze and Silver awards for their efforts, and these awards are recognised nationally. Optional short courses are offered in technology (graphics), in information technology and French, and a full course in computer literacy and information technology (CLAIT). The resources centre has been extensively developed and equipped with a bank of computers and associated software. It is now a valuable resource for both class teaching and information seeking by pupils. The prescribed programmes of study are delivered through the teaching in subject areas. Although the facilities for IT teaching have improved considerably since the last inspection, its development within subject teaching programmes is patchy. It is well developed in design and technology and in the ASDAN course. It is increasingly used in science and history. In other subject areas the use and development of skills in information technology are undeveloped in both key stages.

- 33 The teaching time, including the personal and social education programme, is 24 hours 40 minutes per week for each key stage and is close to nationally recommended figures. With the exception of information and computer technology in Key Stage 4, the times allocated to teach individual subjects of the National Curriculum and optional courses are appropriate. The planning, content and organisation of the curriculum is very good and provides a broad and balanced programme for all pupils.
- 34 The curriculum caters well for pupils of all levels of attainment and has been improved by the introduction of the ASDAN course. The needs of pupils with special educational needs are well catered for in all subjects except geography. They have access to all subject areas and examination courses. The pupils benefit from generally being taught in small groups with a good level of individual attention from teachers and support staff. In art they are fully integrated into mixed ability groups where they are well supported and make good progress. Where appropriate, individual educational plans are in place for pupils with special educational needs and they are of good quality. They provide information to teachers about pupils' specific needs and appropriate targets are set for each subject area. These plans are reviewed regularly.
- 35 The programme for personal and social education (PSE) is well planned and taught, and receives a positive response from pupils. It contains a programme of sex education, health education and drugs education, which is supplemented by further teaching in science courses. Careers' education is well provided for, beginning in Year 8 when pupils spend two days on work shadowing, which they find most rewarding and informative. There is good liaison with the careers adviser and the special needs co-ordinator. The careers library is well resourced. All pupils undertake a two week period of work experience at the end of Year 10.
- 36 The curriculum is enriched by a range of extra-curricular activities. A wide range of sports is offered and school teams compete in local leagues against other schools. Girls' football is currently a strong and rapidly growing sport in the school. Music and drama are also well represented. The school usually produces a major music and drama production and a number of other musical events each year. In the current term the school is preparing a major concert for the local Police Training School. A musical evening with the theme 'African Jigsaw' was presented in April, the school band plays during the summer fair and on open evenings, and various school choirs have participated in and won awards at local music festivals. There is a very active French club, a science club that participates in the national Crest Award scheme, and a keyboard club. Pupils have the opportunity to do artwork during lunchtimes, and the school is actively involved with the local 'artist in residence' scheme. Opportunities are available for pupils to spend residential periods in France developing language skills.
- 37 The school has a very good assessment policy. The procedures are clearly set out and subject areas have produced comprehensive assessment programmes within their schemes of work. Pupils are regularly involved in reviewing their progress and in setting targets for the future.
- 38 The assessment programme has a positive impact on the high standards achieved in the school. Since the last inspection the school has further developed its use of assessment data from a variety of sources with increasing effectiveness to monitor pupils' progress closely and to develop target setting for individual pupils and subject areas. Each unit of work is assessed and pupils receive Statements of Achievement recording their success level. Pupils then draw up their own Individual Action Plan which reviews their success and sets agreed targets for development. As pupils progress through the school a comprehensive record is built up of their attainment and progress which are monitored closely to ensure pupils are achieving their potential.

- 39 The assessment of pupils with special educational needs is very thorough. Through a series of tests the department ascertains pupils' needs on entry and through termly and annual reviews throughout the pupils' school career. Weekly records show the progress of each pupil in a series of targets related to behaviour, speaking, listening, reading and writing. The department is assiduous in helping pupils to recognise their needs, build their self esteem and extend their capabilities.
- 40 The marking of pupils' work follows an agreed school policy with grades awarded for achievement and effort. The marking scheme is clearly on display in each classroom but pupils are not always clear about the criteria for reaching the various grades in individual pieces of work. In most subjects the marking is conscientious and supportive with summative comments, but frequently there is no clear written guidance to pupils on how future work might be improved.
- 41 The school analyses in detail the performance of pupils in all national tests and examinations. Subject departments use these analyses, together with the data from their assessment and monitoring activities, regularly to review curriculum planning and target setting.

46

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

- 42 The school provides well for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils. The strong Mission Statement, based on Christian values that was identified in the previous inspection, is still firmly in place. The school continues to pursue its aim of developing the whole person and does so within a framework of commitment to the spiritual and religious tenets of its faith community.
- 43 Through assemblies, worship, prayer and retreat activities the school provides many valuable opportunities for pupils to reflect upon moral and spiritual issues and on fundamental questions of belief and human life. The weekly voluntary Mass is well attended and is a good example of the pupils' positive response to the provision. The impressive sensitivity and maturity displayed in the devising and executing of this liturgy is proof of the ease in which notions of spirituality permeate the life of the school.
- 44 In assemblies, pupils are given many opportunities to explore human dilemmas and personal choices. Very good use is made of drama and role-play involving many pupils and in this way the strong moral code of the school is emphasised. During the inspection the power of tyrants was dramatically contrasted with that of Christ in a Year 11 assembly. Younger pupils explored the notion of honesty, wrongful accusation and Christian forgiveness in a well performed assembly.
- 45 Across the curriculum the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is explored. The school has invested considerable time and resources in auditing and developing the contribution each department makes to this aspect of the pupils' growth. Whole school staff development has been successfully undertaken and this is seen in the emphasis found in several subject areas to enable pupils to reflect upon the world and the scientific and creative outputs of artists, writers, scientists and philosophers.

- 46 The course in personal and social education complements well the provision for religious education and the school's pastoral support programme. The stress on personal responsibility within a Christian lifestyle underpins the school's day-to-day life and its provision for moral development and the exploration of notions of good and evil; right and wrong. The school has a strong ethos of caring and nurture and is at pains to communicate a sense of self-worth to all its pupils. There is a sense of mutual respect between pupils and between staff and pupils. Pupils are not generally self-conscious and are willing to try things out without fear of being ridiculed. Public acts of speaking and reading, for example, are supported by sympathetic listening. In such an atmosphere it is no surprise that girls play football and that boys learn to cook and sew. It is significant, too, that several female members of staff are footballers, thus providing role models. There is no head boy or head girl and this emphasises the school's belief that all pupils are considered of equal worth.
- 47 The Justice and Peace group and the St Vincent de Paul Society run by pupils are clear evidence of where the work is successful in helping pupils consider problems of inequality, poverty, abuse, oppression and violence. They provide a practical way in which their concerns can be addressed as do the opportunities provided to help pupils raise funds for charitable purposes. This work is a strong feature of the school's year and pupils are both committed and successful in raising large amounts of money for such deserving causes as 'Barnardos', The Catholic Fund for Overseas Development (CAFOD), the Diocesan Children's Society. A special feature of this work is the support given to overseas missions. This helps raise pupils' awareness of the world beyond their own culture and traditions and while the social development of pupils is good, more could be done to deepen understanding of other cultural traditions and beliefs.
- 48 The impact of the accommodation of the school's effort to provide an environment which promotes aesthetic awareness is very negative. Several departments try hard to enhance the learning environment such as modern foreign languages and religious education. However, efforts to raise pupils' appreciation of some great works of art are hampered by both the faded quality of many of the reproductions, the height at which they are displayed and their anonymity. Recreational areas outdoors are too small, bleak and unwelcoming. The school offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities from which many pupils benefit.

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

- 49 The provision for pupils' support and guidance is good. Staff are committed to these aspects of their work. A secure and happy environment has been successfully created in which pupils value their relationships with staff because they find them approachable, ready to help and sensitive to their needs. A number of parents commented on the school's tradition of 'going the extra mile' for pupils.
- 50 Procedures for monitoring progress, personal development and behaviour are very good.
- 51 The pastoral system is effective in monitoring all aspects of personal development and pupils' regular attendance is effectively encouraged.
- 52 The school works consistently and effectively to promote self discipline, which supports good classroom behaviour and creates a good climate for learning. Procedures used to promote good behaviour are based on principles well understood by staff, pupils, governors and parents. However, there is often a delay in categorising absence as either authorised or unauthorised as regulations demand.

- 53 Any form of unpleasantness or bullying is not tolerated and is dealt with appropriately and in a sensitive manner. The majority of parents support the school in its efforts to promote good behaviour and many expressed delight at its success in this area of pastoral care.
- 54 Induction procedures are strong and effective. Good quality advice and support is provided through the well taught personal and social education programme in both key stages. In Key Stage 4 pupils receive good careers advice which they appreciate and follow assiduously. Pupils with special needs receive good support and often excellent teaching and guidance.
- 55 Outside agencies are used wisely in support of the comprehensive pastoral support programme and close liaison is achieved with local authority service providers which informs the pastoral system even further. Child protection procedures are in place and are effective, information on such procedures is published for parents. Care for the small number of pupils of different ethnicity is thoughtful and effective. Pupils and parents are offered support.
- 56 The school makes every effort to encourage a sense of well-being and stability in all its pupils and to ensure that all have an equal chance to progress.
- 57 Levels of cleaning in the school are good but the poor decorative state of communal areas detracts from the quality of care the staff work so hard to provide. Often odours permeate eating areas and the dining facilities offered are woefully inadequate for the number of pupils accommodated. Many pupils eat as they walk about with bags of chips for example, and facilities for pupils' comfort are not satisfactory. There is a weakness here in the school's promotion of pupils' well being and in some aspects of welfare arrangements. There is a very caring ethos evident in the school but some aspects of welfare provision do not match this. The allocated medical room is situated in an inappropriate location for example and treatments here and elsewhere are not recorded. Toilets often lack the facilities necessary for hygiene or comfort.
- 58 Assessments of hazards are usually completed well. Supervision of pupils' egress from school is achieved to a satisfactory degree but risks are evident in pupils sharing path and roadways with moving traffic. Senior staff are firm in their resolve to continue to seek ways of separating the pupils entering or leaving school from vehicles using the same road. Solutions to such concerns are subject to financial constraints of which the school is aware.
- 59 To its credit the school manages on a daily basis very well and staff and pupils co-operate very well to try to overcome adverse conditions. Overall, however, the accommodation detracts considerably from the quality of education that staff offer to pupils. These judgements reflect the previous inspection report.

64 **Partnership with parents and the community**

- 60 Staff work hard to maintain a close and good partnership with the parents and the community that the school serves so well.
- 61 A range of events encourages parents to become involved with the school and the education of their children. Parents have two formal opportunities each year to hear of the progress their children make. Parents noted the accessibility and openness of staff should additional contact be needed. Pupils compile Records of Achievement and are involved in setting targets for

improvements in work or personal developments. These are also sent home to parents although some parents report they rarely receive them.

- 62 Reports to parents are full and meet statutory requirements. Parents receive an interim report at the end of the autumn term with brief comments on progress from form and year tutors. At the end of the school year parents receive a very full annual report. This contains a summary of the pupil's attendance and punctuality together with a summary of the subject grades throughout the year. Pupils also produce an Annual Review in which they summarise their successes and shortcomings in each subject and set targets for the next year. This review is also enclosed together with written reports from teachers in each subject area and comments from form and year tutors. In this way parents receive a very detailed and comprehensive review of the pupil's progress throughout the school year. The majority of parents are satisfied with progress reports and inspectors find them to be of good quality and meeting requirements.
- 63 Responses made by parents at the meeting held prior to the inspection and through questionnaires indicated that most parents are satisfied with the information the school provides. A small minority feel uninformed about what is taught, the content of coursework and what their children need to do to increase attainment and progress in particular subjects.
- 64 Homework provision is thought to be particularly effective by parents and an important link between home and school. They find it consistent and rigorously monitored. Parental involvement with their children's learning at home is very good. The homework diary is used well by most parents as a two-way communication system and a monitoring tool.
- 65 There are well organised induction programmes for new pupils and their parents. The active Parent-teachers' Association is supported well in its work by staff and parents. Substantial funds are raised as a result of this effective co-operation. There are further opportunities for parental involvement during simulated interviews and in raising funds for the various charities well supported by the school.
- 66 Parental attendance at evenings held for reporting progress is high. A comment expressed by a very small number of parents recommended that an options meeting would be a useful addition to the consultation occasions which the school offers, even though each pupil has an individual options interview and counselling session, to which parents are invited.
- 67 Parents are closely involved in statutory reviews of progress connected with those pupils who have special educational needs. Parents and carers have ready access to advice about their children through the co-ordinator for special educational needs, and they have made generous donations, for software for example, to support pupils' progress.
- 68 The school is proud to serve the community and encourages pupils to do so. Links with local commerce and industry through work experience placements enable pupils to gain a greater understanding of society and the challenges therein. Year 10 pupils act as good ambassadors for the school when visiting associated primary schools. Links with primary schools and colleges are strong and fruitful.
- 69 Enrichment activities occur, regular visits are made to the local area to support work in geography and history, and retreat opportunities are enjoyed tremendously. Visitors to the school make an effective contribution to pupils' intellectual and personal development often through personal and social education lessons. The careers department has a good impact in this area and, for example, in the way it manages and develops insights into the world of work for pupils in

Years 8, 9 and 10. There are good opportunities for pupils to become involved in citizenship activities. Charities are well supported and pupils recently worked at a primary school catering for children with behavioural difficulties.

- 70 School reception staff are commended by parents and visitors for the way in which they provide a warm and helpful response to all school enquiries and the school is well supported by its parents. They feel all staff are easy to approach and the school has maintained its high standards in partnership and pastoral care since the last inspection. Inspectors find these positive and honest comments to be justified.
- 71 A minority of parents are concerned about the daily congestion on the access road adjacent to school. Private vehicles dropping off pupils, collecting or waiting illegally outside the school make a difficult situation worse for school managers.

76 **THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL**

76 **Leadership and management**

- 72 The previous inspection reported that the school was very effectively managed. This continues to be the case.
- 73 The personal vision and drive of the headteacher is paramount to this effectiveness. His long-term commitment to the school and his deeply felt caring for the community the school serves is very well supported by an informed and active governing body and a skilled senior management team. The overall aim of doing the best that can be done for their pupils is driven forward in a spirit of common purpose and service.
- 74 The headteacher, the deputy headteachers and those who support them have a very clear view of the educational direction for the school. Its aims, values and policies are all rooted in the Mission Statement and in its very good ethos. There is a very strong and widely shared commitment to achieve high standards and hard work from pupils who are both busy and happy.
- 75 Since the last inspection, the school has continued to develop its already impressive procedures for monitoring and supporting the quality of teaching and the development of the curriculum. The issue in the previous report relating to the provision of a more appropriate curriculum for low attaining pupils has been met very successfully. The learning support department has excellent leadership and a good, cohesive team of teachers and learning support assistants. They are effectively deployed to the benefit of pupils. The school development plan remains a model of good practice and there are clearly defined targets in all aspects of the school's work. These are closely linked to financial considerations. All of this is overseen by the governing body who lead conscientiously and effectively through a well-ordered system of committees and designated individual members. Key roles and responsibilities are clearly identified and meetings are thoroughly minuted and appropriate action is taken following them. This model of leadership is mirrored in the effective middle management found in the departments and key roles of co-ordinating special needs, curriculum and pastoral issues.
- 76 The outstanding success in public examinations is enabled by the rigorous assessment of internal and external results and the target setting for both staff and pupils that follows.

77 The school's management works within a series of effective teams and communications are direct and clear. This is possible because of the high quality of relationships that exist within the school. A genuine sense of care underpins all that the school sets out to do. It incorporates the people and the place, and it compensates greatly for the significant financial and physical constraints put upon the school by its lack of funding and poor accommodation. Both these factors require the leadership and the management to be assiduous in the deployment of resources and in the prioritising of tasks. Their efforts to create an effective learning environment, in which all pupils have equality of opportunity, are successful despite the external pressures on them. Much is achieved because of the atmosphere of service, good will and professional pride generated by the school's leadership. They are aware, however, that the long-term situation is problematic without additional staffing, resources and improved accommodation. These factors constrain the school's capacity for further improvement.

82 **Staffing, accommodation and learning resources**

82 **Staffing**

78 Since the last inspection the number of teachers has increased from 53 to 56.3, but, since there has been a simultaneous increase in pupil numbers from 940 to 1033, the pupil:teacher ratio has remained constant at 18.4 which is well above the national average. The average teaching group size, therefore, remains high. In some subjects the number of full time qualified staff is well matched to curriculum needs, as in modern foreign languages which has six full time qualified linguists. In science, there is an effective balance of subject expertise which the department uses well in giving pupils in Key Stage 4 specialist subject teaching for modules of work. In English, a new specialist appointment has reduced the amount of non-specialist teaching, however, this is still problematic in history. Mathematics, geography and physical education also rely on some non-specialist help. Non-specialist teachers receive very good support from heads of department and their contribution is at least satisfactory. The over-riding problem with staffing at present is absence due to accident, ill-health or maternity leave. The supply teachers bridging the gap receive excellent help from departments and, in general, they manage well.

79 The non-teaching staff make a valuable contribution to the smooth running of the school and, where possible, they effectively support the delivery of the curriculum. Teachers now receive help with reprographics but they are otherwise still without clerical support. There is no technician support for art and this is a weakness. The roles and responsibilities of support teachers for pupils with special educational needs are clearly defined and links with departments are well established and effective.

1 The school places considerable emphasis on the development of staff skills and knowledge. Appraisal procedures are thorough and new staff to the school, including newly qualified staff, are carefully inducted and their performance well monitored.

Accommodation

- 1 Improvements to accommodation since the last inspection include the conversion of storerooms and cloakrooms to provide two new classrooms, a keyboard and practice room in the music area and an extended area for learning support. Reorganisation has enabled the English rooms, with one exception, to be housed in one block with centralised storage areas. The accommodation for science with seven laboratories is just adequate, though a few lessons still have to be taught outside laboratories. Accommodation for learning support is now very good and has been adapted and equipped to provide excellent facilities for learning. The classrooms for modern foreign languages are also exemplary and are greatly enhanced by attractive displays of teaching aids and pupils' work. The music suite is hardly adequate for the music lessons to go on at the same time. The music room is small and the keyboard room quite inadequate for a class of 24 pupils.
- 2 The facilities for art are very poor. The two studios are too small and since there is no storage space they are further reduced by clutter. This limits the range of equipment used; there is no kiln for example. The poor accommodation in this department imposes severe restrictions on the range of learning experience it can offer. Mathematics, English and drama are handicapped by having to use small classrooms which place limitations on practical approaches and especially with drama restricts opportunities for specialist course work in lighting and stagecraft.
- 3 A welcome improvement since the previous inspection is the provision of disabled access to the John Bank's Building. Access for the disabled is not a viable proposition for the school as a whole, however, as its three buildings are two-storied and since it is constructed on a steep slope there are numerous flights of stairs and steps both inside and out.
- 4 Almost all classrooms have been fitted with curtains to reduce glare from sunlight. The perimeters of the playground have been enclosed under colonnades. A full programme of decoration and renovation is carried out by support staff, but some areas of the school such as the design and technology, geography and physical education departments have a drab and neglected appearance. The laboratories in the old building also need attention. Despite these difficulties, the pupils achieve very well and make good progress but the maintenance of these standards long-term is compromised by the environment in which the teaching takes place.
- 5 Staff accommodation in terms of the number of toilets for both sexes is unsatisfactory. There are insufficient cubicles. Toilet accommodation for pupils is also unsatisfactory. The facilities in both cases are poor. Dining facilities are woefully inadequate for the numbers using them. A snack bar, designed to relieve pressure on the dining room has unfortunately increased the congestion in the waiting area which was already a problem. Six hundred pupils dine in the canteen, snack bar, classrooms and corridors each day. Pupils spill out into the corridors and litter is left at this time on stairwells, carpets, corridors and school precincts. These factors represent the school's provision for pupils' welfare.
- 6 The school has tried to enhance the environment with very good displays in some classrooms, especially where suitable display boards have been provided. There are impressive art displays of pupils' work outside the studios, modern language, religious education and in the science area where art and natural science have combined. The corridors are under-used in this respect and so is the entrance hall which was considerably brightened during the course of inspection week with the introduction of displays of pupils' art and technical work.

Resources

- 7 The learning resource area is playing an increasingly important role in the school, especially as it enables pupils to take charge of their own learning. It is used freely by departments and by individual pupils in their own time. There is an attractive section of non-fiction books designed to encourage boys to read more. The take-up, however, is slow; boys preferring to use the resources they can access through information technology.
- 8 The science department is now well resourced, except that there is a shortage of textbooks for GCSE courses. Music is also well equipped with the exception that they have only one computer. In history, textbook resources are good and there have been some well targeted acquisitions in recent years to meet the needs of the full ability range. There is still a need for more artefacts and replicas to help in the teaching of the curriculum. Textbook provision in geography is adequate but resources for topic work are sparse. Fieldwork equipment such as a clinometer and weather equipment is lacking. The department also lacks information technology for satellite images, spreadsheets and data logging, for example.
- 9 In art, the quality of materials and equipment is in some cases good; there are two brand new computers with colour printers. Otherwise there is a very basic range of resources for drawing and painting and two-dimensional work in general. There is limited capital equipment, no kiln or ceramic equipment, limited printing equipment and no equipment for textiles. Design and technology is also low on textbooks and equipment and the drama department lacks specialist lighting and sound equipment. The provision of information technology has grown since the previous inspection, but there is a need for more hardware and textbooks both in the whole school areas, where resources are quite inadequate for the number of pupils in a Key Stage 4 examination group for example, and in the departments with the exception of science. Textbooks are in short-supply in most subjects; there is still much sharing. As in the previous inspection report, praise is due to teaching staff for the care taken to conserve resources and for the respect for books and equipment which they inspire in their pupils.

94 The efficiency of the school

- 10 The school manages its budget of almost two million pounds carefully and efficiently. As at the last inspection the development plan is carefully costed and spending priorities are identified as educational aims and objectives. The specific grants for staff development and special educational needs are identified clearly in the overall budget and these funds are appropriately deployed. Spending is carefully monitored. The overall quality of financial planning is excellent. The governing body defines its priorities clearly and works very closely with the headteacher in these matters.
- 11 The low level of funding was an issue in the last report and the school continues to operate within exceedingly tight financial limits. The scope for variation in its spending patterns is extremely limited. Unit costs per pupil are very much lower than the national average for schools of similar kind and age range. There has been 25 per cent turnover of staff in the last four years and considerable pressure on staff, which has resulted in some absence due to illness. A high pupil teacher ratio (18.4 as against 17.1 nationally) the poor state of decoration and shortage of accommodation at the school remain. These are daily challenges to the good quality of education which the school provides.

- 12 The overall use of teaching and support staff is very good. Pupils are nearly always taught by specialist teachers, except in history, PE and English. Several teachers teach for a minority of their time in another subject but this is not affecting standards adversely. Classroom support assistants are well deployed. However, demand still outweighs provision. Because many of its staff are long-serving and very experienced a very high percentage of the school's limited budget is spent on staffing costs. The expenditure on teaching staff is more than the national average, as is expenditure on support staff. These features reflect the school's aim to provide as well as it can for all its pupils including those of low attainment and those who have special educational needs. More is spent on staff development and advice than the national lower average. However, less is spent on administration and clerical staff than the lowest costs cited for similar schools. No reprographics assistant is currently employed and this means that clerical staff are under additional pressure, especially in a school with over 1,000 pupils. Very good use is made of learning resources and accommodation. The headteacher, in close consultation with his governors, has given careful attention to extending the existing level of facilities for information technology, although computer provision is still only at the national average (10.1) and inadequate for the pupils' needs.
- 13 The quality of financial controls and school administration is very good. Inventories are computerised and up-to-date. The bursar regularly provides the headteacher and senior managers with excellent financial management information to support the monitoring of expenditure. Recommendations of the most recent auditor's report are met.
- 14 Given the below average income and well above average levels of attainment, the very good behaviour, positive attitudes and overall good teaching, the school gives excellent value for money.

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

99 **ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE**

99 **English**

- 15 Standards of attainment in English are well above the national average. In the 1999 GCSE examinations the percentage of pupils gaining grades A*-C was 70.4 (national average 55) against 68.6 (national average 54.1) in 1994. Virtually all pupils (99.5%) are entered for the examination in English and the percentage pass at grades A-G is also well above the national average. In work observed standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 are well above national expectations for both English Language and English Literature.
- 16 Standards have also been consolidated and improved at Key Stage 3. Pupils' results in the national tests are well above the national average both in the percentage of pupils achieving level 5 or above, 78.4 (national average 63), and in the percentage of pupils reaching level 6 or above, 42.6 (national average 35).
- 17 The results in both key stages are also well above the national average for similar schools.
- 18 Speaking and listening skills are a strong feature of the department and, indeed, of the whole school. Pupils of all abilities read aloud in class, give presentations and hold the attention of the group. Participation by pupils across the range of ability was also observed in whole school activities such as assembly and in class. Some work in pairs is also of a very high standard, as in a Year 10 presentation of advertisements which were confident, effective and very entertaining. Response in class is often a delight as in a Year 9 group studying Romeo and Juliet. The class was gripped with the idea of Romeo and Juliet flirting through religious imagery. The response was especially good when considering the religious context. Pupils are able to articulate a viewpoint on religious issues, for example, and language issues such as the difference between standard English and slang. Pupils listen particularly well to each other whether in whole class activity or when collaborating in pairs or small groups.
- 19 The standard of reading is high, and often very high. The effective teaching encourages pupils to read more. Staff in the resource area work closely with staff in the English department and give excellent support, including the setting up of an attractive section of non-fiction books selected to appeal to boys who are reluctant readers of fiction. As part of the literacy programme introduced since the last inspection each form room has a class library. The recent introduction of reading journals is also encouraging pupils to read more. The skills of reading aloud are strong. Pupils read with expression and confidently project their voices to make contact with their audience. In both key stages, pupils are able to discuss the books they have read and in Key Stage 4 they analyse texts perceptively.
- 20 Pupils attain at least satisfactory standards in writing in a wide range of forms including note-taking, descriptive writing, formal letters, poetry, textual analysis and writing to inform or persuade others. The department's methodical approach is raising standards in extended writing among boys and girls and across the ability range. Lessons observed varied from extended writing in which pupils recreated and shared an experience to a response to the poem 'Rapuntlestiltskin'. The department encourages a strong interest in poetry and poetic language. Pupils understand rhyme and rhythm and can apply successfully such literary terms as alliteration, simile and metaphor. A Year 9 group appreciating a Shakespearean sonnet was familiar with the terms quatrain and couplet.

- 21 Due to a structured approach to language study in each year, this element of the syllabus is unusually successful. Reinforcement and progression in language skills is a feature of most lessons. Writing is generally well organised and pupils of all levels of attainment show pleasure in writing. A few pupils, however, find it difficult to construct a paragraph with satisfactory accuracy in grammar, punctuation and spelling. Regular support is given to pupils with these problems. Only very rarely is work unfinished or poorly presented.
- 22 Progress in Key Stage 3 is very good and very good at Key Stage 4. This applies to all levels of prior attainment. For example, a Year 8 group learning about similes was led to consider the function of the 'mind's eye'. Pupils were asked to visualise a green elephant. They quickly understood the use of the 'image' in a simile and were writing their own successfully by the end of the lesson.
- 23 Progress in literacy criticism and in personal development was noted in groups discussing the actions and motives of the characters in the play 'An Inspector Calls' and in the novel 'Of Mice and Men'. Books are marked consistently with good examples of diagnostic and constructive marking. It is also department policy to discuss written work and suggest ways of improving it.
- 24 The quality of teaching is very good in both key stages. At Key Stage 4, 90 per cent of the lessons observed were good or very good, and at Key Stage 3, 88 per cent of lessons observed were good or better. There was no unsatisfactory teaching. Lessons are challenging to pupils across the whole range of prior attainment. In language, all learn grammar and learn to link punctuation to sentence structure; all face the challenge of structured extended writing. High expectations also characterise the reading of literature, even though this is a difficult area for non-specialist teachers. Lessons are planned to cover the whole range of literacy skills, continually consolidating and building on prior knowledge.
- 25 The English schemes of work meet the requirements of the National Curriculum and the GCSE examinations. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues are constantly under consideration in topics raised by both literary and non-literary sources. Literature, taught well, involves pupils in real life issues and they are led to consider actions and make judgements. This is understood very well by the English department. In the lessons observed there was much awe and wonder evident in pupils' appreciation of poetry and in their own writing. A special feature of the department is its encouragement and training in public speaking. Class training is strongly supported by extra-curricular activities. The school has entered a number of public speaking competitions in recent years with spectacular success. Many of these public speakers have gone on to use their skills in business, in politics or in teaching. Some have become local councillors and at least two have become known on television.
- 26 Since the last inspection there has been significant improvement in provision for those with special educational needs. Some pupils are helped by the well-resourced special educational needs department, using 'Successmaker', the electronic library and other aids. There is also good support in class where it is needed. It is the aim of both departments to enable pupils to hold their own in mainstream teaching by Year 10. The facilities in the special educational needs department and in the learning resource area also feature in a programme of extension for more able pupils.
- 27 Procedures are in place for assessing and recording pupils' work and are used to target groups for extra support and encouragement. An analysis of test results led to the adoption of special activities to encourage high attainment in literacy among boys.

- 28 The head of department provides excellent leadership and encourages the ethos of high achievement for all pupils, including those with special educational needs. There is very good communication between members of the department and staff are supportive of each other. Supply teachers and non-specialists are given excellent support and there is a sense of staff all pulling together to achieve the same ends.
- 29 As a result of the previous inspection report, another English specialist has been appointed. The number of non-specialist teachers in the lower school has been reduced. Five of six English rooms are now housed together in the same block with centralised storage areas. Increase in numbers, however, means there is little gain in space and class sizes remain large.
- 30 There have also been improvements in the provision of information and communication technology. There is now a television, video, an overhead projector and screen for each of the six dedicated English rooms. The use of information technology for research, drafting and presentation is encouraged in both key stages, but the department has no computers for pupils to use and whole class access to computers in lesson time in the learning resource area is not easy. In-service training in information technology for English staff has been insufficient.
- 31 The very high standards achieved by the English department reflect well on the effective leadership and high quality of teaching it provides. The department continues to give excellent value for money.

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curriculum

Literacy across the

- 32 Since the previous inspection the school has taken steps to improve levels of literacy across the curriculum. A detailed policy has been drawn up which is pursued with vigour by English teachers and which is also being applied in varying degrees by other departments. Eye-catching displays of technical terms and subject specific vocabulary are found in most classrooms. There is good use of technical vocabulary by staff and pupils. In art, for example, terms such as tone, texture, shape, form and in English terms such as simile, metaphor, alliteration, quatrain and couplet are used confidently. Accurate use of terminology was also noted in mathematics, science and geography.
- 33 Good speaking and listening skills were observed at all levels of prior attainment and are a strong feature of the school. Pupils in Year 8 can explain ideas, hypothesise or make conjectures. They can adapt speech to the listener. After paired discussion they can paraphrase their partner's views. In art, pupils at all levels can use expressive language to describe visual qualities. In English they can articulate thoughts and argue a point of view. In all subjects pupils are confident in their dialogue with the teacher and were prepared, even anxious, to speak to the inspectors.
- 34 Pupils are able to write in a wide variety of forms. For example, in art they make notes and write for information. In geography they compare developed and developing countries in extended writing. In history they write notes, newspaper articles and letters, including an invitation to a Roman feast. In extended writing explanations, arguments and evaluation are developed. There has been a whole school effort to encourage higher standards of literacy among boys. In English, special measures have been taken to enable boys to write at greater length. It might be descriptive writing such as "The Old Cottage" or pupils may be asked to "relive" an experience and share it through their writing. Examples from well known authors and from pupils' own work are used. Once the imagination has been called into action the writing skills expand to give

it expression. A boy in Year 8, describing childhood memory wrote: “I could see heatwaves on the road and, because the road was new, the tar was going soft and little boys were picking at it and throwing it at windows”.

- 35 A well equipped and well organised department for pupils needing learning support ensures that pupils across the range of ability make good progress in literacy.
- 36 Marking in subjects throughout the school is conscientious, encouraging and supportive. In general, however, it needs to be more specific in identifying literacy weaknesses and setting targets.
- 37 Reading for information is satisfactory throughout the school and in most subjects research skills are encouraged through use of the learning resource area, which is building a fine stock of fiction and reference books. It also has a very attractive section of non-fiction books to encourage boys to read more. Skills of reading aloud are a strength of the school as seen in class, in assembly and in the Mass. Pupils of all ability take part and read with understanding and expression and readers can always rely on being listened to attentively.

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Mathematics

- 38 The attainment of pupils in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 3 is above the national average. Test results at the end of the key stage in 1999 were the best on record and reflected an underlying trend of continuous improvement. Over the last three years results have been consistently above the national average and well above the average when compared with schools with pupils from similar backgrounds. Teacher assessments are well matched to test scores. Although the performance of girls in the 1999 tests is slightly better than that of the boys, over the last three years the difference in girls' and boys' results has become smaller and of less significance. Pupils' attainment in lessons matches test results and by the end of the key stage they show that they have an understanding of the various aspects of their work in mathematics. They 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.
- 39 The overall attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 is well above the national average and is significantly higher than at the time of the last inspection. The percentage of pupils who gained GCSE grades A*-C in 1999 is well above the national average and represents an increase of nearly 20 per cent over the last five years. Almost every pupil obtains GCSE certification within the A*-G range and the number of pupils obtaining a grade A*, grade A or grade B is also well above the national average. The discrepancy between the performance of boys and girls, with girls formerly producing better results than boys, has been successfully addressed and boys and girls perform at least as well in mathematics as they do in their other subjects. By the end of the key stage most pupils have an extensive repertoire of mathematical vocabulary, solve equations of varying complexity, construct algebraic and statistical graphs, carry out investigation work and consolidate their computational skills. All groups of pupils, whether higher, average or lower attainers, experience appropriate levels of work in each of the mathematics attainment targets.

- 40 Pupils make good progress in 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 pupils make good progress because, when pupils are working on the same topics, exercises and explanations are formulated to match the range of individual pupils' needs. When carrying out mental arithmetic exercises, for example, higher attaining pupils are given questions that often require two or more stages in calculation that involve different units, whilst average attainers' questions are confined to single operations. By the end of Key Stage 3, nearly all pupils cope satisfactorily with number and basic computational skills. However, standards of presentation of work vary and progress is sometimes impeded because some written work lacks structure and therefore fails to foster understanding and retention.
- 41 In Key Stage 4 pupils make very good progress. Their knowledge increases steadily and their skills develop through the provision of carefully constructed schemes of work. Continued arrangements for grouping pupils according to their needs in mathematics are effective and support progress. Teachers provide each particular group of pupils with challenging work that ensures that all pupils experience the same range of mathematical topics at an appropriate level. For example, higher attaining pupils demonstrate mathematical understanding of a high order when they use standard deviation to measure the degree to which data is spread, whilst lower attaining pupils understand the notion of spread but confine their calculations to finding the various ranges. Similarly, all pupils construct frequency distribution tables and draw corresponding histograms, but higher and average attainers include grouped data and the use of interval centres in subsequent calculations. Standards of written work are mostly satisfactory, and often very good, but the quality of solutions, particularly in algebra, is sometimes lacking in rigorous, systematic and structured presentation.
- 42 In both key stages a combination of tailored texts, appropriate schemes of work and sensitive, informed teacher interactions ensure that pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Pupils with special needs are well integrated in mainstream classes. The use of information technology and software that provides individual learning schemes has had a positive impact on the progress of pupils with special educational needs, and all have added significantly to their scores in mathematics.
- 43 In both key stages pupils are very well motivated and they consistently adopt a mature, positive and studious attitude to their work. Their conduct is rarely other than exemplary and they display a healthy regard and respect for the subject. Levels of sustained concentration are generally very high and the relationship between teachers and pupils is positive and characterised by cooperation and harmony.
- 44 The quality of teaching in mathematics is good overall and very good at Key Stage 4. It has improved since the last inspection. In more than one third of lessons teaching is good or very good in equal proportions and no unsatisfactory lessons were observed during the inspection. Although two mathematics teachers are currently on long-term leave of absence, the effect of their absence on standards has been minimised by the range and quality of preparation in anticipation of the absences, and the strong, lasting impact of their contributions. Teachers have a good command of the subject, prepare lessons thoroughly and are committed to raising the achievement of their pupils. In the best lessons the teacher fully involves the pupils in the exposition, engenders a brisk pace, sets challenging and realistic tasks and continually assesses the understanding of the pupils. For example, a group of above average attaining Key Stage 4 pupils, preparing for GCSE examinations at intermediate level, were fully engaged by the teacher in a process of systematically building up strategies for solving simultaneous equations of increasing complexity. The teacher punctuated the lesson with short-term targets and appropriate time limits that matched each level of increased difficulty, checked the progress of pupils on an individual basis,

and shared the objectives of the lesson with a collective focus that involved all of the pupils. In less successful lessons, the teacher does not fully involve all the pupils during the process of exposition, relying on responses from a limited range of pupils, and does not vary the activities in order to sustain the lesson's momentum towards the end of double period sessions. For example, another group of above average attaining pupils, working on patterns and sequences, were receptive but passive as the teacher used the textbook as the main instrument of teaching rather than as a learning resource. The pupils' concentration was divided between the teacher and textbook and consequently there was insufficient dialogue to ensure that maximum interest and understanding were achieved.

- 45 The team of teachers delivering the mathematics curriculum enjoys the benefits of very strong, capable and enthusiastic leadership. The department is very efficiently and effectively managed and this is reflected in the continuously improving levels of attainment since the last inspection. Documentation is thorough and practical, including a development plan which accurately identifies priorities for further improvement. Schemes of work are detailed and highly tuned to accommodate individual pupil need and the modular programme of delivery. Although the development plan has identified the need for increasing the use of information technology to enrich and support the curriculum its use is not sufficiently prescribed and integrated into the schemes of work. The department has good assessment procedures and a great deal of energy has been invested into generating a departmental data bank of pupil assessments. The fruits of these labours have yet to be fully realised but its potential for enhancing performance is already recognised in the department's plans.

130 **Science**

- 46 In the 1999 GCSE examinations, results in both the double award and single award science were well above the national average for all schools and above average in comparison with similar schools. The results for the double award science were slightly below those in 1998, but for the single award science they were at the same level as in 1998. Since the last inspection the results in double award science have shown a considerable improvement whilst those in single award science have remained at the same level. There is no significant difference in the results for boys and girls.
- 47 The results in the 1999 National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 are above average for all schools and above average in comparison with schools with pupils from similar backgrounds. There is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls. The 1999 results were slightly higher than those for 1998. Since the last inspection the results have remained consistently above the national average.
- 48 Attainment by pupils near the end of Key Stage 3 is above average. Pupils have good knowledge and understanding of the science topics they have covered. They express themselves well and are confident and accurate in the use of scientific terms when discussing their work. They measure accurately length, time, volume and temperature, and record their results neatly in tables. Where appropriate, they present results in a variety of graphical forms such as block graphs, pie charts and line graphs, but skills in the construction of line graphs are rather undeveloped for their age. The quality of their written work is good.
- 49 Attainment by pupils near the end of Key Stage 4 is well above average. They are mature and efficient students of the subject. They have very good knowledge of various basic scientific theories and models. They are able to relate their knowledge well in new situations. They

research material efficiently and selectively, using reference books, CD ROMs and the Internet for appropriate information. Pupils in Year 11, for example used their knowledge from previous science topics in gathering further information to produce balanced reports on various aspects of environmental pollution such as acid rain, the greenhouse effect and de-forestation.

- 50 Pupils' attainment in science when they enter the school is above average. They make good progress in Key Stage 3. They develop good skills in handling a range of materials and equipment with care. They respect laboratory rules and adopt safe working practices. They enjoy designing and carrying out simple scientific investigations. For example, Year 8 pupils investigated the principles of streamlining by making a variety of shapes out of plasticine and testing their relative merits by timing their rate of fall down a cylinder of water. Pupils in Year 9 demonstrated good understanding of the reactivity series of metals from previous lessons to predict and carry out a series of metal displacement reactions. Another group of Year 9 pupils used their understanding of respiration and blood circulation to analyse their data on pulse rate to assess their recovery rate after exercise. Lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs also make good progress in Key Stage 3 due to smaller classes and the teachers' careful planning of work. Lower attaining pupils in Year 8, for example, worked well with the support of the teacher on a carefully constructed set of worksheets on aspects of alcohol use and abuse.
- 51 Pupils make very good progress in Key Stage 4. They become mature and efficient students of science, adopting a dedicated approach to their studies. They have very good all-round subject knowledge. They are able to relate their knowledge to new situations. Pupils in Year 11 drew on their knowledge of atomic structure and bonding to develop an understanding of why some reactions produce heat energy whilst others consume heat energy. Year 10 pupils used their knowledge of electrical circuits to refine their ideas of how current flows by measuring the voltages in different sections of series and parallel circuits. Pupils mature in their work in scientific investigations. A group of pupils in Year 10, for example, recognised the need for careful control of conditions and the need for repeated measurements in order to collect useful results in their investigation of the breakdown of hydrogen peroxide by enzyme action. They collect data and process it more accurately. They are more analytical and critical in assessing the reliability of their results and conclusions, but the presentation of data in graphical form is still not fully up to the expected standard for pupils at this age. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in Key Stage 4 to reach levels of attainment well in line with their ability.
- 52 The response of pupils to their science lessons in both key stages is very good. They enter lessons with a very positive approach. They are ready to work and react well to the good pace of lessons and the challenges set. They are attentive listeners and respond well to teachers' questions. They have good and sustained powers of concentration and settle quickly on task. They welcome opportunities to express their own views, which they do politely and using scientific knowledge and vocabulary accurately, particularly in Key Stage 4. The relationship between pupils and teachers is one of mutual respect.
- 53 The quality of teaching is good. In almost half the lessons it is good or very good. A very small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching was observed in each key stage. Teaching is overall slightly better in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and use it to good effect in their confident delivery, the accuracy of their questioning and in the assured manner in which they respond to pupils' questions. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives which are appropriate to the age and ability of the pupils. On the very few occasions when lesson planning was inappropriate or inadequate, learning objectives were not met and pupils made only limited progress. Teachers have high expectations of pupils, particularly in Key Stage 4, and set appropriate challenges. Lessons proceed at good pace and very effective use is made of time. Teachers were careful to take time at the end of lessons to assess with pupils

their success in reaching the stated objectives. Teachers manage pupils very well, organising and supervising group work efficiently and supportively. Very good use is made of high quality video material to stimulate interest and discussion. Pupils in Year 10, for example, watched a video on genetic engineering and showed understanding and sensitivity to the issues raised in the lively discussion that followed. Homework is set regularly to supplement and extend the teaching in lessons. All pupils' work is carefully marked and supportive comments are made, but not enough clear guidance is given on how future work could be improved.

- 54 The curriculum is well planned to meet statutory requirements and to provide for the needs of pupils of all abilities. The curriculum in Key Stage 3 is currently being revised to integrate opportunities for the development and assessment of skills in scientific investigations more closely. More opportunities for the use of computers and data logging facilities are also being incorporated. Planning for the needs of pupils with special educational needs is good, and extension work for high attaining pupils is prepared. In Key Stage 4 pupils are offered the option of studying for the single award or the dual award in science, and all pupils are entered for the GCSE examinations. The curriculum is planned in a series of units that are timetabled in rotation for pupils to receive specialist subject teaching. There is a small but enthusiastic Science Club which participates in the national Crest Award scheme. There is a comprehensive and effective programme for the regular assessment of pupils' work and progress. Pupils regularly review their own progress and set targets for the future.
- 55 The department is very well led and development targets are realistic. There is a strong sense of teamwork and a clear commitment to high standards by all teachers. Accommodation is just adequate but some lessons have to be taught outside laboratories. The laboratories are in two separate sites which places some strain on resources and presents technicians with problems in servicing lessons. The older laboratories are in poor decorative order. Teachers enhance the laboratories with colourful and informative displays of pupils' work, posters and pupils' artistic work linked to science. Resources are adequate and efficiently used. Since the last inspection the provision of textbooks for the GCSE courses has been steadily improved by careful budgeting of funds.

140 **OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES**

140 **Art**

- 56 Standards of attainment in art are never less than satisfactory and are often good or very good especially at Key Stage 4 where examination results are consistently high and significantly better than national averages. At the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is in line with national expectations and pupils work satisfactorily from imagination, memory and observation. Pupils use water colours with sensitivity and are able to produce accurate small scale observational drawings which are used well to inform three-dimensional work. Across both key stages, pupils are less skilled in drawing with accuracy on a larger scale from more complex and challenging still life arrangements. All pupils make appropriate use of the work of other artists to inform the development of their own work and many talk with insight and understanding about the work of selected artists. In Year 7, pupils who were designing and making containers and boxes, took ideas from the work of North American Indians and Islamic artists. In Year 8, a painting project based on music was extended and enriched by looking at the work of Kandinsky. In Key Stage 4, pupils show a developing ability to make reference to a variety of sources to support and inform their work. In a still life painting project, several pupils looked at selected artists to learn about composition and use of colour to help them in their work. Some pupils in Key Stage 4 make expressive use of paint which, when combined with other media, often result in rich and exciting work. Much work in painting has a decorative quality and is insufficiently developed into surface pattern design and printed textiles. In order to improve standards still further, work in printmaking and in the use of sketchbooks, as a key resource in which to explore and develop ideas, should be extended.
- 57 Progress in lessons and over the key stages is good, especially where lessons have clear learning objectives and carefully structured, direct teaching. This feature helps pupils to acquire good knowledge and skills.

- 58 Good progress is seen at Key Stage 4. Again, clearly focused teaching is supported by a carefully planned scheme of work which identifies extension activities for pupils who need them and integrated homework tasks which complement and extend what pupils have learned in the lessons. Pupils make slower progress in objective drawing on a large scale than in other aspects of their work. Some pupils who find traditional drawing and painting difficult do not have wide enough opportunities to develop their skills, such as print making which would evolve naturally from the present curriculum.
- 59 Pupils are strongly committed to their work in art. They are responsive and willing to contribute to discussions and they often make good and expressive use of language when talking about their own work and that of others. They show care and control when using materials and often show tenacity and initiative in solving practical problems. Across both key stages, pupils show an ability to sustain work, over extended periods and work co-operatively with staff and peers in difficult and cramped studios.
- 60 The quality of teaching is never less than satisfactory and often good or occasionally very good. Good use is being made of artists in residence to support and extend the curriculum. Staff have good specialist knowledge of art and reveal a strong personal commitment to their subject which is revealed in the amount of time they are willing to devote to pupils and in the high quality of discussions that take place with individual pupils as they are working. Lessons are well prepared with extension activities and homework carefully integrated into lesson notes. Staff are skilled in managing complex practical activities in overcrowded studios which lack adequate storage facilities. Assessment clearly informs lesson planning and staff regularly come together to compare work and standards. Good use is made of practical demonstrations and visual resource material to support teaching. Pupils with special educational needs are carefully supported and well integrated into all lessons so that they make good progress. Staff are encouraging and supportive but their formal assessment of pupils' work is insufficiently challenging. The department is well led. It provides a social curriculum that meets the requirements of the National Curriculum despite the constraints imposed by the difficult accommodation and lack of some resources.

145 **Design and technology**

- 61 GCSE results in design and technology related over the past three years have been at or above the national average. Results in business studies have been consistently very good and well above the national average. Overall examination results have improved since the last inspection. Results in resistant materials in 1999 were well above average and a significant improvement on the previous year. In graphics, systems control, food studies and child development, pupils attain broadly at the national average. While there are some stereotyped choices at the age of 14, boys are beginning to choose food studies and girls to study resistant materials. Graphics is popular with both boys and girls. The detailed analyses of examination and test results carried out by the school enables it to predict grade success accurately and to monitor areas of success.
- 62 Pupils' attainments at the end of Key Stage 3 are in line with national expectations and similar to those reported at the time of the last inspection. By the age of 14, all pupils carry out research and generate ideas which they develop in their designs. Some, however do not generate and document enough ideas before developing one in detail. Pupils gain an understanding of the link between designing and making and the nature of a design brief from Year 7, and how to plan and prepare their work, for example, when making fruit salad in their Year 8 food studies course. Pupils follow a given design brief and use tools and equipment, including a sewing machine, safely in the textile modules. A satisfactory standard of graphics is attained in a range of

techniques, including orthographic projections and information technology packages and free-hand sketching, although the latter is not always of a high level. Clear detailed work is produced by high attaining pupils and those of average attainment. Readable text, simple graphic images and more complicated views are achieved using Computer Assisted Design (CAD) packages. With the help of their teachers and information technology, pupils with special educational needs achieve satisfactory standards. Pupils use tools confidently, measure, mark out, shape and finish work in a variety of materials: wood, food and textiles. They adapt and experiment, for example, when changing recipes for dietary requirements.

- 63 By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils attain above average standards in business studies and graphics and average standards in the other material areas they study. They tackle longer and more complex assignments with success showing good graphical skills. The very well presented coursework of higher attaining pupils shows detailed research and critical analysis, particularly in business studies and graphics. In food studies, pupils have satisfactory making skills but their coursework lacks the detail, in-depth research and high standards of presentation shown in other areas of the subject. Higher attaining pupils produce thoughtful evaluations of their work. Information technology is used well to enhance the standards of work of pupils of average attainment and of those who have special educational needs.
- 64 Pupils make good progress throughout both key stages: they develop their practical skills with a range of materials. They learn to work safely and organise themselves well developing good teamwork skills. In Key Stage 4, pupils make good progress in using information technology and in acquiring and applying their new knowledge, for example in business studies. Pupils with special educational needs make very satisfactory progress. Some pupils in Years 10 and 11, however, have casual attitudes so that they fail to produce enough work of quality and work below their capability. In some material areas pupils do not acquire and use sufficient technical vocabulary.
- 65 As at the previous inspection, pupils' attitudes are very good overall. They respond well to teachers' questions, sometimes ask their own, and show interest in their work. Behaviour is good. Relationships are usually very good and mutually supportive. Collaborative work is particularly successful in food. When given opportunities to work independently or take responsibility, pupils respond willingly. This was particularly noticeable in the Year 9 electronics lesson when pupils using printed circuit boards worked on the 'steady hand' game and organised themselves successfully to carry out a number of different tasks. Lower attainers and special educational needs pupils' commitment to learning in class was particularly noticeable in the Year 8 textile class undertaking the wall hanging project. The Year 9 graphics class studying orthographic projection where pupils' attitudes to learning combined with the teachers' supportive class management, ensured an atmosphere of concentration throughout the lesson.
- 66 The quality of teaching, as at the last inspection, is good. Teachers know their subjects well and impart their knowledge clearly. Lessons are well planned, and well structured with a good balance of teacher input and pupil activity. Time is well used. Skills and techniques are built up progressively from Key Stage 3 and applied successfully at GCSE. An impressive feature has been the improvement in GCSE examination results. Visual aids are used effectively to give a clear idea of what is to be learnt in the lessons. Clear worksheets encourage pupils' responses and ideas. Teachers regularly assess and record pupils' work. Homework is set and makes a sound contribution to the pupils' learning. Teachers are enthusiastic, have high expectations of pupils and praise pupils in lessons for their positive contributions. Oral feedback to pupils on their work is an important contributory factor in speeding progress and improving attainment, particularly in the GCSE graphics work.

- 67 Work is regularly marked. The quality of evaluative comments at Key Stage 3 varies; some comments are clear and helpful, but others do not provide a clear indication of how to improve. In all the lessons, a friendly working atmosphere is created. Teachers ensure that pupils understand and apply new knowledge. Storage of pupils' work is well organised. Information technology is well developed and integrated within the department

68 The management of the department is strong and effective and elicits a high level of commitment from staff. The finance for the department has remained the same for a number of years and this has resulted in inadequate resources in terms of textbooks and small equipment. A number of the rooms are in need of upgrading. While the department has good information technology facilities, they are inadequate for the number of pupils following the courses. The requirements of the National Curriculum design and technology courses are being met. Since the previous inspection of May 1995, the department has continued the good work reported on and increased the number of courses available at Key Stage 4.

153 **Drama**

69 Timetabling constraints and the absence of key staff made it impossible to gather sufficient evidence to report fully on drama. However, from conversations with Year 10 and Year 11 pupils, demonstrations of their work, an analysis of examination success and from scrutiny of video evidence of past productions, and interviews with the co-ordinator, it is possible to confirm the strength of the work.

70 Drama is not taught as a discrete subject in Years 7 to 9, it is taught occasionally in English lessons and role play is used in other subjects. A single option group pursues the subject to GCSE level with excellent results. That so much is achieved from such little pre-course experience is testimony to a very high level in the quality of the teaching provided. The independence, confidence and group cohesiveness demonstrated by the older pupils is very impressive as is the wide range of knowledge and theatre skills. On this evidence, drama can be judged to be a strength of the school and very significant in achieving the school's aims of developing the whole child. It makes a very major contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural life of the school, and its impact is seen in assemblies, personal and social education lessons, religious education and public performances. The subject is inspiringly led but the lack of expertise in other staff makes the subject particularly vulnerable at times of absence. Its work is severely constrained by poor accommodation and a lack of specialist equipment for sound and lighting.

155 **Geography**

71 Attainment in the end of Key Stage 4 GCSE examinations is above the national average. The majority of pupils demonstrate levels of achievement at least commensurate, often higher than expected for age and ability. GCSE grades A*-C and A*-G have risen steadily since the last inspection. 1998 results remain above the national average with A*-G grades slightly above and the 1999 results were well above average at 78 per cent. A*-C grades compared to a national average of 56 per cent. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is broadly in line with that found nationally. However, in work observed in lessons and work scrutiny there is evidence of a deterioration in standards of attainment since the last inspection. Pupils have a basic knowledge and understanding of places but their sense of place within a local, national and global context is limited. Overall, pupils acquire good graphical, analytical and enquiry skills but are limited by the lack of development of some key communication skills. Their skills in problem solving, discussion and general oracy are limited through lack of practice. Higher attainers, however, use sophisticated terminology with confidence, have good concentration and listening skills and a capacity for independent study. The majority of pupils have good recall, respond well to open questions and generally apply themselves well to set tasks.

- 72 Most pupils are making worse progress than expected at Key Stage 3 in relation to prior attainment on entry. Progress is poor at Key Stage 3 when pupils have little opportunity to build on and apply previously gained knowledge and understanding from a variety of tasks and case studies. Little opportunity is given to skills' reinforcement, particularly key skills and enquiry skills both within the classroom and field. Higher attainers make limited progress through the absence of extension exercises, task choice, independent learning opportunities and higher graphicacy and enquiry skills. Generally, special educational needs pupils make limited progress within the lesson through the absence of support material and literacy related tasks, for example, use of key words, vocabulary exercises, writing frames and grammatical structures. Progress is satisfactory or good when lessons have clear structures, a variety and choice of tasks. By re-visiting previously acquired skills and knowledge higher order skills are attained. A good example was seen in the use of map skills in a Year 8 lesson on the physical and human features on Kenya. Key Stage 4 pupils make better progress than Key Stage 3 pupils. However, progress in many lessons is unsatisfactory given the high ability levels of many pupils. Progress is made over time through knowledge and understanding re-inforcement through appropriate texts, through pupils' self-application, self-discipline and a genuine desire to succeed. GCSE pupils are given structured guidance and opportunities for study skills techniques and examination preparation. Progress is made through fieldwork opportunities and coursework enquiry where experience in the field supports learning in the classroom. A good example seen was in the use of information technology to construct and support analytical skills in a Year 10 lesson.
- 73 Pupils' behaviour is generally good or very good across both key stages. At Key Stage 3 pupils display a positive attitude towards learning in the classroom. They are willing and eager, self-disciplined and have good concentration and listening skills. Pupils' very good behaviour is a strength within the department and has a profound effect, enhancing social relationships and academic progress. At Key Stage 4, pupils' attitude to learning is mature and self-disciplined. The capacity for independent study and personal initiative is all pervading. All pupils observed had excellent manners and were most courteous with staff and adults. Pupil-teacher relationships are sound, based on mutual respect and a shared sense of purpose.
- 74 The standard of teaching in lessons observed at Key Stage 3 is unsatisfactory, promoting low standards in just under half the lessons seen. The quality of teaching is satisfactory at Key Stage 4, however, expectations are not high enough to promote a high standard of attainment and progress within the classroom. The majority of lessons across both key stages are led by teachers, without clear aims and objectives or target skills. Lessons lack structure and consolidation and there is a notable absence of variety both of teaching styles, approaches and variety of resources. The pace of lessons is too slow often to effect or promote sound educational standards or progress. Methods and classroom organisation generally are not suited to the ability levels or needs of pupils. Higher attainers are not always sufficiently challenged. In a significant number of lessons pupils are not managed well enough to achieve high standards of discipline or secure sound progress within the classroom. There is a notable absence of fieldwork opportunities to enhance classwork and homework and provide alternative learning environments. Teaching is good when pupils are provided with clear objectives, a variety of tasks and are moved along quickly through clear lesson structures and appropriate key skills. A good example was seen in Year 11 work on coasts where there was a strong emphasis on terminology and processes. The monitoring and assessment of pupils' work are good. The department skillfully prepares pupils for public examination but this narrow focus on examination success is at the expense of the development of a broader range of geographical skills. Academic progress is monitored effectively through achievement sheets and through a series of different, end of topic tests, to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities.

- 75 Modules are too long and lack variety of suitable activities for curriculum enrichment opportunities, for example, with the work in Year 9 on climate. Teaching schemes of work at both Key Stage 3 and 4 need modification to suit the needs of all ability ranges. The absence of wide curriculum opportunities reduces the provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through the subject. However, the department does provide pupils with excellent role models in teaching principles of right from wrong.
- 76 Leadership within the geography department is not strong enough to give direction to good teaching practice or effective curriculum planning to meet the needs of all pupils. Monitoring and support for teaching staff and the sharing of good practice is underdeveloped. There is insufficient professional development and in-service training to improve the quality of teaching and to develop effective literacy and numeracy strategies to support pupils, especially those with special educational needs.

161 **History**

- 77 The attainment of the majority of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 is above average. They know how to select relevant information from sources and to make judgements about the usefulness of different sources for studying the past. The written work of many pupils is well above average in its use of a wide vocabulary and quality of presentation, including word -processed exercises and computer-generated charts. The attainment of pupils in a Year 8 lesson observed was well above average. They spoke confidently, could express a personal opinion clearly and understood how the materials they were studying may have been intended to influence the opinions and attitudes of people in the past.
- 78 The attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 is well above average. The performance of pupils in the GCSE examination is well above the national average for grades A*-C and has been consistently so for several years. The performance of girls in the recent examination was well above the national average for girls. Boys' performance showed significant improvement, from an already high base, the pass-rate for A*-C being well above the national average for boys. The percentage of pupils gaining the higher grades A*-B is well above the national average, as is the average point score. In five of the past six years all pupils entered for the examination gained a pass in the grades A*-G. Results have matched or bettered the national average for these grades for the past nine years. The attainment of pupils in lessons in Key Stage 4 is above average. They use a range of source materials and explain well why some are more useful to the historian than others. The general standard of written work is above average. Pupils have a detailed knowledge of the periods they are studying and understand that the sources they are using may have been influenced by political and social attitudes in the past.
- 79 The progress of pupils in Key Stage 3 is good and that of many pupils, especially those with special educational needs, is very good. Pupils extend their knowledge of the periods studied and apply their previous learning to new issues and questions. The written work of many pupils shows good progress over the key stage in acquiring a detailed knowledge of the periods and themes studied, in the development of skills in using sources and in presenting their own views in extended written form. Excellent progress was observed in a Year 7 lesson where lower-attaining pupils were acquiring knowledge of the main features of Roman life and the capacity to compare their own lives with those of the people they were studying.

- 80 The progress of pupils in Key Stage 4 is good, and that of many is very good. Pupils extend their knowledge of the period studied, enabling them to recall factual material well and to explain their understanding of key events and the significance of important personalities. The progress of some lower-attaining pupils in a Year 9 lesson observed was held back by poor IT skills and lack of confidence in using the computer program. Very good progress was observed in a Year 10 lesson on the history of medicine. Pupils developed good organisational skills, enabling them to draw together information from a number of sources to explain changes in medical knowledge in the period studied. Their written work shows that they have made very good progress in acquiring knowledge of this theme at this early stage of the course.
- 81 The response of pupils in Key Stage 3 is very good. They work with concentration, are courteous towards each other and well-behaved. Pupils in a Year 9 lesson responded in a mature way when given the opportunity for independent research on a local study. Throughout this key stage pupils listen attentively in class to each other and the teacher and pupils of all abilities apply themselves to their work with perseverance. The response of pupils in Key Stage 4 is good. They settle quickly to the tasks set, explain what they are doing and work well together. Very good response was observed in a Year 10 lesson on aspects of social history in which pupils were engaged throughout the lesson and collaborated sensibly in assessing each other's work. The positive attitude of the great majority of pupils in this key stage creates an atmosphere of purposeful learning in the classroom.
- 82 The quality of teaching in Key Stage 3 is very good. Lessons are well-planned and aims are clearly explained to pupils. Very good teaching was observed in a Year 9 lesson in which pupils were set a variety of research tasks for a study of the locality. Good time management challenged pupils to work at a pace matching their ability and enabled the teacher to reinforce learning effectively. Work-books and graded activities give pupils of all abilities opportunities to experience success in their learning. The quality of teaching in Key Stage 4 is very good. Teachers have command of their subject and teach with enthusiasm. Lessons are purposeful and clearly structured; good support material enables pupils to extend their learning through well-planned homework. Pupils are carefully prepared for the GCSE examinations and are given many opportunities to learn how the past has shaped the present. Very good teaching was observed in a Year 10 class studying aspects of social history. Energetic teaching and good questioning generated purposeful learning, extending pupils' knowledge and skills of analysis.
- 83 There are three specialist history teachers in the department and several non-specialists who teach in Years 7 and 8. These are qualified teachers who bring good teaching skills to their history teaching. The head of department provides professional help as needed for these staff on an informal basis and they have access to a range of materials to support their teaching including study guides produced in-house. The core team of specialist historians meets regularly but the non-specialists do not meet as a team. Since the staffing may change from year to year, any expertise the non-specialist teachers acquire in historical knowledge and history teaching skill may not be developed. The school is aware of this and has addressed the issue of staffing for history in the current development plan.
- 84 The history curriculum, key stage tests and reports to parents meet statutory requirements. Planning for continuity and progression is very good, providing pupils with a coherent knowledge of the past, including aspects of their own local history. The curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to develop an awareness of the influences which have shaped their own cultural heritage, both locally and nationally, and to reflect on a range of moral and social issues which arise from their study of the past but there is no opportunity to visit museums and sites of historic interest outside the immediate locality. This inhibits their wider cultural development.

- 85 Pupils' work is conscientiously assessed in line with school policy. This, however, does not relate closely to the knowledge and skills set out in the key elements of the National Curriculum for history. Targets are set by pupils for each unit, but many of these are general and insufficiently clear about how they can improve in their work in history. Pupils cannot always re-call these targets when questioned about them.
- 86 The department benefits from the positive leadership of an experienced and committed teacher. Clear targets are set for development and careful curriculum planning provides good support for all teachers of the subject, especially those who are not specialist historians. Teachers' expectation of high standards from their pupils creates a positive ethos for learning. The head of department also manages the work of the technician.
- 87 Accommodation is satisfactory. Two adjacent rooms provide a focus for the subject. Pupils' work and other visual display create stimulus for learning but one of these rooms in a poor state of decoration and the second houses a range of computer equipment which is often in demand by teachers in other subjects, requiring history classes to move. Half of all lessons in Years 7 and 8 are taught outside the specialist rooms. Teachers work hard to minimise the disadvantages of this spread of accommodation, but opportunities to display pupils' work in these rooms are limited.
- 88 Resources are adequate. A range of textbooks, supplemented by workbooks and graded exercises produced by staff, provide good learning support for pupils of all abilities. There is still a need for a more suitable textbook for some Year 11 pupils and a small addition to stock for pupils in Year 8. Video and other visual materials enable pupils to learn from film archive. The use of information technology is being developed. A small collection of artefacts has been established, but this is limited and cannot provide the extra stimulus to learning which teachers intend.
- 89 Improvements have been made since the last inspection in: the teachers' knowledge of the specific needs of pupils with learning difficulties; the range of text-books used in class; information technology supported learning.
- 90 Shortcomings remain in: relating the assessment of pupils' work more clearly to the key elements of the national history curriculum; helping pupils to focus their own learning targets more closely on these key elements; extending the range of visits to historical sites; continuity of staffing; building up a wider range of artefacts to enrich the learning of pupils.
- 91 This is a very good department, making a significant contribution to pupils' social and intellectual development.

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Information technology

- 92 Standards of attainment in information technology at the age of 14 are at the levels expected nationally with a few pupils achieving above. In the RSA CLAIT (Computer Literacy and Information Technology) and NEAB Certificate of Achievement examinations in 1998, and in 1998 a small group of pupils at the age of 16 achieved a hundred per cent pass rate. Scrutiny of pupils' work indicates that the attainment of 16 year-olds is at the nationally expected standard with some above. This is a similar to that found at the last inspection.

- 93 In the separate information technology lessons in Year 7, pupils access and develop understanding of the Claris software. The majority log on, use the icons and facilities of the software with some confidence and close down the software. This was seen in the Year 7 lesson where pupils competently presented their own compositions and letters which they had created for homework, changing the type and size of fonts. They transfer created databases into their word processing documents. Work is saved and retrieved, as appropriate, and text is edited and enhanced with illustrations. At Year 8, pupils work on spreadsheets. Some pupils display satisfactory word processing skills which, for a number of pupils, is the result of practice as much on their home computers as on those in the school. At Year 9 some competence is shown at using CAD (computer aided design) when pupils produce basic orthographic projection drawings using everyday packages, such as toothpaste boxes and confectionery packaging, as sources of ideas. Higher attainers are able to produce clear, clean graphics along with text that is appropriately sized and placed. Pupils undertaking the electronics 'steady hand' game produce packaging designs using the 'Draw' software. Some of these designs are imaginative, detailed and of a high standard. Electronic software designed by the technology department is well used to design simple circuits. Limited evidence of control work is seen in pupils' books. Pupils use the Internet and CD-ROMs such as Encarta to access information on specific topics including the environment and transport. Special educational needs pupils attain satisfactorily in distinct information technology lessons and when using the 'Success-maker' software. At the age of 14, from low levels of attainment on entry for many pupils, they access software, including the use of word processing and graphics competently. A significant number of pupils, however, are not adept at using the keyboard and have difficulty in finding a number of the keys. They do not use two hands and are slow. A keyboard course in Year 7 would greatly benefit pupils.
- 94 By the age of 16 pupils on the CLAIT and Certificate of Achievement courses word process, desktop publish, create spreadsheets and databases to a satisfactory standard. At Key Stage 4 ,pupils produce good quality information technology work independently - some of a very high standard, creating attractive front covers, devising questionnaires, analysing research and presenting it in graph and pie chart form. Good quality information technology is to be seen in the coursework done by business studies, graphics and geography pupils.
- 95 The progress made by pupils in lessons between the ages of 11and 16 is satisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to their peers in both key stages. Progression is evident in the information technology planning. Development of knowledge and skills is noticeable in the Year 7 lessons and the examination work at Key Stage 4. This is due to the well-structured scheme of work, detailed lesson planning and good classroom interaction. Business Studies pupils make very good progress due to detailed planning and regular assessment. Progress is hindered by the fact that pupils have to work in pairs and that class sizes are large, especially in Year 10.
- 96 At both key stages, pupils' attitudes to learning are good. Pupils enjoy the topics offered and are keen to work on the computers. Behaviour in lessons is usually good. While some classes are quite large, pupils on the whole are supportive of each other and good working relationships exist with the teachers. At Key Stage 4, however, some pupils' attitudes are affected by the lack of available computers. While their behaviour is not unacceptable, they are not on task throughout the lesson.

- 97 The quality of teaching in lessons containing information technology is good. This is similar to the situation found at the previous inspection when teaching was described as ‘good in majority of lessons’. Teachers have good subject knowledge and lessons are well structured with a suitable balance of time for instruction and for pupils to work independently. Ambitious work is planned and encouraged. The support given to individual pupils by the teacher helps them to develop confidence and skills. Homework is well used to support class work, especially at Key Stage 3. An assessment scheme is in place that keeps a useful record of pupils’ progress. At Year 7 the pupils find the recently introduced self-assessment sheet helpful to indicate their progress.
- 98 In addition to being taught how to use computers, pupils are required to develop the use of this capability within the subjects of the curriculum. This use of information technology is developing well in a number of subject areas, notably ASDAN, history and science. History in particular has developed its own unique software on the 1841 Bury Census and web pages on Bury that Year 9 pupils use well. Information technology is also developing well in science, where it is used for data logging. Limited amounts of information technology are found in mathematics, English, geography, modern foreign languages, art and religious education. While information technology is mentioned in the documentation of individual departments, no cross-curricular scheme of work is available. The provision for information technology has greatly improved since the last inspection and is used more extensively, although further development is needed across the curriculum.
- 99 The last report drew attention to provision in Key Stage 4 to meet the needs of all pupils and especially of those with special educational needs. Pupils with special educational needs are now very well served by the new provision in the learning support area. They are also well served in separate information technology lessons.
- 100 Much needed staff development is on-going and plans to use the New Opportunities Funding for in-service training are underway. At present there is very limited technical assistance and it often falls on to the teachers to fulfil this role. The school recognises the need for this and is in the process of appointing technical help to maintain the computers.
- 101 The leadership of information technology is successfully shared at present. The suitability of this for future development needs consideration. Generally statutory requirements are being met. While existing room sizes are adequate for the present number of computers, they would be inadequate in the future if, and when, the necessary additional machines are acquired.
- 102 The governing body has put considerable resources into information technology since the last inspection of May 1995. Examination results have improved. The extensive use in design and technology coursework has helped to improve standards. Technical help is insufficient. There is a need for further development of information technology across the curriculum. The school is trying very hard with very limited resources to provide a good experience for the pupils in its care.

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Modern foreign languages

- 103 The good standards of attainment in modern foreign languages reported on at the last inspection have been maintained in both Key Stage 3 and in Key Stage 4 where modern foreign languages is now a compulsory National Curriculum subject. In the 1999 GCSE French examination the percentage of pupils obtaining grades A*-C was well above the national average for both boys

and girls. The small number of pupils who were entered for GCSE Spanish after three years of study obtained results which were broadly in line with the national average.

- 104 Pupils continue to show competence in all attainment targets. Listening is generally a well-developed skill because pupils hear the foreign language spoken frequently in lessons. By the end of Key Stage 4, many pupils show understanding of short extracts recorded by native speakers across various contexts. Most pupils can use vocabulary and phrases they have learnt for basic communication and by the end of Key Stage 4 many can take part in exchanges on familiar topics referring to past and future events, with reasonably good pronunciation. Some pupils, however, lack the confidence to speak at any length from memory. Many pupils produce accurate pieces of redrafted written work of good length on a range of topics and there are examples of some good work in information technology. Reading skills develop well because the department has introduced a wider range of reading opportunities.
- 105 Listening skills are generally well developed in Key Stage 3 in French and in Spanish which pupils begin in Year 9. Pupils respond confidently in the foreign language when prompted by the teacher and they take part in brief exchanges. Some pupils, however, lack the confidence to attempt to speak spontaneously. Most pupils copy words and phrases neatly and accurately and by the end of Key Stage 3 many produce an accurate redrafted piece of writing of reasonable length.
- 106 Girls generally attain higher standards than boys in modern foreign languages, as is the case nationally but boys in this school still attain standards which are above national expectations.
- 107 Overall, high, average and low attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs make good progress in lessons. This is because they show interest in learning a foreign language and they respond positively to the support, guidance and encouragement they receive from their teachers. In Key Stage 3 they make good progress in acquiring knowledge of vocabulary, structures and cultural background commensurate with their prior attainment. They make good progress in developing listening skills and by the end of the key stage they are able to show understanding of short extracts spoken by native speakers. They respond briefly in the foreign language with intelligible pronunciation but only a minority of pupils develop the confidence to speak at any length from memory. Pupils copy words and phrases accurately and neatly and by the end of the key stage they have progressed to producing longer pieces of written work.
- 108 In Key Stage 4, pupils make good progress because teachers have high expectations. They develop the ability to understand a variety of types of spoken material taken from a range of sources. Some pupils still lack the confidence to speak the foreign language spontaneously but an increasing number of pupils are developing the ability to speak spontaneously from memory with good pronunciation and information. They develop the ability to understand a variety of types of written material and they make good progress towards producing accurate pieces of original writing of good length.
- 109 Pupils generally display positive attitudes to learning a foreign language because they respond well to the support and encouragement they receive from their teachers. They participate willingly, often with enthusiasm and enjoyment, in a variety of activities. They display good levels of attentiveness, concentration and perseverance and they work well collaboratively in group and pair activities. Pupils are well-behaved, co-operative and courteous. This is because their teachers insist on good standards of behaviour. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. They come to the classroom well-prepared and well-organised and they show respect for others and for the resources they use.

- 110 Teaching is good in a significant majority of lessons and in some lessons it is very good. It is never less than satisfactory. Teachers have secure knowledge and understanding. A strength of many lessons is the consistent and confident use of the foreign language by the teacher which enables pupils to develop their listening and speaking skills.
- 111 Teachers have high expectations of pupils and set challenging tasks such as taking part in a series of oral exchanges from memory and producing redrafted pieces of original written work of good length. Lessons are well-planned, well-prepared and have clear objectives. Most lessons start with a brisk whole-class oral warm-up followed by a sequence of activities involving a combination of language skills. Teachers make good use of resources and regularly set homework tasks to reinforce or extend pupils' learning. Teachers manage pupils well and expect good standards of behaviour. Classroom relationships are good. Pupils are kept on task and receive good support and encouragement from their teachers. Teachers make good use of assessment and keep detailed records of pupils' attainment and progress, which they use to guide short and long term curriculum planning. Pupils with special educational needs are very well supported.
- 112 The curriculum is broad and balanced. All pupils study French from Year 7 and study Spanish as a second language in Year 9. As was the case at the last inspection, very few pupils choose to do both languages in Key Stage 4. Assessment of pupils' attainment and progress is a real strength of the department. The provision of staffing, accommodation and learning resources with the exception of those for information technology is good. The department is managed efficiently and effectively by an experienced, well-qualified linguist who provides strong leadership for a hard working team. A strong impact has been made in a relatively short period of time by introducing clear planning and establishing a sense of shared purpose and a commitment to raising standards.
- 197 **Music**
- 113 At the end of Key Stage 3 attainment in music is above national expectations for the majority of pupils. The 1998 GCSE results at Key Stage 4 were above the national average with 88.8 per cent A* - C grades but below the national average for A* - G grades. The 1999 GCSE results were an improvement on this with all candidates gaining A* - C grades achieving above the national averages for A* - C and A* - G grades.
- 114 Attainment is high in both key stages. The two attainment targets are met in Key Stage 3 with good habits particularly noticeable in performing skills. Year 7 pupils accurately use voice sounds in their interpretation of graphic scores and sing African chants in parts. Year 9 pupils play keyboards with good finger technique. Higher attainers have good coordination when playing with both hands. Lower attainers work hard on tunes with the right hand to establish a flowing style. Most understand call and response for the Blues but some find difficulty in maintaining a good rhythm. Year 11 pupils compose duets for recorder, violin and piano with full musical directions for performance. They provide written background information to describe their composing intentions. Pupils' historical knowledge ranges from short commentaries on mass, motet and anthem to extended essays on musical periods.
- 115 All pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress. Gains are made in all aspects of performing, listening, composing and appraisal. Year 8 pupils have a good sense of rhythm and develop an understanding of syncopation in group work. They listen to each other and quickly grasp the idea of emphasizing weak beats. Year 10 pupils improve their knowledge of the baroque era by listening to musical examples to enhance aural recognition. Exercises in binary, ternary and ritornello form develop a keener sense of musical style. All abilities are

challenged with work that significantly extends learning.

- 116 Attitudes to learning are extremely positive with cooperation and good behaviour obvious in all lessons. Key Stage 3 pupils are keen and eager to demonstrate rhythm work with body slaps and clapping. They have good rapport with their teachers and demonstrate group improvisations with determination and pride. Key Stage 4 pupils listen well and show initiative in expanding on questions covering a wide range of musical styles. Occasional frustration arises when pupils struggle with rhythmic patterns they do not fully understand. Celebration of individual work with presentation of certificates and class applause reinforces a positive attitude to music.
- 117 All teaching is good throughout both key stages. Teachers have a good command of music in education and pace the work at an appropriate level to draw out the best from their pupils. Pupils with special educational needs are fully integrated into the lessons. A variety of teaching styles enables learning to be supported in a friendly, cooperative atmosphere. Objectives are clearly explained with well-chosen questions to enhance musical competence. Excellent planning and management of pupils ensure a secure learning environment for classes being taught in the small classroom used for keyboard tuition. High expectations and a suitable choice of topics allow most pupils to develop their own musical style in cooperation with others. Sometimes a lack of understanding occurs when tasks are not carefully balanced to match the needs of all pupils. There is a competent team of visiting instrumental teachers who set high standards for their pupils which filter through to group work in the classroom. Records of assessment are kept in accordance with school policy and homework is regularly set and marked.
- 118 The department is well-managed and clear targets for improvement are set. Effective deployment of staff and use of accommodation and learning resources makes for a tightly controlled environment. The department is still inadequately equipped to offer two simultaneous music lessons as the keyboard laboratory is too cramped. Time allocation at Key Stage 4 is insufficient and staff teach lessons after school to enable pupils to have a full entitlement. Extra-curricular activities take place at lunch time and are well-supported by staff and pupils. Concerts take place on a regular basis and the school choir has won many prizes at local music festivals. The department makes a strong contribution to the social and cultural provision of the school.

203 **Physical education**

- 119 Attainment by pupils near the end of Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. At the time of the inspection pupils in Key Stage 3 were experiencing their first lessons of new activities. Pupils attain satisfactory standards in a variety of invasion games as well as in dance and gymnastics while the standard in swimming is good. Pupils have at least mastered sending and receiving skills in netball, hockey, rugby and basketball. They successfully apply these skills in small sided games and demonstrate a satisfactory understanding of the principles of attack and defence. In swimming at Year 7 all pupils present are able to swim and are confident in the water. In dance they work in groups to plan and perform sequences which show some understanding of levels and direction and sensitivity to the music. In gymnastics pupils arrive at the school with a limited movement repertoire.
- 120 There is no GCSE examination course in the subject. The standard of attainment at Key Stage 4 is good. In the games of netball and soccer pupils achieve a good standard of performance. They repeat actions with good control and accuracy. In both games they are more competent and versatile. They have a good understanding of the principles, tactics and rules of the games.
- 121 Pupils throughout the school, including those with special needs, make good progress in relation to their prior learning. Pupils' progress at Key Stage 3 is good. At the beginning of every lesson

previous work is revised and consolidated. Well designed and challenging practice enables pupils to further perfect and develop their skills. As they move through each key stage, they consolidate their skills and apply previous knowledge to new situations. They show a better understanding of the tactics of various games. In Years 7 and 8 they acquire the basic skills and apply these in small group practices. By the end of Key Stage 3, they have a greater variety of technique and are beginning to employ tactics especially evident in netball at Year 9.

- 122 At Key Stage 4, pupils make good progress, especially in the games of netball and soccer. In Year 11 teachers create good opportunities for pupils take more responsibility to plan their own learning activities. Pupils respond well and with a mature attitude. They successfully apply their knowledge to plan, organise and lead good skill practices. Their ability to analyse performance has greatly improved and they are able to make good coaching points.
- 123 Pupils enjoy physical education and display a very positive attitude to learning. Their good behaviour makes a significant contribution to a safe learning environment. They listen attentively, respond well, concentrate and co-operate in various sized groups. They handle equipment safely and with care. They have good organisational skills and are able to give clear instructions. At both key stages, participation rates and standards of kit are very good.
- 124 The quality of teaching is consistently satisfactory and often good and has a positive impact on pupils' attainment. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. There are very good relationships between pupils and their teachers which makes a significant contribution to the good discipline and co-operative atmosphere in lessons. Pupils are given ample opportunity to practice and develop their skills through lessons that are well planned. Appropriate, well structured activities make suitable demands on pupils and keep them interested. Demonstration of new techniques is well used and safety issues emphasised. In the best lessons pace is brisker and pupils are given more responsibility. Where non-specialists are deployed, they are used effectively and give appropriate support.
- 125 The department is well led by an experienced head of department. Good progress has been made on issues raised in the previous report. The curriculum at both key stages meets the current requirements and is well organised. The Key Stage 3 games curriculum has been thoroughly reviewed and suitable amendments made. The provision is better balanced and units on fitness and aerobics introduced. There are good and comprehensive schemes of work and these provide a firm basis for lesson planning. Departmental routines and areas of responsibility are clearly defined. Procedures for assessment are comprehensive and fully implemented. Assessment is appropriately linked to the curriculum and criteria produced for each area taught. Good opportunities have been created for pupils' self assessment and target setting. The department has worked hard to produce and establish the new system. Development planning is good and includes priorities and targets. Many improvements have been made since the last inspection. Assessment procedures have been revised, a groundsman appointed and a new heating system installed in the sports hall.
- 126 Indoor accommodation is of a good size but unattractive. There are extensive playing field which are in good condition although one area is reported as being badly drained. The surfaces of the hard play areas are satisfactory although there are signs of wear.
- 127 Extra-curricular provision is good and well supported by pupils. There is a good tradition of team games which are entered in a variety of competitions. Teams in netball, soccer, hockey, cross country and athletics have been particularly successful. Pupils have been selected to represent both the LEA and the Catholic Schools Sports Federation.

212 **Religious education**

- 128 Religious education was inspected separately by the Inspector appointed by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Salford. A copy of his report is available from the school.

213 PART C: INSPECTION DATA

213 SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 129 The inspection was conducted by a team of 13 inspectors covering 52 inspector days which were spent gathering first-hand evidence.
- 130 A total of 153 lessons or part-lessons were observed in a period of time amounting to nearly 116 hours. The remaining time was spent interviewing staff and pupils; scrutinising departmental and organisational planning and assessment and the work of a representative group of pupils from each year and across all levels of attainment; attending assemblies, observing registration periods in all years and after-school activities.
- 131 All teachers were seen teaching at least once and many more frequently. Senior and middle managers were interviewed about their roles and responsibilities. Inspectors also interviewed members of the governing body; administration, site management, caretaking and technical staff and visitors to the school. The behaviour of pupils around the school, in the dining hall and on arrival and departure was observed and reported upon.
- 132 Meetings prior to the inspection were held with the governors and the parent body. Forty four parents attended the meeting with the Registered Inspector and a similar number wrote additional comments on their questionnaire returns. Views expressed in those meetings, in the responses to the parents' questionnaire and in the comments sent to the Registered Inspector, were considered when identifying issues to be explored during the inspection week.
- 133 Also prior to the inspection, inspectors scrutinised the previous inspection report by OFSTED in 1995. A considerable amount of departmental and general documentation including minutes of governors' meetings and audits, that had been very thoroughly prepared by the staff was also scrutinised. This material also informed the pre-inspection commentaries and raised inspection issues.

218 **DATA AND INDICATORS**

218 **Pupil data**

	Number of pupils on roll (full-time equivalent)	Number of pupils with statements of SEN	Number of pupils on school's register of SEN	Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals
Y7 – Y11	1033	19	152	105

218 **Teachers and classes**

218 **Qualified teachers (Y7 – Y11)**

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent):	56.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher:	40

218 **Education support staff (Y7 – Y11)**

Total number of education support staff:	9
Total aggregate hours worked each week:	245.5

[Secondary schools]

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:	76.6
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Average teaching group size:	KS3	24.9
	KS4	22.6

Financial year:	1999
	£
Total Income	2,018,246
Total Expenditure	2,037,031
Expenditure per pupil	1,993
Balance brought forward from previous year	84,135
Balance carried forward to next year	65,350

Number of questionnaires sent out: 1033
 Number of questionnaires returned: 170

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	31	56	12	2	0
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	54	41	4	1	1
The school handles complaints from parents well	34	44	19	2	1
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	37	45	11	7	1
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	40	43	10	6	1
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	53	42	3	1	1
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	40	48	10	2	0
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	46	47	2	4	1
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	46	47	5	1	1
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	42	47	7	4	1
My child(ren) like(s) school	61	33	5	1	0

NB: Percentages of responses are rounded to nearest integer, sum may not = 100%.
 Percentages given are in relation to total number of returns, EXCLUDING nil replies.