

INSPECTION REPORT

Kingsmead High School
Hednesford

LEA area: Staffordshire

Unique Reference Number: 124397

Inspection Number: 185434

Headteacher: Miss Julia Almond

Reporting inspector: Mr David Cox

Dates of inspection: 1st – 5th November 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 708251

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
Type of control:	County
Age range of students:	11 - 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	Staffordshire LEA
Name of Chair of Governors:	Mr James Hazell
Date of previous inspection:	March 1995

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Ian Kirby	Music	Efficiency Curriculum
William Wimshurst	Mathematics	
Bernard Treacy	English	
Anthony McDermott	Science	
Haydn Webb	Design and technology Information technology	
Ian Waters	Modern languages	Staffing
Clifford Blakemore	Geography	
	History	
Ian Thompson	Art	Assessment
Bernard Jones	Physical education	Accommodation
Felicity Shuffle-Botham	Religious education	Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education
Cheryl Jackson	Sixth form Equality of opportunity Special educational needs Key Stage 4 non-compulsory	

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MAIN FINDINGS

What the school does well

- The majority of students make good progress.
- GCSE results in music are far above the national average.
- Students' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are good.
- The quality of relationships is good.
- The level of students' attendance is above the national average and their punctuality to lessons is good.
- The quality of teaching is good overall.
- Assessment procedures are good.
- Provision for students' moral development is very good.
- The curriculum provision is good.
- Extracurricular provision is very good and careers education is good.
- Procedures for the support, guidance and welfare of students are good.
- There are very good procedures for monitoring and promoting good attendance.
- Partnership with parents is good.
- The leadership and management of the school is good.
- The efficiency of the school is good.
- The school provides good value for money.

Where the school has weaknesses

- Boys' levels of literacy and oracy are below the levels expected nationally.
- Students with special educational needs make insufficient progress relative to other students in the school.
- The attainment of boys is well below the national average and below that of the girls.
- The school does not meet all statutory requirements.
- Students make unsatisfactory progress at Key Stage 4 in non-examination religious education because of insufficient curriculum time to meet the demands of the agreed syllabus.

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

How the school has improved since the last inspection

The school has made satisfactory progress since the previous report. There has been an improvement in the quality of teaching. Standards of attainment are now beginning to improve and the rate of attendance has improved. Under the leadership of the Headteacher and senior management team, most of the weaknesses identified in the previous report have been overcome. Given the improvements made, the many good systems and structures that are now in place and the quality of leadership provided by the Headteacher and the senior management team, the school is well placed to continue its improvement.

Standards in subjects

The following table shows standards achieved by 14, 16 and 19 year olds in national tests, GCSE and A/AS-level examinations in 1999:

Performance in:	Compared with all schools	Compared with similar schools
Key Stage 3	C	E
GCSE Examinations	C	E
A/AS level	D	

Key	
<i>well above average</i>	A
<i>above average</i>	B
<i>average</i>	C
<i>below average</i>	D
<i>well below average</i>	E

In National Curriculum tests at the age of 14, results in mathematics and science were in line with the national averages when compared with all schools but below average in English. In comparison with schools with students from similar backgrounds¹, results were below average in science and well below in English and mathematics.

GCSE results were in line with the national average when compared with all schools. When compared with schools with students from similar backgrounds², results were well below average. Students' best results overall, compared to their achievements in other subjects, were in art, design and technology, geography, information technology, music and physical education. The poorest results were in chemistry, French and German.

GCE A level results were below the national average. In the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) all students obtained either full or unit accreditation. Many of the students who attained these results entered the sixth form with relatively low GCSE grades.

Quality of teaching

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 7-9	Good	Design and technology Information technology Physical education	English Special educational needs
Years 10-11	Good	Design and technology Information technology Music	Special educational needs
Sixth form	Good	N/A	N/A
English	Satisfactory		
Mathematics	Good		

At Key Stage 3, the quality of teaching is at least satisfactory in 91 per cent of lessons seen; good or better in 53 per cent of lessons and very good or excellent in 18 per cent of lessons. The quality of teaching is less than satisfactory in nine per cent of lessons and is rarely poor. The quality of teaching is good in all subjects with the exception of English, science and modern languages where it is satisfactory.

At Key Stage 4, the quality of teaching is at least satisfactory in 93 per cent of lessons seen; good or better in 55 per cent of lessons and very good or excellent in 11 per cent of lessons. The quality of teaching is less than satisfactory in seven per cent of lessons and never poor. The quality of teaching is very good in music; good in science, art, design and technology, geography, history, information technology and physical education and satisfactory in English, mathematics, modern languages and religious education.

¹ Schools with students from similar backgrounds are currently identified in terms of the number of students who are entitled to free school meals.

² Schools with students from similar backgrounds are currently identified in terms of the number of students who are entitled to free school meals.

At sixth form level, the quality of teaching is at least satisfactory in all lessons seen; good in 63 per cent of lessons and very good or excellent in 18 per cent of lessons. The quality of teaching is good in all subjects with the exception of English and physical education where it is satisfactory.

A significant proportion of the specialist teaching of students with special educational needs was unsatisfactory.

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	Students' behaviour is good.
Attendance	Attendance is good. Students' punctuality to lessons is good.
Ethos*	The ethos of the school is good and raises students' self-esteem.
Leadership and management	Good overall leadership and management provided by the Headteacher, the senior management team and most middle managers.
Curriculum	Good overall. Insufficient time for religious education at Key Stage 4. Very good extracurricular provision.
Students with special educational needs	Students with special educational needs make insufficient progress relative to other students in the school.
Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall, with very good moral development. Spiritual development is satisfactory.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	Good overall, well-qualified teaching staff, good quality support staff, satisfactory accommodation and resources.
Value for money	Good value for money with well below average funding.

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

The parents' views of the school

Parents expressed positive views about most areas of the school's work.

What most parents like about the school	What some parents are not happy about
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents are particularly impressed with the standards of attainment in music and design and technology. • The school promotes good attitudes and values. • There is a good flow of information between the school and the home. • The behaviour of students is good. 	

The overall response to the parents' questionnaire is very positive.

The inspectors' judgements support the positive views of the parents.

Standards of attainment are above average in design and technology and in music. The school promotes good attitudes and there is a good flow of information between the school and the home. The behaviour of students is good.

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

To raise further the standards of work and the quality of education provided, the governors and senior management team should:

I Improve boys' literacy and oracy skills by:

- providing more planned opportunities for students, particularly boys, to practise key skills, such as speaking, listening, reading and writing, within all subjects' programmes of study (para 17);
- by sharing the good practice that already exists in some subjects (para 17).

II Improve the progress of students with special educational needs by:

- ensuring all teachers are fully aware of the needs of these students (para 45 and 118);
- ensuring that individual education plans provide sufficient information and relevant targets to enable subjects to develop subject specific targets (paras 29, 72, 116 and 135);
- improving the quality of the specialist teaching of these students (paras 29 and 52);
- improving the coordination, monitoring and evaluation of this area of the school's work (para 87);
- involving parents more in the review process of these students (para 82).

III Improve the attainment of boys by:

- ensuring that boys better organise their work and take greater responsibility for their own development (paras 28, 148 and 142);
- ensuring all subjects match the work more closely to the needs of the boys (paras 45 and 148);
- ensuring subjects provide tasks that sustain the interest of the boys (para 46).

Other weaknesses

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

Meet statutory requirements by:

- ensuring there is sufficient religious education provision for all students in the sixth form (paras 53 and 92);
- providing a daily act of collective worship (paras 66 and 92);
- ensuring that the governors' annual report mentions changes made to the special educational needs policy during the year. Stating the targets set by governors for future successes in GCSE exams (paras 79 and 92).

Improve students' progress in non-examination religious education at Key Stage 4 by providing sufficient curriculum time for the agreed syllabus to be taught (paras 26, 52 and 53).

INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the school

1. The Kingsmead High School, Hednesford, is close to the town of Cannock within the county of Staffordshire. It is a maintained 11-18 mixed comprehensive school with 1,223 students on roll: 627 boys; 596 girls. There are 124 students in the sixth form. The number of students on roll is similar to that noted in the previous inspection report. The school is bigger than most other secondary schools of the same type. The percentage of students speaking English as an additional language is well below average. The school draws its students from a varied catchment area but the socioeconomic circumstances of the students are broadly average although there are pockets of deprivation. The school serves an ex-mining area, which has lately expanded vigorously with the development of a number of new housing estates. The school has a sixth form consortium agreement with two other local schools.
2. The school was last inspected in March 1995.
3. Until recently, a significant minority of students entered the school with levels of literacy and numeracy below the level expected nationally for their age. However, in Years 7 and 8, most students entered the school close to the level expected nationally. The percentage of students identified as having special educational needs is broadly in line with the national average as is the percentage of students with statements of special educational needs. There are 164 (13.4 per cent) students on the school's register of special educational needs and there are 46 students at Levels 3 to 5 of the Code of Practice. The number of students eligible for free school meals is 132 (12 per cent of the main school) which is broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals was lower than the national average at the time of the previous inspection. In 1998, 65 per cent of students stayed on to full-time education; 18.7 per cent gained employment; 10.8 per cent entered a training scheme and 5.4 per cent were in the 'other' category.
4. The standards admission figure is 228 and in Year 7 the school is oversubscribed.
5. The statutory target set for the Year 2000 for five or more passes at GCSE grades at A*-C is 37 per cent.
6. The school has a mission statement 'Achieving success together'. The school's aims are to provide:
 - high quality teaching and learning;
 - a caring and supportive ethos;
 - a community school.
7. The school has focused particularly on the seven key issues set out in the previous report. These are to:
 - continue evaluating delivery of the curriculum to identify areas for improvement;
 - bring all teaching skills up to the level of the best already in place and continue widening the staff's repertoire of teaching methods especially to include those which enhance students' capacities for independent learning;
 - give students more practice in higher-level communication skills;
 - enhance provision for the most able, by continuing to raise teachers' awareness of the need to differentiate students' work and their skills in doing so;
 - develop progression from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 so that standards rise further in GCSE;
 - improve girls' performance in science;
 - weed out irrelevant books and re-stock the library to provide for students of all abilities and ages; encouraging students' private reading.

Key indicators

Attainment at Key Stage 3³

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	117	109	226

National Curriculum test results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of students at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	49 (29)	71 (52)	69 (58)
	Girls	79 (46)	66 (49)	62 (52)
	Total	128 (75)	137 (101)	131 (110)
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	57 (36)	61 (50)	58 (55)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	16 (14)	32 (26)	23 (27)
	National	31 (35)	37 (36)	28 (27)

Teacher assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of students at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	39 (37)	68 (44)	71 (51)
	Girls	60 (56)	64 (47)	69 (56)
	Total	99 (93)	132 (91)	140 (107)
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	44 (45)	58 (45)	62 (52)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	23 (18)	26 (24)	28 (18)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

Attainment at Key Stage 4⁴

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	108	93	201

GCSE Results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A* to G	1 or more grades A* to G
Number of students achieving standard specified	Boys	33 (35)	100 (102)	105 (106)
	Girls	48 (41)	91 (91)	91 (95)
	Total	81 (76)	191 (193)	196 (201)
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	40 (37)	95 (93)	98 (97)
	National	46.3 (44.6)	90.7 (87.3)	95.7 (95.2)

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

	Number	% success rate
School	n/a	n/a
National		n/a

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

⁴ Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

Attainment in the sixth form⁵

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

Year	Male	Female	Total
1999	26	28	54

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	12.9 (10.6)	14 (12.5)	13.5 (12.0)	0	0	0
National	n/a	n/a	(17.6)			(2.8)

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

	Number	% success rate
School	n/a	n/a
National		79.1

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

	Number	% success rate
School	1	100
National		n/a

Attendance

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

		%
Authorised absence	School	8.0
	National comparative data	7.9
Unauthorised absence	School	0.3
	National comparative data	1.1

Exclusions

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

	Number
Fixed period	42
Permanent	2

Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is:

	%
Very good or better	16
Satisfactory or better	93
Less than satisfactory	7

⁵ Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

Attainment and progress

8. By the ages of 14 and 16, in work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment are at the level expected for students of the same age nationally. By the age of 19, students' standards of attainment are below the level expected.

9. In the 1999 National Curriculum tests at the age of 14 in mathematics and science, the proportion of students reaching Level 5 and above was in line with the national average but was below the national average in English. The proportion of students reaching Level 6 and above in mathematics and science was in line with the national average but well below in English. In English, girls' attainment is broadly in line with the national average for girls for Level 5 whereas boys' attainment is well below the national average for boys. In mathematics and science there was no significant difference between boys and girls. The average National Curriculum points score was in line with the national averages in mathematics and science when compared with all schools but below average in English. This year's results show a clear improvement in all three subjects. In comparison with schools with students from similar backgrounds, students' average National Curriculum points score was below in science and well below in English and mathematics.

10. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, the proportion of students obtaining five or more passes at grades A*-C was in line with the national average. Girls' results are much higher than those of the boys. The proportion of students obtaining five or more passes at grades A*-G was above average. The proportion of students obtaining one or more passes at A*-G was in line with the national average. The average total GCSE points score per student was in line with the national average when compared with all schools. When compared with schools with students from similar backgrounds, results were well below average.

11. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, results at A*-C were far above the national average in music; above the national average in English literature, design and technology, geography, information technology and physical education; below the national average in English, mathematics, double award science, biology, physics, chemistry and art; and well below in history, French, German and religious education.

12. Students' best results overall, compared to their achievements in other subjects, were in art, design and technology, geography, information technology, music and physical education. The poorest results were in chemistry, French and German.

13. In 1999 there was an improvement in the proportion of students obtaining five or more passes at GCSE grades A*-C compared to 1998 and the average total GCSE points score also improved. The target set by the school for the number of students achieving five or more passes at A*-C in 1999 was achieved. Targets set for the Year 2000 are realistic.

14. In the 1999 General Certificate of Education (GCE) A level examinations, the average A/AS points score of candidates entered for two or more GCE A levels or AS equivalent was below the national average. Based on the average for the last three years, the average A/AS level point score of candidates entered for two or more GCE A levels or AS equivalent was below the national average. In 1999, in the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) all students obtained either full or unit accreditation.

15. In the work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the ages of 14 and 16 are at the level expected for students of the same ages nationally. By the age of 19, students' standards of attainment are below the level expected.

16. In work seen during the inspection in English, students' standards of attainment at the ages of 14, 16 and 19 are below the level expected of students of the same ages nationally. By the age of 14, higher attaining students are confident speakers. Lower and middle attaining students express themselves briefly. By the age of 16 higher attaining students go on to be able to argue more persuasively. However, many middle and low attaining students, particularly boys, assert ideas rather than argue a case. By the age of 19, students are willing to engage in class or group discussion but the majority lack the appropriate vocabulary to be able to discuss literature effectively. By the age of 14, students read novels and poems that are appropriate to their age. There is a decline of interest in reading in Years 10 and 11, especially amongst boys. By the age of 19, students use their reading skills to study prescribed texts. By the age of 14, students are able to write in a variety of styles. By the age of 16, most students widen their range to include, for example, good quality comparisons between writers.

Many students, including lower attainers, are able to improve the appearance of their work by using word processing. However, inaccuracy in spelling, punctuation and poor presentation mars the work of lower and middle attaining students. By the age of 19 students produce accurate summaries and display insight into characterisation.

17. The standard of literacy is below the national expectation. It is considerably higher amongst girls than it is amongst boys. However, a number of subjects have developed strategies which to some extent compensate for this, enabling students to make progress and to have access to the National Curriculum. In design and technology and music, for example, students use a good range of technical vocabulary in both speech and writing, and attention is given to accuracy in spelling and punctuation. Science provides opportunities for students to undertake research and to write full reports on their findings, paying attention to high quality presentation by using desktop publishing skills. Whilst there is good practice, it is not yet sufficiently consistent, systematic, planned or thorough, to result in the majority of students achieving the national expectation. Higher attaining students explain themselves fully and confidently but the majority of students possess a restricted vocabulary and express themselves briefly. Students usually listen courteously to other students and teachers, but in many lessons do not attend to detail and tend to oversimplify what they hear. Students gather information from what they read but many do not closely attend to exact meaning. Lower attaining students read slowly and hesitantly and many cannot read independently. Many lower and middle attaining boys show a declining interest in reading in Key Stage 4. Whilst students are introduced to writing for a range of different audiences through their various subjects, the work of most middle and lower attaining students is marred by unsatisfactory spelling, punctuation and grammar.

18. In work seen during the inspection in mathematics, students' standards of attainment at the age of 14 are at the level expected of students of the same age nationally. Their understanding of shape and space is developed well. Higher attainers in Year 9 can find circumferences and areas of circles. Students are developing good skills in solving problems. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the age of 16 are below that expected of students nationally. Lower attaining students have difficulty with the concepts of number; many lack confidence when dealing with mental calculations. Problem-solving skills continue to be developed well. Most students can identify patterns, establish rules, make predictions and test results. Middle and higher attaining students can determine formulae with many higher attainers able to suitably extend investigations. By the age of 19 most students are confident in dealing with a range of algebraic equations.

19. The standard of numeracy is in line with the national expectation. Number and algebraic skills are generally sound; students in geography can use coordinates confidently in map reading although some GNVQ students have difficulty with percentages. Satisfactory measuring skills are demonstrated in geography and design and technology; students handle confidently scales on maps in geography and use scales accurately when representing designs in two dimensions in design and technology. Data handling skills are satisfactory; in science most students are able to draw well and successfully interpret graphs for physical situations and in geography, collect and analyse data.

20. In work seen during the inspection in science, students' standards of attainment at the ages of 14, 16 and 19 are at the level expected of students of the same ages nationally. By the age of 14, higher attaining students plan complex investigations. Middle attainers need to be prompted to recall what they have studied. By the age of 16 higher attainers show extensive knowledge of magnetic fields. Middle attainers investigate heat changes in a variety of chemical reactions. Lower attainers have difficulty in investigating heat changes in chemical reactions; many cannot follow instructions in a textbook because of their weak reading skills. By the age of 19, students have a sound grasp of scientific principles and undertake investigations with precision.

21. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the age of 14 are above the level expected for students of the same age nationally in design and technology, information technology and physical education; at the level expected in art, geography, history, music and religious education and below the level expected in French and German.

22. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the age of 16 are well above the level expected in music; above the level expected in design and technology, information technology and physical education; at the level expected in art and geography and below the level expected in history, French, German, and in the non-examination religious education course.

23. In work seen during the inspection and where there is sufficient evidence to form a judgement, students' standards of attainment at the age of 19 are above course expectations in design and technology, history and information technology, and in line with course expectations in art, geography, music and physical education. Standards of attainment seen in lessons are better than recent examination results would suggest. Many of the

students presently undertaking sixth form courses have better GCSE results on entry to the sixth form than many of the students who had been entered for examinations previously.

24. The majority of students make good progress at the school. A significant proportion of students in Year 9 and above entered the school with levels of literacy and numeracy below the levels expected nationally. However, students in Years 7 and 8 entered the school broadly at the level expected of students of the same age nationally. Students make at least good progress in one lesson in two and satisfactory progress in most other lessons. They make good progress over time at all key stages. Students make good progress at Key Stage 3 from a low base. The school has introduced a literacy scheme and girls in particular have benefited from this scheme and make good progress with their literacy skills. However, boys' literacy skills remain weak and this is one reason why boys' results in National Curriculum tests in English are well below the national average.

25. At Key Stage 3 there has been a considerable determination to improve students' standards of attainment and the development of teaching strategies has been instrumental in bringing about good progress. Students make good progress in all subjects with the exception of English, science and modern languages where progress is satisfactory.

26. At Key Stage 4, students make good progress. Teachers ensure that students consolidate previous learning and build upon this to good effect. Teachers' high expectations of behaviour and what students can achieve, help to sustain the good progress over Key Stage 4. Students make very good progress in music; good progress in science, art, design and technology, geography, history, information technology and physical education; satisfactory progress in English, mathematics and modern languages and unsatisfactory progress in religious education. In music, the very good teaching leads to students' very good progress. In non-examination religious education the allocation of curricular time to religious education is insufficient to fully deliver the agreed syllabus and is the main reason for students making unsatisfactory progress.

27. At sixth form, students make good progress. Whilst examination results are generally below the national averages, many of the students enter the sixth form with relatively low GCSE grades. Students who are now in the sixth form are making good progress in lessons. They are coping well with the increased rigour of GCE A level courses and GNVQ. Students make good progress in mathematics, science, art, design and technology, history, information technology, music and religious education and geography, and satisfactory progress in English and physical education. Students develop their skills of independent learning and take greater responsibility for their own learning.

28. There is no significant difference in the progress of students from different ethnic backgrounds. Girls tend to make better progress than boys, mainly because they are better organised and because of a more diligent approach to the development of their work, particularly at Key Stage 4.

29. The progress of students with special educational needs is satisfactory rather than good, because individual education plans are not sufficiently refined. The time spans for targets are too long-term for sufficient flexibility to be built into the targets set. Individual education plans for Year 7 students are not produced until their second term in the school. When plans are produced they do not provide adequate subject-specific guidance. Special educational needs students make only slow progress in developing a capacity for personal study and are very dependent on the teacher in most subject areas. A significant proportion of the specialist teaching of students with special educational needs was unsatisfactory. This unsatisfactory teaching is leading to some students making unsatisfactory progress.

Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

30. Good attitudes to learning and good behaviour are evident throughout the school and these contribute to the progress students make with their learning. The school is an orderly community, and relationships are good, as when the school was previously inspected. Parents are content with the happy atmosphere in the school, and the standards of behaviour achieved. Students relate well to each other and to staff, and readily work together. Other aspects of their personal development are also good.

31. Students' response is good in the majority of lessons throughout the school. They come to lessons ready to learn. They pay good attention to the teacher and try to answer questions. They usually settle down quickly to written tasks and persevere well. Sixth form students in particular show a mature approach to their work and develop a good rapport with their teachers. Where teaching is at its best students are eager to work and show real enjoyment, as when a Year 7 class were designing Aboriginal totem poles. Students generally complete homework that is set, though there are occasional exceptions. Most students in all age groups show good attitudes to learning by their regular attendance at school. A good number join enthusiastically in extracurricular activities, such as drama, musical and sports activities.

32. Students understand how they are expected to behave, and although a minority do occasionally fidget or allow their attention to wander in lessons, they readily respond to a reminder from the teacher. Rarely, but most often when teaching is less skilled, unsatisfactory behaviour arises in a lesson. Around the buildings and the site, behaviour is for the most part good, if occasionally over-boisterous. Students are friendly to visitors, showing consideration for them when corridors are crowded. They generally observe the one-way system round the buildings, assisting safe movement to lessons. Although in lessons students look after equipment, respect for the school site is less marked, as there is some carelessness with litter.

33. Occasional incidents of poor behaviour arise, at times serious enough to result in short-term exclusion. The recent rate of such exclusions is broadly in line with other schools. It is higher than the number reported at the previous inspection, but has recently fallen considerably. In the year preceding the inspection 31 students were involved in a total of 42 fixed term exclusions, while in the previous year 57 students were excluded. There are few permanent exclusions.

34. Relationships are good. The school is an orderly and harmonious community. Students relate well to each other and to staff. Their progress in lessons is aided by the way even younger ones readily work together in pairs or groups and they volunteer help for each other.

35. Students' personal development is good. When students are given responsibility and opportunity to show initiative they cope well and this contributes to their learning. In physical education they ably manage 'warm up' sessions. They use computer facilities to research information for homework. Year 8 cheerfully and capably take their turn at helping office staff by running a reception desk. A number of older students volunteered for training and now support Year 7 by acting as mentors. Sixth formers are regularly involved in the young enterprise scheme; for instance, last year they marketed mugs to commemorate the school's sixtieth anniversary. Students serving on the year and school councils contribute to decisions about the school community; for instance, resulting in the installation of a pay phone for students' use. They contribute to the wider community; for instance, they supply entertainment, and serve food, at the senior citizens' Christmas party. They regularly raise funds or donate goods for a range of charities selected through their year councils. Representatives play a role in the development of the local single regeneration budget project, the Hednesford Sentinel Project.

Attendance

36. Attendance is good. It has improved in response to the steps taken by the school since the last inspection. From year to year it remains consistently above average levels seen in other schools. In the most recent year it was nearly 93 per cent over all. Year 11 attendance was just below 90 per cent but in other year groups in the main school it was higher. At the time of the inspection the efforts of staff ensured attendance was maintained at well over 90 per cent throughout Key Stages 3 and 4, as in the 1998 autumn term. During the inspection attendance was satisfactory in the sixth form lessons seen.

37. Unauthorised absence is lower than the national average. When a student stays away from school there is in most cases an acceptable reason. A few students, most often in Key Stage 4, are frequently absent. In a few instances this absence has no real excuse, but is condoned by parents. Good efforts by the school, with very effective support from the education welfare officer, restrict the extent of this problem. Nevertheless poor attendance of a minority of individuals has an adverse effect on their progress and limits their attainment. Family holidays taken in term time cause some concern to the school, because of the resulting interruption to learning.

38. Students usually arrive in good time in the morning, allowing a smooth start to the day's activities. This is helped by teachers' insistence on good punctuality. Similarly students move purposefully around the site between lessons, so that lateness to lessons during the day is only an occasional concern.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

Teaching

39. The quality of teaching is good at all key stages. There has been an improvement in the quality of teaching since the last inspection, particularly at Key Stage 4 where one-fifth of the teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory in the previous report. This improvement in the quality of teaching is now beginning to translate into improved National Curriculum test results and GCSE results.

40. At Key Stage 3, the quality of teaching is at least satisfactory in 91 per cent of lessons seen; good or better in 53 per cent of lessons and very good or excellent in 18 per cent of lessons. The quality of teaching is less than satisfactory in nine per cent of lessons and is rarely poor. The good teaching provision at Key Stage 3 is

one reason for the good progress of most students. The quality of teaching is good in all subjects with the exception of English, science and modern languages, where it is satisfactory.

41. At Key Stage 4, the quality of teaching is at least satisfactory in 93 per cent of lessons seen; good or better in 55 per cent of lessons and very good or excellent in 11 per cent of lessons. The quality of teaching is less than satisfactory in seven per cent of lessons and never poor. The quality of teaching is very good in music; good in science, art, design and technology, geography, history, information technology and physical education, and satisfactory in English, mathematics, modern languages and religious education.

42. At sixth form level, the quality of teaching is at least satisfactory in all lessons seen; good in 63 per cent of lessons and very good or excellent in 18 per cent of lessons. The quality of teaching is good in all subjects with the exception of English and physical education where it is satisfactory.

43. Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of their subjects. This is particularly true at Key Stage 3 where teachers use their knowledge of the Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests system to improve the performance of students. Non-specialist teachers and temporary teachers have a secure knowledge for the classes that they are teaching. In mathematics, all full-time teachers have good subject knowledge and explain concepts clearly.

44. Teachers' expectations are high. Nearly all teachers have high expectations of students' behaviour that account for the good working atmosphere in most classes. Appropriate and challenging work is set in information technology and leads to standards being above the level expected. Often students respond positively to the impact of good teaching by producing their best efforts as was seen in a Year 8 netball lesson in physical education.

45. The quality of planning is good at Key Stage 4 and at sixth form level, and it is satisfactory at Key Stage 3. In religious education, lessons are well planned with clear objectives. In these lessons, the work is well matched to the needs of the students. Teachers plan their lessons to enable students to consolidate their information technology skills. However, teachers do not always plan their lessons to ensure that boys make the same progress as the girls. In English, teachers do not always take sufficient account of the needs of students with special educational needs in their planning resulting in this group of students making unsatisfactory progress.

46. Most teachers use a good range of teaching strategies and provide activities that help to sustain most students' concentration and interest. However, tasks are not always of interest to the boys. Teachers provide a high level of support and effective demonstrations to help students succeed and build self-esteem. In modern languages, lessons include a variety of activities that help students to hear and speak French or German. However, in history, appropriate strategies are not always used to challenge higher attaining students.

47. Classroom management is a strength of many teachers. It is based on good relationships and mutual respect between teachers and students. Teachers use praise and encouragement to move students forward in their studies. In English, in a minority of lessons, teachers do not always check the inappropriate behaviour of a small minority of older boys and this leads to disruption and students not making adequate progress in these lessons.

48. The use of time is good. Many lessons are taught at a good pace with clearly focused tasks that help to sustain students' concentration and good behaviour. In science, good teaching is characterised by a brisk introduction and then deadlines set and adhered to throughout the lesson. This enables students to make good progress in these lessons. In physical education, lessons sometimes lack pace, where teachers do not always give enough attention to making the transition between different activities smooth enough.

49. Teachers make good use of the available resources. Many teachers make effective use of the information technology facilities and this helps students to attainment standards above the level expected. In geography, book resources, complemented by the use of computers, film and worksheets are successful in stimulating interest and supporting progress.

50. The quality and use of day-to-day assessment are satisfactory. Students' work is marked regularly, but comments do not always inform students of their progress or how they might improve. In science, work is regularly marked in an informative way which students understand and value. This enables students to make good progress and to focus on areas for improvement.

51. The setting and use of homework are satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4 and at sixth form level. Many opportunities are provided for sixth form students to extend their studies through homework

and independent study. Teachers set homework on a regular basis and it is normally relevant to the topic being covered.

52. A significant proportion of the specialist teaching of students with special educational needs was unsatisfactory. Unsatisfactory teaching was as a result of ineffective planning to meet individual students' needs; poor classroom management, particularly of boys; and the use of unclear and impractical individual education plans that do not closely identify students' individual needs.

The curriculum and assessment

53. The curriculum provides good breadth, balance and relevance. It meets statutory requirements except in the provision for religious education in the sixth form and in an inadequate time allocation to deliver the agreed syllabus for religious education at Key Stage 4. The curriculum includes all subjects of the National Curriculum including religious education, personal development and life skills. The proportion of time allocated to subjects is appropriate except that all students in Year 8, irrespective of attainment, take a second modern language. In Year 9 students have the option to drop this second language and this is one reason for attainment being below the level expected by the age of 14 in the subject. At Key Stage 4 the allocation of time to religious education is insufficient to cover the agreed syllabus and is the main reason for standards of attainment being below the level expected and students making unsatisfactory progress. The length of the taught week is in line with DfEE recommendations.

54. Students are provided with good equality of access and opportunity although only those students who take GCE A level general studies receive religious education in the sixth form. Students in Year 7 are taught in mixed ability classes for all subjects except mathematics where they are set according to ability. Many subjects set students in Year 8 except English and science who set in Year 9, and religious education, physical education, art, music, information technology, personal development, drama and business studies who continue to teach in mixed ability groups. In Key Stage 4, there is a core curriculum followed by all students and in addition to GCSE options, students are able to take a third science, performing arts, extra physical education leading to a certificate of achievement or art, business studies and health studies which can be counted towards a GNVQ in the sixth form.

55. The school is also part of the Cannock Gateway Project, a partnership with other local schools to allow some students in Years 10 and 11 to gain vocational access and key skills with accredited units. A small group of seven students are formally disapplied from the National Curriculum. Sixth form provision is offered as part of a consortium with two other local schools. This offers a very good range of courses.

56. A well-planned programme of personal development and life skills promotes the personal development of students throughout the school and prepares them for adult life. Systems are in place to monitor the teaching and success of this programme and to support the staff. The programme includes health education, sex education, bullying and issues of drug misuse, which are comprehensively covered. The scheme builds progressively throughout a student's school life.

57. Curriculum provision for special educational needs is satisfactory. Good provision is made in many subjects but there are concerns in modern languages where these students study two languages in Year 8 which is beyond the capability of many of the students.

58. Planning for progression and continuity is good. The curriculum is planned to create a smooth transition between key stages and there are also links with primary schools to help both promote the school and to ensure continuity and progression in students' education.

59. The provision for careers education and guidance is good. The programme in Key Stage 4 includes the opportunity for all students to have one week's work experience in Year 10. All work experience is well monitored, with careful preparation and follow-up during and after the placement by members of the teaching staff. The school provides good sixth form career and education guidance.

60. The school makes available a very good and wide range of extracurricular activities at lunchtimes and after school, which enrich the curricular provision. In addition to music, drama and sport, many departments offer curricular clubs, activities and educational visits. Eighty-five students participate in extracurricular sporting activities. These activities are supervised by a total of 11 teachers, including four members of the physical education department.

61. The school has responded well to the key issues of the previous inspection that said that the school should continue evaluating delivery of the curriculum to identify areas for improvement.

62. Procedures for assessing, recording and monitoring attainment and progress are satisfactory at Key Stages 3 and 4; they are good in the sixth form. Recently designed systems, based on National Curriculum levels, for recording progress are being progressively implemented and provide a good means of monitoring progress. The school has well organised, accurate data, including results of tests on entry to the school, to assist departments to identify underachievement and to set targets. This information is provided to all departments. The ways in which departments use and build upon whole-school assessments are not consistently effective. For example, assessment data is very well used in music to monitor attainment; in art there is a good collection of exemplar material to ensure accuracy and consistency, and in English targets are set which provide guidance for teaching. However, in religious education, assessment is limited and does not provide sufficient detail to enable effective monitoring of groups or individual progress.

63. Good use is made of assessment information to help teaching and planning in all subjects except religious education. For example, in science, assessment is used effectively to evaluate methods and guide planning for improvement. Assessment is used in music to identify individual needs and in planning to meet them. Students' self-assessments are effectively used in the majority of departments to promote progress. It is a strong feature in art, where students are involved in regular reviews of their work to consolidate progress and to set targets for improvement. In modern languages students check their own worksheets in listening exercises, and in mathematics there is an element of self-evaluation in each topic. Assessment, recording and reporting for statemented students all satisfy statutory requirements.

64. Since the previous report, there is more consistent use of assessment to support planning.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

65. The school makes good overall provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its students. The school has a clear set of aims with a strong emphasis on students' achievement and development. The school has recently reviewed its policy on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and in the revised document has identified the whole school as responsible for its delivery.

66. The quality of provision for the spiritual development of students is satisfactory. While the school does not meet legal requirements for a daily act of collective worship, assemblies are well planned and provide good opportunities for student participation and reflection. They also make a significant contribution towards the moral and social development of students. Opportunities for the spiritual development of students across the curriculum are limited but good opportunities are found in religious education, where students consider the nature of belief and the belief practices of several religions. They have the opportunity to consider ultimate questions surrounding life and death and to develop their own beliefs and values. Art provides opportunities for reflection and the expression of emotion and feelings, and in science students reflect upon the views of the universe through the ages. In music, students have the opportunity for spiritual growth in reflection on the performance of others.

67. The school provides very good support for the moral development of its students. There is a clear behaviour policy and all staff have high expectations of students. The use of assemblies to celebrate achievement of all kinds promotes positive values and the introduction of praise postcards and use of the gold crown symbol supports this. Very good moral education is provided through the life skills lessons and through the personal development courses in Key Stage 3 and the relationships and careers course in Key Stage 4. The use of drama to support the teaching of moral development is a very positive move, as is the use of outside specialist advice for students. Contemporary issues and their consequences, such as pollution, inequality in the third world, racism and medical ethics, are considered in science, geography and religious education. The school continues to promote charity fund raising and awareness and each year group adopts the charity of its choice and works to support it.

68. Students are provided with good opportunities for social development in the range of clubs and activities offered by the school. There is a clear anti-bullying policy that is supported by the use of trained students who act as peer mentors for Year 7 students and by the availability of the school counsellor. Social development is promoted in the invitations extended to visitors to the school and the opportunities for students to support the primary schools and the elderly. In lessons the use of group work, in particular in physical education and music, encourages good collaboration and cooperation. The use of discussion in several areas promotes tolerance for the views of others. The school council provides students with an opportunity for considered discussion and interaction.

69. The school provides good opportunities for the cultural growth of its students. The inclusion of an artist in residence encourages students to experiment in different media and the display of art in various forms around the school promotes an awareness of visual culture. Literature and poetry are promoted by the writer in residence

and by the book week held in school. The school has a comprehensive range of clubs and groups to enable students to develop their own talents in music, art and drama. These talents are shared with the rest of the school in assemblies, carol concerts and dramatic productions. The invitation to perform excerpts from the school's production of Grease in Lichfield Cathedral indicates the high standard achieved. Students have opportunities to study the culture and history of their own country as seen from visits to the Black Country museum and Tamworth Castle, for example, and in the theatre visits, such as the Year 11 trip to the Garrick Theatre in London. Opportunities to learn about the cultures of other countries are more limited but students visit the Sikh Gurdwara in religious education and learn about the cultures of the lands associated with the faiths studied. In geography, students learn about the people of Japan, Brazil and Italy, and in music and art the syllabi provide opportunities for experiencing the cultures of other countries and times. There is an annual visit to Europe by students who are supported in their studies by the German conversation club and a day trip to France by students in Year 9.

Support, guidance and students' welfare

70. Measures for the support, guidance and welfare of students are good, as at the previous inspection.

71. Students receive good pastoral support. A good induction programme helps them to settle happily when they first transfer from their primary schools. Pastoral staff have a good understanding of students' individual circumstances. In addition, thorough records are kept in the main school and contribute to the way that tutors, heads of year and more senior staff all play appropriate roles in meeting students' needs for support and guidance. There is appropriate involvement of parents and also of outside support agencies where the students' needs demand this. Appropriate routines are in place for following up any concerns about sixth form students.

72. Procedures for monitoring progress and personal development are good. Students set targets for their own learning and progress, on the basis of their annual reports and through discussions on the new review days. A system of awards is used to recognise their efforts and successes. However those with special educational needs are not fully supported because their individual education plans are not specific enough to guide staff; neither are the students themselves helped to understand what they need to learn. Special educational needs students in Year 7 are disadvantaged because of the length of time taken to put their individual education plans in place. A good programme of careers education guides students as they select their options for study in Key Stage 4, and then helps them decide their post-16 course of action. Similarly a good timetable of guidance is in place for sixth form students.

73. Procedures for monitoring and promoting discipline and good behaviour are good. The recently revised behaviour policy contributes to the guidance systems by supplying a very good structure for managing behaviour. The policy is generally applied to good effect, although there are occasional instances where it is not used fairly and consistently. Where an individual's behaviour deteriorates, good steps are taken to achieve improvements. A suitable range of sanctions is used. Appropriate use is made of exclusion when this becomes necessary, so that it has an impact but with a minimum loss of time in school. A referral unit, run jointly by local secondary schools, contributes to the provision for tackling the more serious behavioural difficulties of a few students.

74. A new anti-bullying policy has recently been adopted after careful development. Little evidence of bullying was seen during the inspection, but a few students feel insecure about such matters because of the time taken to resolve them in the past.

75. Very good attention is now given to arrangements for recording and monitoring attendance. Systems have been improved in recent months so that a proper central compilation of printouts from the computerised registration records is now kept, in addition to the records appropriately kept by heads of year. Regular checks are in place to identify students with falling attendance. A pilot scheme using clerical assistance to contact homes of frequent absentees on the first day of any absence has been extended to cover all year groups in the main school. Parents are expected to notify the school promptly when their child is unable to come to school, and students know their home will be contacted if they fail to arrive. Good attendance is encouraged and rewarded. There is very good liaison with the education welfare officer who gives very effective support. For instance, she joins staff in interviews of students and parents about attendance problems, and tackles welfare matters that impede attendance. She also helps monitor the attendance of a small group of Year 11 students whose particular needs are being met by a key skills and vocational curriculum organised at an off-site centre.

76. Appropriate liaison is maintained with a range of other agencies that contribute to the way students are supported. Various good procedures, including arrangements for first aid and for emergency evacuation of the premises, are in place to promote students' welfare. The well-detailed child protection policy defines procedures for dealing with any such issues that arise. There is a need to ensure that all staff are properly aware of these

procedures, for instance to make sure that all know which member of staff is designated to coordinate the response to any concerns that arise.

77. Good routines are generally in place for identifying and remedying health and safety concerns. The school is aware of matters that currently need attention, such as the lack of separation of pedestrians and vehicles that gives cause for concern in parts of the site, especially where students cross the access road between the physical education changing rooms and the playing fields.

Partnership with parents and the community

78. Students benefit from the school's good emphasis on fostering links with parents and with the local and wider community. Steps taken since the last inspection have resulted in an increased sense of partnership. Parents who expressed a view appreciate the efforts made to inform and involve them. Overall, liaison with the community and with industry makes a good contribution to the work of the school.

79. There is a good flow of information to parents, including the well-presented prospectus, an introductory booklet with a helpful explanation of the Year 7 curriculum, and regular newsletters. The most recent governors' annual report gives a generally good range of detail, but omits mention of changes made to the special educational needs policy during the year. It also fails to state the targets set by governors for future successes in GCSE exams.

80. Good steps are taken to consider parents' views, for instance through asking Year 7 parents to fill in a questionnaire and by consulting the parents' association before finalising the home-school contract that nearly all parents have now signed.

81. The school responds readily to any parents who express queries or concerns. Satisfactory use is made of the students' organisers for communication and many parents sign these regularly. Plans are well in hand for teachers to send praise postcards home, to share students' successes. Pastoral staff discuss with parents any problems with attendance or behaviour, and often this contributes to improvements in learning for the student involved. Routines for reporting to parents are good, with both an interim and a full report issued during the year. The recent revision of the report format adds improved detail about attainment and targets for improvement to the helpful subject-specific information already supplied to parents. A new system of review meetings, where parent, student and tutor discuss work, progress and steps for further improvement, has been introduced and is already proving a successful means of increasing parents' involvement.

82. In one area liaison is unsatisfactory. Little is done to tell parents of students with special educational needs on stages one and two about these needs. Parental support is not enlisted to support the progress of these students.

83. There is close liaison with the parents' and friends' association to promote its involvement. As well as raising funds for extra resources, members of this group contribute to the community life of the school, for instance through their part in the sixtieth anniversary celebrations.

84. Enrichment through links with the community is good. Visitors invited to the school contribute to several areas of the curriculum, for instance making a valuable contribution to the drugs education programme. Good links with local employers underpin the success of the well-planned Year 10 work experience week, enable practice interviews to be included in the careers programme for Year 11 students, and also lead to appropriate placements for sixth form students. Similarly, good links with a range of employers add to the breadth of students' experience in subjects such as science and geography, and contribute to the progress they make.

85. Liaison with the six main feeder primary schools results in useful links in several subject areas, with instances of good steps to curricular continuity. For instance in science, Year 6 students start a project on bubbles that is continued during their Year 7 science lessons. Students in the sixth form benefit from the range of post-16 courses made available through the consortium operated in partnership with two other secondary schools.

86. In recent years the school has contributed to the local community by surveying interest in evening classes, and now meets local needs by running a range of courses in partnership with a local college.

THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

Leadership and management

87. The quality of leadership and management of the school is good. The Headteacher has a clear vision for the future direction of the school. This vision is evident in the school's mission statement and through the successful application of its aims and values. These aims and values are central to the work of the school and all developments and policies are related to these aims and values. The Headteacher has been in post for three years. During these years, she has created and forged a good senior management team that works collectively and effectively together. All members of the senior management team have clearly defined but overlapping job descriptions that enable them to cover effectively all aspects of the school. The line management system is effective and enables the senior management team to monitor effectively the work of the school. The quality of management is good at middle management level although it does vary. There is very good leadership and management in mathematics. In the two years since her appointment, the head of department has provided a clear direction for the subject and there has been an improvement in students' standards of attainment. However, the coordination, monitoring and evaluation of special educational needs are not providing for the needs of students with special educational needs. This is reflected in the lack of involvement, commitment and understanding of some curriculum staff in identifying and meeting the needs of students on the school's register of special educational needs.

88. The governing body has a satisfactory knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses and has a good strategic overview of the school's development. It is kept well informed of the work of the school by the senior management team. The governing body monitors and evaluates the work of the school through its committee structure. There are good systems for monitoring the school budget on a regular basis. However, whilst governors are aware of the work of the school, they do not always gather first-hand evidence of how the school operates.

89. Development planning at a whole-school level is good. The priorities identified have been appropriate to the needs of the school and have built well upon the previous OFSTED inspection. Developments are well planned with a clear programme of action with resources directed to meet the school's needs. Development planning at subject level is generally good. There are good procedures for monitoring and evaluating these by the senior management team.

90. The monitoring and support of teaching and the curriculum are good. There is a programme of subject reviews that includes formal observation of all teachers of the subject. Examination results are discussed and action plans drawn up to support subjects. The results of this approach are clear in the improvement in the quality of teaching and in the improved National Curriculum test results in areas such as mathematics.

91. The ethos of the school is good. There is a strong emphasis on students' personal development as well as improving their standards of attainment. Parents are supportive of the school and are pleased with the values that the school promotes. Through its strong pastoral system it raises the self-esteem of its students.

92. The governing body, however, fails to meet some of its statutory requirements. There is insufficient religious education provision for all students in the sixth form. The school does not comply fully with statutory requirements regarding an act of collective worship. The most recent governors' annual report gives a generally good range of detail, but omits mention of changes made to the special educational needs policy during the year. It also fails to state the targets set by governors for future successes in GCSE exams.

93. The school has made satisfactory progress since the previous report. There has been an improvement in the quality of teaching. Standards of attainment are now beginning to improve and the rate of attendance has improved. Under the leadership of the Headteacher and senior management team, most of the weaknesses identified in the previous report have been overcome.

94. Given the improvements made, the many good systems and structures that are now in place and the quality of leadership provided by the Headteacher and the senior management team, the school is well placed to continue its improvement.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

95. The match of number, qualifications and experience of the teachers and other classroom staff for the demands of the school curriculum is good. During the previous two years 13 teachers have left the school and 16 have been appointed. There is a good mix of experience and youth. Each member of staff has a job description.

96. The match between the needs of the curriculum and the number of support staff is good. Support staff working with special educational needs are well qualified and experienced. There are sufficient numbers of support staff in art and science, but not enough in design and technology.

97. Arrangements for the induction of newly qualified teachers and for teachers new to the school are very good. The school has appointed three newly qualified teachers this year, and two have taken over posts where teachers are absent. Newly qualified teachers have regular meetings with the coordinator and weekly meetings with their induction tutor, and targets are set to meet their career entry profile. They speak very highly of the system and also of the strong support they have received from staff.

98. There is good provision for the appraisal and professional development of staff. The school has introduced its own system for appraisal, which operates by professional development interviews. Targets for professional development are also identified in the department review programme. Copies of the staff development review meeting are held by the coordinator for professional development in order to build up a school profile. In addition, a questionnaire has been circulated to all staff. Departmental development needs are prioritised and are collated by the coordinator. Applications for courses have to be approved by the line manager, and departments have to monitor the impact of the course to ensure that it provides value for money. Administrative staff have also been involved in staff development, as for instance with desktop publishing, and counselling is now being offered to students as a result of a learning support assistant having attended a course.

99. The accommodation is adequate. The reception area is welcoming and provides a comfortable area where visitors and parents can wait. There is good display throughout the school that celebrates students' achievement. There has been significant improvement in the accommodation since the last inspection. Poor quality mobile classrooms have been removed, new classrooms built, and computer rooms enhanced. The library is now a good facility. The buildings are in a sound state of repair. They are well managed and organised and there is a good system in place to ensure that any necessary remedial work is reported early and acted upon quickly. The site is well cared for, is free of graffiti and the school as a whole provides a very pleasant learning environment. The school has made good progress in ensuring that students with visual impairment have access to all the buildings.

100. Resources to support learning are satisfactory. The school has invested in new information technology facilities although the ratio of students to computers is worse than the national average. This is not having an adverse impact on students' standards of attainment or their progress because efficient use is made of these resources, many of which are relatively new. There are good information technology resources in design and technology and this has led to students' standards of computer control being above the level expected. There are adequate resources for students with special educational needs.

101. The library is pleasant and welcoming and has recently been refurbished. There is a satisfactory range of texts that meet the needs of the National Curriculum and of sixth form students. There is a range of periodicals and students have access to daily newspapers. There are a number of computers located in the library and students have access to the Internet, which they use to good effect to enhance their coursework and other studies.

102. The school makes good use of resources beyond the school by organising visits relevant to aspects of the curriculum such as field trips in geography and visiting speakers in the life skills programme.

The efficiency of the school

103. The financial systems and governance of the school are good. The funding of the school in 1998/99 was well below the national average. The school received £2,078 per student compared to the national average of £2,298. The school carries out forecasts of the potential number of students on roll and produces financial forecasts and budget assumptions based upon these forecasts.

104. Financial planning in the school is good. The school manages its budget effectively and has good procedures in place to monitor and evaluate its effectiveness. The current three-year strategic plan builds upon previous developments and includes measurable targets. These targets are well supported through good financial planning. The central aim of the strategic plan is targeted towards raising students' standards of attainment and improving the learning environment. The school environment and resources to support teaching have been improved through careful financial management.

105. The governing body plays a full and active role in the financial planning and management of the school through its committee structures. There is a good working partnership between the governors and the staff through half-termly financial reports from the finance officer to the governors.

106. The school is in general an efficient organisation. Good use is made of teaching and support staff. The accommodation and available resources are used well to support learning. The school makes good use of outside resources for sixth form education through a consortium arrangement with two other local schools. The school did not receive any capital grants. The management of funds for students with special educational needs is satisfactory.

107. Financial control and daily school administration are very good. There are efficient computer-based systems in place to allow monitoring of the school's expenditure against budget. The school has well defined procedures for obtaining quotations and tenders before placing orders. The latest auditor's report gave a positive picture of the school's financial systems and the recommendations of the audit have been accepted and implemented.

108. The socioeconomic circumstances of the overall student population are broadly average, but their attainment on entry is below the level expected nationally. At ages 14 and 16, overall attainment is at the level expected of students of the same ages nationally. At the age of 19, students' performance in examinations is below that expected nationally, but attainment observed in lessons during the inspection, is in line with course expectations. Given that most students make good progress and respond positively to the education provided, and student unit costs are well below average, the school provides good value for money.

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

English

109. In the 1999 National Curriculum tests the proportion of students at the age of 14 who attained Level 5 and above was below the national average and the proportion attaining Level 6 and above was well below the national average. Girls' attainment is broadly in line with the national average for Level 5 whereas boys' attainment is well below the national average. In 1999 the proportion of students attaining Level 5 and above increased compared to 1998, whilst the proportion attaining Level 6 remained at a similar level. The average National Curriculum points score attained by students in 1999 was below the national average when compared with all schools and was well below the national average for schools with students from similar backgrounds.

110. In 1999 the proportion of students attaining GCSE grades A*-C in English was below the national average and the proportion attaining grades A*-G was in line with the national average. In English literature the proportion attaining grades A*-C was above the national average and the proportion attaining grades A*-G was in line with the national average. The trend of results has been broadly consistent for the past three years. Students' results in both subjects were not significantly different than those they obtained in most other subjects. The attainment of girls was significantly better than that of boys.

111. Results attained in English literature at GCE A level in 1999 were below expectations for the course nationally. Results were in line with those attained in recent years by the school.

112. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the ages of 14, 16 and 19 are below the level expected of students of the same ages nationally which is consistent with students' attainment in examinations. The exception is English literature, where attainment is in line with the national average. This does not represent a decline in standards but is consistent with variations in the pattern of results in recent years. Evidence gathered also confirms that the performance of girls is significantly better than that of boys.

113. By the age of 14, higher attaining students are confident speakers, who are able to participate fully in class and group discussion and to answer teachers' questions fully. Lower and middle attaining students, who are in the majority, express themselves briefly, possess limited vocabularies and are often unable to express themselves fully in response to questions. Students explore different social situations by participating in role-play in drama lessons. For example, one group of Year 9 students managed to combine their gymnastic skills with good dialogue to present themselves as a medal-winning athletic team as part of a mock television news item. By the age of 16 higher attaining students go on to be able to argue more persuasively and to challenge each other's ideas, as was seen, for example, in a Year 10 discussion on the social consequences of slavery. However, many middle and low attaining students, particularly boys, assert ideas rather than argue a case and are uncomfortable when speaking to others outside their own peer group. By the age of 19, students are willing to engage in class or group discussion but the majority lack the technical vocabulary to be able to discuss literature effectively. At all levels in the school students listen to their teachers and to other students respectfully. However, notes taken during lessons, including annotations made on literary texts by students preparing for GCSE and A level, often indicate that while simple points have been noted more complex matters have not been fully understood.

114. By the age of 14 students read novels and poems that are appropriate to their age. Higher attainers read aloud with appropriate expression and fluency. Middle attainers read with reasonable fluency and are able to refer to the context to help them establish meaning. Lower attainers, a high proportion of whom are boys, need help in pronouncing and understanding everyday words. By the age of 16 students go on to read a good range of more complex texts. The small proportion of higher attainers go on to understand the metaphorical meaning of poems by such poets as Ted Hughes or D H Lawrence. Middle and low attainers do not engage directly with what they read and their understanding is often limited to the literal meaning. There is a decline of interest in reading in Years 10 and 11, especially amongst boys. By the age of 19, students use their reading skills to study prescribed texts, and understand the salient features, but generally do not read widely enough.

115. By the age of 14, students are able to write in a variety of styles, including narrative, description and reportage. By the age of 16, most students widen their range to include, for example, convincingly argued cases regarding capital punishment and good quality comparisons between writers of detective fiction. Many students, including lower attainers, are able to improve the appearance of their work by using word processing. However, inaccuracy in spelling and punctuation and poor presentation mars the work of lower and middle attaining

students. By the age of 19 students can produce accurate summaries and display insight into characterisation, but the majority of students do not produce analytic writing of rigour or depth.

116. Students make satisfactory progress at all key stages. Students mostly cooperate with each other and with their teachers. However, girls make better progress than boys. In some classes, higher attaining students are not sufficiently challenged so as to make good progress. Students with special educational needs make unsatisfactory progress at Key Stage 3 but satisfactory progress at Key Stage 4. Individual education plans for Year 7 students are not produced until their second term in the school; when plans are produced they do not provide adequate subject-specific guidance; learning support assistance is not always provided in classes where the need is greatest. There is no significant difference in the progress of students from different ethnic backgrounds.

117. Students' attitudes are satisfactory. They are mostly attentive and work on the tasks set. Students generally treat each other and their teachers with respect and are careful with property. Behaviour is mostly satisfactory, but is occasionally inappropriate. This occurred when lessons did not include sufficient variety in the work to maintain the momentum of the lesson and when the teacher did not effectively check misbehaviour. Sixth form students are mostly conscientious but do not use their initiative to further their studies to the extent that might be expected of students of this age.

118. The quality of teaching is satisfactory at all key stages. When teaching is at its best, teachers display good subject knowledge, plan their lessons in depth, have clear objectives for the lesson and provide students with an outline of what it is intended they will learn. Teachers display good knowledge of the National Curriculum, as was seen, for example, in a Year 9 lesson when a teacher made reference to National Curriculum level descriptors in speaking and listening as a preliminary to group discussion. Expectations of students are satisfactory, variety is introduced into lessons and pace is maintained. When teaching is unsatisfactory, teachers do not sufficiently take into account the prior attainment of students, which can result in unrealistic expectations of students, insufficient challenge for higher attainers, or insufficient support and guidance for students with special educational needs. In a significant minority of lessons, teachers did not effectively check the inappropriate behaviour of some students, particularly that of some older boys. Marking is of good quality and provides students with guidance, sometimes in considerable detail, on what they need to do to improve.

119. The leadership and management of the subject is satisfactory. The attainment of students and the quality of teaching are similar to what they were at the time of the previous inspection.

Mathematics

120. In the 1999 National Curriculum tests, the proportion of students at the age of 14 attaining Level 5 and above and Level 6 and above was in line with the national averages. There was no significant difference between boys and girls. The average National Curriculum points score attained by students was in line with the national average when compared with all schools but well below average in comparison with schools with students from similar backgrounds. These results show a significant improvement on the previous years' results.

121. In 1999 the proportion of students attaining GCSE grades A*-C was below the national average; the proportion achieving grades A*-G was above the national average. Girls achieved significantly better than boys. Students' results in mathematics were not significantly different than those they obtained in most other subjects. In 1999, 10 students were entered for GCE A level mathematics and results were below national expectations. The size of the group makes any comparison with national averages unreliable.

122. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the age of 14 are at the level expected of students of the same age nationally. Number skills on entry are generally weak with a significant number of students having difficulty with simple calculations. By the age of 14 this has improved with many students able to handle numbers confidently. Higher attaining students analyse confidently a range of discrete and continuous data; they understand the need to group together large amounts of data. Middle attainers accurately identify number patterns in sequences and produce appropriate formulae to represent the patterns. Low attainers draw and analyse pictograms and bar charts. Students with special educational needs are able to round numbers to the nearest thousand but mental skills are generally weak with many students not able to recall their tables easily. Higher attainers in Year 9 can find circumferences and areas of circles. Students are developing good skills in solving problems; students in Year 9 are able to investigate problems, identify patterns and establish rules.

123. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the age of 16 are below that expected of students nationally. Lower attaining students have difficulty with the concepts of number; many lack confidence when dealing with mental calculations. The higher attaining students have difficulty recalling methods for solving simultaneous equations though they are able to apply confidently the techniques for solving

equations once this has been reviewed. In shape, space, and measures, lower attainers understand the concepts of bearings though some have difficulty in using a protractor to draw diagrams when bearings are greater than 180 degrees. Middle attainers rotate shapes accurately and use simple scale factors to enlarge shapes. Data handling skills are generally satisfactory. Higher attaining students identify lines of best fit and lower attainers calculate simple probabilities. Problem-solving skills continue to develop well. Most students can identify patterns, establish rules, make predictions and test results. Middle and higher attaining students can determine formulae with many higher attainers able to suitably extend investigations.

124. There are too few students to make a secure judgement on the attainment of students at the age of 19. However, previous examination results were below the level expected nationally. This year there are only seven students and they are on target to achieve results at GCE A level in line with course expectations. The number of students in Year 12 is much larger, at 16, and these students are attaining at levels in line with their GCSE performance. During the inspection, Year 12 students were observed being tested on their understanding of the pure mathematics and were working in line with course expectations. Most students are confident in dealing with a range of algebraic equations. They apply the concepts of dealing with functions and use surds. In mechanics, Year 13 students understand the principles of projectile motion and can apply confidently the concepts of horizontal and vertical components to projectile diagrams.

125. Students make good progress at Key Stage 3. Good teaching at this key stage leads to the good progress made and this has a significant improvement in National Curriculum test results. Students at all attainment levels including students with special educational needs make good progress. Students in the lower years are consolidating number skills for rounding and estimating. In Year 9 students are improving skills for handling data. The progress of some lower attaining classes is not as good as that of others of similar capabilities; these are taught by a non-specialist teacher. There is no significant difference in the progress of students from different ethnic backgrounds.

126. Overall, progress at Key Stage 4 is satisfactory. Higher and lower attainers, including those with special educational needs, make good progress. Higher attainers make good progress with problem-solving skills and using mathematics to support their work. Lower attainers make good progress with handling numbers in sequences and the use of angles in bearings. The progress of middle attainers, which represent the majority of students, is satisfactory. Most are consolidating knowledge and understanding though many have difficulty in recalling previous knowledge. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. Progress is good in the sixth form where students who achieved less than the highest grades at GCSE are coping well with the increased rigour of GCE A level.

127. Students' attitudes are good. Students behave well in lessons and concentration is usually maintained. Students work productively on their tasks during lessons. Relationships with each other and teachers are good. When required to work together students discuss and share ideas well. Many students appear to enjoy mathematics. They generally listen attentively and respond positively to teacher questioning. Students are encouraged to think of reasons for their answers. The presentation of work is good with clearly labelled diagrams, charts and tables. In the sixth form, students' show good structure in their answers and respond positively in classroom discussions.

128. The quality of the teaching is good at Key Stage 3 and at sixth form level and it is satisfactory at Key Stage 4. The good teaching is reflected in the good progress at Key Stage 3 and the improving levels of attainment at both key stages. Not all teachers in the sixth form were seen during the inspection due to the timetable arrangements. The teaching seen was good. All full-time teachers have good subject knowledge; they are able to explain concepts clearly. Non-specialist teachers have a secure subject knowledge for the classes they are teaching. Lessons are usually planned well with clear objectives and progression through, and between, lessons. Tasks are clearly explained and in the best lessons there is a good review of knowledge and understanding from that and previous lessons. Teachers set high expectations of students with regard to behaviour and presentation of results. In-class support is used well, support teachers are kept well informed by class teachers of the objectives of lessons. Mental activities are a regular feature of many lessons. Homework is set and marked regularly. Teachers assess students' work well although the quality of comments lacks consistency across the department; some marking requires more information on what students need to do to improve. Appropriate activities are provided to challenge and meet the needs of students, including those with special educational needs. Some of the teaching is too heavily linked to the textbooks being used which is resulting in a lack of variety in the way in which some teachers deliver different topics.

129. Leadership and management is very good. In the two years since appointment the head of department has provided a clear direction for the subject and is working hard to raise standards. A significant number of changes have been made, including a change in GCSE syllabus, new schemes of work and better arrangements for the grouping of students. These have resulted in a significant improvement in National Curriculum results in 1999

and improving GCSE examination results. The new schemes of work provide well for the progression of all students, including those with special educational needs, through the National Curriculum. Good relationships exist between members of staff who are all committed to raising standards. Good curriculum links have been established with feeder primary schools and these are beginning to have an impact on student expectation on entry. Assessment is good with very good records kept at Key Stage 3 of student progress. Opportunities are limited, however, for teachers to use computers to support learning.

130. The subject has made good progress since the previous inspection. Standards of attainment and the quality of teaching have improved.

Science

131. In the 1999 National Curriculum tests, the proportion of students at the age of 14 attaining Level 5 and above and Level 6 and above was in line with the national averages. There has been an improvement in results from those obtained in previous years. The average National Curriculum points score attained by students in 1999 was in line with the national average when compared with all schools but was below average for schools with students from similar backgrounds. Boys and girls achieve similar results.

132. In 1999, the proportion of students attaining GCSE grades A*-C in the double award science examinations was below the national average, whilst the proportion attaining grades A*-G was above the national average; girls do better than boys. These results represent a substantial improvement on the 1998 results. In GCSE biology the proportion of students attaining A* -C grades was below the national average whilst the proportion attaining A*-G grades was above the national average and girls perform higher than boys do overall. In GCSE physics the proportion of students gaining A*-C grades was below the national average, and the proportion attaining A*-G grades was above the national average; boys perform better than girls. In GCSE chemistry the proportion of students attaining grades A*-C and A*-G were below national averages; boys perform better than girls. All students in the year group are entered for a science examination and most gain a grade. There is no trend in results. Students' results in double science, physics and biology were not significantly different from those obtained in most other subjects; they were worse in chemistry than those achieved in most other subjects.

133. Group numbers in GCE A level chemistry physics and biology are small and statistical analysis is not valid, but there is an improvement on the 1998 results and 1999 results are in line with course expectations. There are measures in place to improve numbers achieving higher grades and to decrease the comparatively high numbers of unclassified grades.

134. In work seen during inspection, students' standards of attainment at the ages of 14, 16 and 19 are at the level expected of students of the same ages nationally. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the age of 16 are better than those indicated by recent examination results, this is partly because of the statistical distortion, caused by students being entered for triple sciences and thus reducing the ability range amongst students entered for the double science subject. By the age of 14, higher attaining students plan complex investigations in chemistry, linking knowledge from previous lessons to produce strategies to separate a mixture of chemicals, they choose a range of operations and achieve separations successfully, evaluating their results and discussing the theory behind the work. Middle attainers need to be prompted to recall what they have studied about light; they employ limited but correct scientific language, such as reflected and colour. Lower attainers read the names of three types of rock and some are able to remember them. By the age of 16, higher attainers show extensive knowledge of magnetic fields using correct scientific language to talk about them. Middle attainers investigate heat changes in a variety of chemical reactions, working in a diligent, safe, manner. Lower attainers have difficulty in investigating heat changes in chemical reactions; many cannot follow instructions in a textbook. By the age of 19, students have a sound grasp of scientific principles and undertake investigations with precision. They use the technical language of the subject to discuss and describe their activities.

135. Students make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 3 and good progress at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Higher attainers make very good progress in carrying out complex investigations and recording the work using tables charts and graphs. Middle attainers consolidate knowledge from previous lessons progressing to extending their knowledge by making new measurements to be able to increase their understanding in, for example, the subject of light. Most students with special needs make satisfactory progress, especially when learning support assistants are efficiently involved and deployed. However, targets for individual education plans are not always subject specific and this slows the progress of some of these students. There is no significant difference in the progress of students from different ethnic backgrounds.

136. Students' attitudes are good although a small number make an unsatisfactory response at Key Stage 4, especially boys. The large majority of students show enjoyment of well-directed, hard work. Sixth form students

show good listening skills, answering questions well. There is collaboration in working and much sharing of ideas and interpretations. When students' attitudes are less than satisfactory they fail to obey instructions, exhibiting poor self-discipline in the process.

137. The quality of teaching is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and there is good teaching overall at both Key Stage 4 and at sixth form level. Teachers have secure subject knowledge. Planning for lessons is often good and is underpinned by very good schemes of work. Good teaching is characterised by a good brisk introduction, with a clear sharing of objectives, a good pace and direction is maintained, and a variety of strategies used with positive use of praise. When teaching is less than satisfactory the pitch and challenge are not maintained at a high enough level, there are inconsistencies in the application of discipline, and the planning has insufficient detail. In general, the use of time and resources are good, making an impact on teaching. Assessment is a strength and is carried out in detail with increasing accuracy and sophistication; it is used to inform all types of planning and is regularly evaluated. There are some high challenges set for homework, and as with all work, homework is regularly marked in an informative way which students understand and value, it makes a difference to teaching and learning quality. It is regularly monitored by the head of faculty.

138. Self-assessment is used and there is regular negotiation of students' targets for progress. There is good curriculum progression, and the department is rightly proud of its primary school links, which explains why students arrive with higher National Curriculum levels than are found in other core areas. The department is very well led and managed. A clear focus is provided on raising students' attainment. Two technicians occupy two full-time roles and contribute to the high efficiency level of the department.

139. The department has made good progress since the previous report. Girls' standards of attainment have improved significantly; this was a key issue in the previous report.

OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES

Art

140. In 1999, the proportion of students attaining GCSE grades A*-C was below the national average but the proportion gaining grades A*-G was above the national average. There has been a trend of improving results over the last two years at a faster rate than nationally. Students' results in art were significantly better than those they obtained in most other subjects. All students in the sixth form who have undertaken GCE A level have achieved grades A-E in the last three years. The numbers of students taking the examination have been too small to make valid comparisons with national standards. All students following the GNVQ course have achieved at least a pass result, some with merit or distinction.

141. In work seen during the inspection, students' attainments at the ages of 14 and 16 are at the level expected of students of the same ages nationally. By the age of 19, students' standards of attainment are in line with course expectations. Observational drawing is well developed across the key stages, although recording varies widely in Key Stage 3, reflecting differences in prior attainment and experience that students have on entry to the school. A key feature of work across the school is the way in which students are encouraged to take the widest possible approach to exploring media and techniques. Divergent thinking is particularly evident in sensitive, well-executed work in the sixth form. Ceramic skills, of which few have any previous experience, are well developed as students move through the school. Good use is made of references to art of other cultures and the work of established artists. Students have a lot of fun while developing their use of colour and exploring textural effects. The way that they work together makes a significant contribution to their social development. By the time they reach the sixth form, students are able to discuss their work articulately; they understand both the technical and visual language of the subject and this is reflected in original, creative work. There is no difference in standards achieved by higher attaining boys and girls, but more girls than boys attain the national average. Changes in the schemes of work and in teaching styles, brought about in the last two years by new management in the department, are contributing to higher standards. This is seen particularly in the work of the current Year 10.

142. Students make good progress at all key stages. There is no significant difference in the progress made by students of differing attainment at Key Stage 3 except when poor behaviour by a minority of boys slows their progress and, eventually, that of others in their class. At Key Stage 4, girls make better overall progress than boys because of a more diligent approach to the development of their work. Students following the GNVQ course make considerable gains in personal development in addition to the progress they make in the practical exploration of ideas. Students with special educational needs make similar progress to others in their classes because they are well integrated and given good support by teachers. There is no significant difference in the progress of students from different ethnic backgrounds.

143. Students' attitudes are good. This is a direct result of the enthusiasm which teachers bring to their work and the standards they set. There is a good working atmosphere in the department. Students generally show a high level of interest and involvement in their work. Particularly in the sixth form, they show pride in their work and discuss it with enthusiasm. Relationships are good amongst students and with teachers. Students respect each other's views and opinions, as they show in positive critical analysis of each other's work and when working together. Independent learning is encouraged by the way students are asked to tackle their work, which is increasingly self-directed as they move up through the school.

144. The quality of teaching is good at all key stages. Teachers have a good command of their subject; shown in references to artists and cultural influences in an approach that links art and craft. This is used to good effect in planning lessons to challenge and interest students at all levels of attainment. Teachers provide a high level of support and effective demonstrations to help students succeed and build self-esteem. Homework is used well in planning, research and development of work. Day-to-day assessment is effective in promoting progress through positive feedback that tells students what they need to do to improve. Occasionally, when standards of behaviour are accepted which are below those usually set, progress is affected. When this happens, the individual support that is a key feature in raising standards leads to students who are not directly supervised working slowly.

145. The department is very well led and managed. The department makes a significant contribution to the school's wider aims by its very good provision for students' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development.

146. Since the previous inspection, management has improved and standards at GCSE have risen.

Design and technology

147. In 1999, the proportions of students attaining GCSE grades A*-C and grades A*-G were above the national averages in design and technology based subjects. Results in GCSE textiles and graphic products were well above the national averages. Students' results in design and technology were significantly better than those they obtained in most other subjects. The results in design and technology have been consistently above the national average since the previous inspection. The 1999 GCE A level results were well above the national average with nearly three times as many students achieving a grade A or B although this is based on a relatively small number of students.

148. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the ages of 14 and 16 are above the level expected of students of the same ages nationally. However, girls achieve significantly better standards than boys because they are better at organising their work. By the age of 14, students have a good knowledge and understanding of systems and control. Higher attainers produce a program to control the sequence of disco lights to flash in a predetermined sequence. They understand how the computer can process input information to affect external events through a series of electronic switches to which it is connected. Students use external resources to aid their design work. They make choices from a range of design proposals and make suggestions for improvement. Most students can measure, mark out and cut shapes in a range of materials. By the age of 16, most students have a good understanding of the design and make process. They research their ideas using the Internet and propose realistic ideas for discussion. In a Year 11 class, when designing and making a meal, they analyse the success of their project and compare the results to their design specifications. They can identify the good points and weaknesses in the process and propose workable modifications. In a Year 11 graphics class, students used modelling techniques effectively to trial their designs.

149. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the age of 19 are above course expectations. Students produce detailed design proposals and discuss these using the technical vocabulary of the subject. They refine their ideas, realising the needs of customers and of manufacturers. Presentation skills are of a very high standard and are used to good effect in present GCE A level portfolios.

150. The students' standards of literacy are developed well through the use of appropriate technical language. Information technology is used effectively for the presentation of students' graphical and written work. Skills in numeracy are developed particularly well in graphical communications.

151. Students make good progress at all key stages. This is a consequence of the teachers' high expectations and a very good scheme of work that ensures a rich and stimulating education of very high quality. Over Key Stage 3, students develop their practical skills and develop their understanding of the design and make process. Good progress is made with the development of graphical skills. In Year 7 students make very good progress when they successfully meet the challenge of designing and making a decorative indoor mobile from aluminium sheet complete with wire, cord, assembly instructions and packaging. During Key Stage 4, students refine their practical skills and this results in good quality project work. Students use a wider range of tools and equipment. They make good progress in the development of their thinking to turn creative ideas into plans and specifications

for a product. In the sixth form, students develop their graphics skills still further and use these to compare designs for different commercial products such as computers. Students with special educational needs also make good progress. This is because they receive good support and individual attention from their teachers when engaged on individual tasks. There is no significant difference in the progress of students from different ethnic backgrounds.

152. Students' attitudes are very good. In all lessons students have a very positive attitude to their work. Many are enthusiastic and they clearly enjoy their studies. They take pride in the quality of their practical and written work. In all classes students cooperate, sharing and using equipment sensibly and safely. They are keen to demonstrate and explain the things they have made.

153. The quality of teaching is good at all key stages. All teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects; this is particularly the case at Key Stage 4 when teachers use their knowledge of the examination syllabus to ensure that students attain good standards. Teachers set high expectations for both learning and behaviour to which their students readily respond. The teachers know their students well and match the work to the needs of the students. They support and encourage students enabling them to experience success. Homework is set on a regular basis and is always relevant to the topic being covered. Teachers plan their lessons well and convey clearly the aims and objectives for the lesson. Planning builds on previous work and links well with the schemes of work. Demonstrations are skilful and enable all students to focus on a particular aspect of the subject. Teachers use praise effectively to encourage students and to move students forward with their studies. Teachers are always available to enable students to carry on with practical assignments during lunchtimes and after school. A programme of visits enables students to gain knowledge of industrial practise and to extend their studies.

154. The teaching and non-teaching staff work very well as a team to ensure continuity in students' learning. Procedures for assessing students' work are good. Students' attainment is carefully monitored and recorded as they progress through the school. Regular assessment is enabling students to be appropriately challenged.

155. An experienced, knowledgeable and enthusiastic leader manages the faculty to a very good standard. These standards are also reflected in the leadership of the separate subjects and aspects. The one part-time technician makes a very valuable contribution to the smooth running of the faculty. However there is an insufficient number of technicians and this lack of support imposes restraints on the teachers' time to further develop the curriculum, for example in electronics, and to enhance the learning environment. Support is particularly inadequate for textiles and food technology.

156. Since the previous inspection the department has been successful in maintaining high standards and good quality teaching.

Geography

157. In 1999, the proportions of students attaining GCSE grades A*-C and grades A*-G were above the national average. Girls' attainment was significantly higher than the boys', particularly at the higher grades A* and A. Students' results in geography were significantly better than those they obtained in most other subjects. The results show a rising trend of achievement over the last four years at grades A* -C. The 1999 GCE A level results were below the national average points score but higher than the predicted grades. Girls attained higher than boys, continuing the pattern set in 1998, but the overall attainment shows a significant decline over the 1998 results.

158. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the age of 14 are at the level expected of students of the same age nationally. Students acquire a range of skills, accurately use maps to plot information, and draw graphs to show climate and population patterns. Most students have knowledge of the earth's structure and the nature of earthquakes. Higher attaining students understand the processes that result in tectonic activity. Lower attaining students, including some with special educational needs, use and extract information about Japan and describe features, but attainment is reduced by weaknesses in comprehension and grammatical accuracy. A significant minority, both boys and girls, are insecure in their knowledge of the location of major places studied, some find difficulty in recalling terms and processes involved in earthquake activity.

159. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the age of 16 are at the level expected of students of the same age nationally. They make good use of the atlas for place location and data research, read maps of different scales and use a range of resources, including computers, to obtain information for projects such as on Japan. Higher attaining students, girls more so than boys, extract information from text to understand links between water table levels and human activity in contrasting regions and write well-ordered notes with attention to grammatical accuracy. Many lower attaining students, however, find difficulty in

understanding less common words and written explanations lack detail. Oral responses in class discussions are often short and undeveloped.

160. Students' standards of attainment at the age of 19 are in line with the course expectations. They are competent in observation and recording fieldwork data. All are able to undertake research independently, accurately test hypotheses and represent findings in a variety of ways. Most write well-ordered notes, and undertake mathematical calculations in developing assignments, but essays give insufficient attention to analysis and work lacks appropriate reference to places.

161. Students make good progress at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 3, students extend their knowledge of contrasting regions of the world. They are increasingly aware of the global differences in economic development and the need for interdependence of countries. Higher attaining students learn to recognise links between the physical and human environments in studies of Japan, whilst students with special educational needs succeed in researching information given close learning support. In lower attaining groups, girls sustain concentration more than boys and make more progress. At Key Stage 4, higher attaining students, girls in particular, develop research skills through a range of resources. Lower attaining students use photographic evidence to identify advantages and disadvantages of high-rise accommodation, but continuing weakness in grammatical accuracy reduces progress. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. Sixth form students make good progress. The majority improve understanding of ecosystems and the importance of human action in its management, and apply theoretical concepts through reference case studies. Less progress occurs when analysis and application to places in essays do not significantly improve over time. There is no significant difference in the progress of students from different ethnic backgrounds.

162. Students' attitudes are satisfactory. Most students are well behaved and cooperate with teachers. Many show enthusiasm for practical activities and research and the majority, more so higher attaining students, present work neatly. A minority of students however, often leave work incomplete and its presentation is marred by untidy crossings out. Some students show confidence and are willing to participate in class discussion, but many are reluctant to do so and remain passive. Sixth form students show a mature and responsible attitude to their studies and increasingly accept responsibility for their own learning.

163. The quality of teaching at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 is good and it is good in the sixth form. At Key Stage 3 lessons have clear aims that are shared with and understood by students. Book resources complemented by the use of computers, film and worksheets are successful in stimulating interest and supporting progress. Class control is good and lessons proceed smoothly. On some occasions however, planning is not fully effective and lessons end without reinforcement of the main learning outcomes. Strategies to meet the needs of students of different attainment are not fully effective. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced and this impacts well on progress. Students' work is supportively marked with comments on how to improve content and grammatical accuracy. Oral work is less effective in many lessons, resulting in teachers imparting knowledge to the neglect of encouraging students to express ideas and show understanding of issues. Teachers guide students in the sixth form to be increasingly self-reliant in research and provide opportunities for practical experience through fieldwork, but students do not show depth of understanding in class discussion.

164. The schemes of work are helpful and informative to teachers in planning lessons but do not show intentions for the teaching of broader curricular issues and how their contribution is to be evaluated. Some teachers identify subject targets for students with special educational needs but this is inconsistently developed. National Curriculum levels are reported to parents at the end of Key Stage 3 but this is not yet extended throughout the key stage to help inform parents on students' attainment and progress. Opportunities for promoting students' moral and cultural understanding are present but students' spiritual development is not well developed. Leadership is good and there is effective communication and support to colleagues. Teaching and students' work is systematically monitored. The development plan is detailed but the mechanisms for measuring its success are insufficiently clear.

165. Since the last inspection there has been a significant improvement in the GCSE A*-C grades. GCE A level results have deteriorated but attainment at Key Stage 3 is consistent with that previously reported. The weakness in developing opportunities for students to undertake enquiry study has been successfully addressed. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection.

History

166. In 1999, the proportion of students attaining GCSE grades A*-C was well below the national average, but was in line at grades A*-G. Girls attained significantly higher than boys. Students' results in history were not significantly different than those they obtained in most other subjects. The GCSE A*-C grades have been

broadly consistent over the previous three years, with few students attaining A* and A grades. In the 1999 GCE A level examination, students average points score was higher than the national average, as was attainment at the high A and B grades. With few boys in the 1999 entry, gender comparisons are inappropriate, but girls attained higher than boys did in 1998. There has been a progressive improvement in results over the last three years.

167. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the age of 14 are at the level expected of students of the same age nationally. They observe and record information about past civilisations through studies of historical artefacts, though a minority find difficulty in recall of knowledge about recent visits to the Roman sites of Wall and Wroxeter. Most have a sense of chronology and are able to draw time lines and place events sequentially. Students understand the nature and significance of evidence sources, but frequently there is limited evaluation of the evidence available. They know about 1914-18 trench warfare and many can write simulated letters to empathise with soldiers' lives at the time.

168. Students' standards of attainment at the age of 16 are below that expected for students of the same age nationally. Many students are competent in handling different types of evidence and higher attaining students able to offer interpretation. Students know about developments in medicine in the Middle Ages and of the circumstances leading to the rise of Nazism in Germany but oral and written accounts of many students are weakly developed. The attainment of many students is reduced by weaknesses in literacy, particularly in expression and grammatical accuracy.

169. Students' standards of attainment at the age of 19 are above course expectations. Students acquire depth of knowledge of topics studied such as German problems after 1918. They use evidence sources well to justify explanations and have a good understanding of the reasons for political developments and change. Most have acquired sound note taking skills and can write well organised, re-drafted essays but in many instances there is insufficient development in interpretation and evidence is not fully analysed.

170. Students make good progress at Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. At Key Stage 3 students make gains in firsthand knowledge of historical sites and learn to appreciate life of past societies. They improve their chronological understanding in drawing time lines of the Roman occupation of Britain and develop research skills through books and information technology. Good progress is evident in Year 8 when students are given opportunity to work cooperatively in researching information about the Spanish Armada. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress when learning support is available but make slower progress on other occasions. Progress is slow when a minority fail to sustain their concentration, whilst others spend time on unchallenging tasks and work at a leisurely pace. Lower attaining boys at Key Stage 4 benefit from individual support available in small classes and make good progress in learning about changing attitudes to medicine in the Middle Ages. Students improve their understanding of the issues facing the Weimar republic after World War I, with higher attaining students, mostly girls, writing well structured, reasoned accounts. The written work of some average and lower attaining students is underdeveloped and poor spelling hinders the progress of a minority, mainly boys. Students with special educational need benefit from additional in-class support but their contribution in oral work is weak, these students make satisfactory progress. Sixth form students make gains as independent learners. They improve research skills, select and use information to make judgements, whilst higher attaining students skilfully incorporate evidence sources in developing and supporting argument and conclusions. A minority of students however, lack confidence in oral work and in some essays there is insufficient analysis. There is no significant difference in the progress of students from different ethnic backgrounds.

171. Students' attitudes are good. The majority are well behaved and cooperate with teachers. This is evident in Key Stage 3 when students listen carefully to explanations and concentrate on the tasks set for them. Many students however, show a reluctance to participate in class discussion. This is sometimes due to a lack of self-confidence and at times to insufficient interest in the lesson. Good response is evident at Key Stage 4 when students engage in discussion and subsequently concentrate on completing individual tasks. Work is usually carefully presented, except for some lower attaining students whose work is sometimes untidy and left incomplete. Sixth form students have a mature approach to their studies. They show responsibility for their own learning and enjoy good relationships with teachers and fellow students.

172. The quality of teaching at Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is good. At Key Stage 3, teachers are appropriately qualified and have considerable teaching experience which makes a significant impact on the good progress that most students make. Effective use is made of a variety of resources, including good quality texts and out of school resources that are successful in stimulating interest in the subject. Class control and discipline is mostly effective, except occasionally when noise levels are high and students are not kept fully engaged on task. Most work is satisfactorily marked according to agreed policy. At Key Stage 4, lessons have clear aims and are structured to provide a variety of activity and set challenges for students. Very effective use of video presentations combined with skilful questioning enabled very good progress to be made in students'

understanding of Hitler's rise to power. Marking is mostly good but some marking is too reliant on ticks without comment as to how to improve. Some lessons have appropriate strategies to meet the needs of students of different attainment but this is not fully satisfactory in all lessons and some higher attaining students in middle ability groups are under-challenged. There is good expertise to meet the needs of sixth form students. Lessons are well structured and set appropriate challenges, particularly through presentations and class discussions. Work is assessed and informs students on strengths and weaknesses and how they can improve.

173. The schemes of work are informative but do not consistently show what is to be learnt or how the needs of students of different attainment will be met. History's contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural is not clearly identified in planning and the use of information technology is insufficiently bedded into curricular practice. There is good practice for the assessment of students' performance and this is appropriately being further developed to incorporate student self-assessment. The recently appointed head of department has made a good start in reviewing the work of the department. The development plan is a comprehensive document but the priorities for development are insufficiently clear and the evaluation criteria are too generalised. The longer term planning is not identified. Staffing provision is very good and makes an impact on the good standards prevailing and the comprehensive range of resources makes a positive contribution to learning.

174. Since the last inspection attainment at Key Stage 3 has been maintained in line with the national expectation; it is below at Key Stage 4 but above the GCE A level course expectations in the sixth form. Students continue to make good progress at each key stage, and the good standards of teaching previously reported are being maintained.

Information technology

175. In 1999, the proportions of students attaining GCSE grades A*-C and grades A*-G were above the national averages. The results have been consistently above the national average over the past three years. Students' results in information technology, compared to their achievements in other subjects, were significantly better than those obtained in most other subjects. By the end of Key Stage 4, the majority of students not taking a GCSE examination successfully gain a nationally recognised qualification in computer literacy and information technology. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys when compared to that of girls in this subject. In the 1999 GCE A level results in computing all four students achieved grades in the range C-E. This number of students is too small to compare their results with national averages. There are now much larger numbers of students studying both computing and information technology at GCE A level.

176. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the ages of 14, 16 and 19 are above the level expected of students of the same age nationally. Throughout the school, standards of work are very good in communicating and handling information and in using information technology to control, measure and model. By the age of 14 students use a fully featured word processor with confidence and they are familiar with the range of menus and options needed to produce quality presentations. In science, students know how a computer can collect data from experiments directly through sensors and can plot graphs from these investigations. In design and technology, students write and test procedures to enable a computer to control in sequence the operation of devices such as lights and electric motors. They use a spreadsheet to model different scenarios of a school ski trip, for example, the cost implications should some students not go. By the age of 16, students have good computer-aided design skills and know about computer-aided manufacture. Students of all ages make effective use of the desktop publishing application to enhance the presentation of their work. Most students use the Internet with confidence and use it to carry out research in a number of subjects.

177. Students make good progress at all key stages. They quickly gain confidence and improve their keyboard skills. Good links with local primary schools ensure that students in Year 7 make a good start when they arrive at the school. Good progress is made when students use information technology in other subjects of the curriculum, for example, in a Year 9 geography class, when they use the Internet to carry out independent research for a project about Japan. In a similar way good progress is made when students use applications to support their learning in mathematics. Students with special educational needs make good progress when using information technology to develop their skills in literacy and numeracy. This good progress is facilitated by the provision of an application that provides individualised computer assisted learning. This enables students to work towards their own personalised learning targets. There is no significant difference in the progress of students from different ethnic backgrounds.

178. Students' attitudes are good. Many students enjoy this subject and they work for long periods of time, sustaining their concentration on the task set for them. They are confident in their skills and they are prepared to explore new ideas and work creatively. Their motivation enables them to work on their own when required to do so. They take advantage of opportunities to use the computers to carry on with their work during lunchtimes and

after school. A learning resource centre provides additional access to computers and there are computer and Internet clubs.

179. The quality of teaching is good at all key stages. The teachers have good subject knowledge relevant to the age range of the students. The students are given a clear understanding of what they are to do and what is expected of them. In a Year 8 lesson, students were given specific instruction by the teacher on how to use the menu system and how to edit text. Appropriate and challenging work is set. In a Year 12 lesson, students were presented with opportunity to participate in a lively debate on banking and shopping using the Internet. High expectations leads to the good progress made by students when using applications for controlling and modelling. The students are generally well supported when they require help and most lessons proceed at a good pace. In a Year 8 lesson on word processing, a good pace was maintained because students' concentration was sustained by focused tasks and a range of activities. Teachers use praise appropriately to encourage students to achieve their best.

180. The curriculum is very well planned to ensure continuity as the students progress through the school. Many students benefit from the good access to the Internet. This helps them to improve their skills through the exploration of many special educational facilities available on the Internet. There is good provision for all staff to update their skills in information technology. A group of teachers representing many of the subjects of the curriculum meet regularly to monitor the development of information technology and to exchange ideas to improve teaching and learning.

181. Assessment based on National Curriculum levels of attainment is carried out regularly and to a good standard. Standards are monitored as students progress through the school allowing adjustments to be made to meet their learning needs. An experienced and knowledgeable coordinator manages the development of the department very effectively. Two full-time technicians make a valued contribution by keeping the network of computers running to maximise their use.

182. The subject has made good progress since the previous inspection. Facilities have improved and standards are now above the level expected. The quality of teaching has improved and this is one reason for the improvement in students' standards of attainment.

Modern languages

183. In 1999, the proportion of students attaining GCSE grades A*-C was well below the national averages in French and German. The French results showed a slight improvement over the previous year's results. The German results dropped substantially, but this was the result of the entry policy rather than students' actual attainment; this trend was not reflected in the work seen during the inspection. The proportion of students attaining grades A*-G was above the national average in French and in line in German. Students obtained better results in all their other subjects than in languages. In the GCE A level examination all the candidates in each language gained a grade; because of the small number involved, statistical analysis and comparison with national averages are not valid.

184. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at age 14 in French and German are below the level expected of students of the same age nationally. However, there is limited time allocation in Year 7 for one language and all students learn a second language in Year 8, which dilutes the impact of the first language. Students' understanding of the foreign language is generally good. Much of this is due to the good use made by teachers of the foreign language in the classroom. Two of the teachers are native speakers, so that students have good models for developing their pronunciation; in other lessons teachers use tongue twisters and chorus work to help students in this aspect. Oracy skills are less well developed, but there has been an improvement since the last inspection. Higher attainers in French in Year 8 speak well, taking part in a station role-play, asking for and giving information about train timetables, they speak from memory and use the 24 hour clock. Higher attainers in Year 9 German speak from memory in a simulated telephone conversation of 4 to 5 exchanges, giving opinions and using the future tense. In written work in French and German, Year 9 students write using the perfect tense, although accuracy varies considerably, particularly with accents in French. Generally, however, writing is restricted to word lists and exercises.

185. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the age of 16 in French and German are below the level expected of students of the same age nationally. Understanding of the spoken word is usually good. This was noticeable in a Year 10 French class of middle to lower attainers, in which students performed better in the aural test than the reading test. In oral work, however, students are generally too reliant on prompt sheets to assist them, instead of reliance on memory. They find it difficult to perform without the text in front of them. This also applies to written tasks. Retention of past work is a problem for many students, so that worksheets devised by teachers are used to support them with past work, rather than to help them move forward

more quickly. Most students have a working knowledge of the basic topic vocabulary at all levels, but in many cases the inability to apply grammatical structures correctly leads to inaccuracies. Higher and middle attainers use different tenses, but not always with consistent accuracy. Written work by lower attainers usually communicates, but they find difficulty applying the rules, for instance, with the correct case in German or adjectival endings in French.

186. Students' progress at both Key Stages 3 and 4 is satisfactory. There are gains in knowledge, as in Year 7 French when new numbers were introduced, or in the German lesson with colours. By the end of the lesson, students were describing the colour of their classroom items in complete sentences from memory. A Year 8 French class of lower attainers learnt the names of members of the family and used this knowledge to play family dominoes. Students develop their oracy skills in role-play situations with partners. Higher attainers in Year 9 German are making good progress in speaking. Higher attainers in French in Year 9 have made good progress over time in writing. One Year 9 German set, however, had made little progress in developing writing skills this term. At Key Stage 4 students consolidate the work required for each module, although recall of past work inhibits the pace of progress for some average to lower attainers in both languages. Students develop their oral skills in pair work with question and answer sessions in preparation for their presentation on tape. One cassette produced in a Year 11 German lesson during inspection week showed good knowledge of topic vocabulary and an accurate use of structures. In a Year 10 class of average attainers, mainly boys, students spoke more French than they realised because of the teacher's good planning of appropriate strategies. Higher attainers consolidate their knowledge of different tenses. However, in one Year 11 French class, progress for several students, mainly boys, was slow owing to lack of motivation. Continuity and progress for some students are impeded by absence, which is particularly significant for a modular course. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. Teachers are aware of their needs and have appropriate targets for them on their individual plans. In a small set of lower attainers with special needs students in Year 8 French, all students showed good understanding of the spoken word and made good progress in developing recently-learnt weather phrases to present the weather forecast with flash cards to the class on a map of France. They spoke confidently and their pronunciation was good. There is no significant difference in the progress of students from different ethnic backgrounds.

187. Students' attitudes are good. Students are well behaved and attentive. They listen well to cassettes and to the teacher. They work well together in pairs or independently. At Key Stage 3 they enjoy the games, competitions and songs. Students work well in the language laboratory and in the information technology room. Concentration is usually well maintained for the whole 60-minute lesson. A Year 10 class was kept well on task by chorus work and working together in small groups. Some demotivation among a small number of boys in Year 11 was apparent during one French lesson, but one class of lower attainers worked well under controlled conditions at a German assessment writing task. Presentation of written work is generally sound, but there is room for improvement in some instances. Most students do not complete corrections to their written work.

188. The quality of teaching is satisfactory at both Key Stages 3 and 4. Teachers have sound subject knowledge, and two of them are native speakers. Teachers work very hard with their groups and make good use of the foreign language in most lessons. Lessons are well prepared and well planned. They usually include a variety of activities and of skills; many lessons provide good opportunities for students to hear and to speak French or German. Insufficient emphasis is placed on students to memorise their work. Pair or group work is used well, but there are also opportunities for students to work independently. Expectations are generally high. Good use is made of time and resources, although lessons do not always benefit from a visual element, as from flash cards or the use of the overhead projector. Tasks are appropriate, and students are prepared well for their modules in Key Stage 4. Homework is set regularly. Written work is marked, often including grades, targets and levels, but it is not yet fully consistent across the department. Teachers do not always ensure that students complete corrections.

189. The leadership and management of the department is good, and the head of department provides clear guidance and direction for the department. The head of department monitors the teaching; the department was reviewed last year by senior management, to which there was a positive response. The line manager provides good support for the department. Since September three of the five teachers now teach in excellent accommodation which is a stimulating learning environment. This accommodation also includes a language laboratory, which is of great benefit to the department. The limited time allocation for languages within the curriculum is one reason for attainment being below the level expected by the age of 14 in this subject.

190. Changes since the last inspection have been good. The accommodation has improved. Staffing has become stable. The use of the foreign language in the classroom, the use of time and the development of oracy have all improved. The use of the foreign language in the classroom is now nearly consistent across the department. There is still room for improvement in oracy. The use of information technology is being developed with good support. The department has the capacity to improve.

Music

191. In 1999, the proportions of students attaining GCSE grades A*-C, and A*-G, were far above the national averages. Students' results in music were significantly better than those they obtained in most other subjects. At GCE A level, the number of students attaining A and B grades, and A-E grades was well above the national average.

192. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the age of 14 are at the level expected of students of the same age nationally. Students critically appraise their own, and other students' work, identifying styles and form and using an appropriate vocabulary. They compose using harmony and a variety of resources appropriately. In their classroom performances they use an appropriate range of instruments with confidence and control. However, they do not use an appropriate range of information technology to create, record and store sounds.

193. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the age of 16 are well above the level expected of students of the same age nationally. However, these levels of attainment are influenced by variable cohorts and levels of instrumental competence and are greatly supported by work of peripatetic teachers and extracurricular work, as is attainment in the sixth form. Students have a good knowledge of all the major periods of music and also popular styles and compare and contrast these periods using an appropriate musical vocabulary. Most compose in a wide range of styles using various resources including appropriate information technology. They perform on their selected instruments, interpreting mood and style through an expressive use of phrase and dynamic colouring. However, lower attainers describe music, but do not use a full and appropriate musical vocabulary and their compositions are based on simple harmonic structures, but these students are less successful in transcribing their ideas into staff notation.

194. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the age of 19 are in line with course expectations, although the numbers are too small and cohorts variable, to make accurate statistical comparisons. Students compose using a wide variety of instrumentation, musical devices and extended forms. Their historical knowledge covers all the major periods and they make clear and accurate comparisons between music and its social and historical contexts, using a very wide range of appropriate vocabulary. They analyse passages of music and transcribe two-part dictation. On their chosen instruments they perform with confidence and control.

195. Throughout the key stages, music encourages students to write extended answers to questions. They use discussion as a regular tool for assessment and to evaluate and appraise their own and the work of their peers. Vocabulary and spelling are checked and corrected and they cover basic numeracy throughout the key stages. They are introduced to number and basic division through rhythm exercises and these concepts are developed throughout the department. There are no significant variations in attainment between boys and girls.

196. Students make good progress at Key Stage 3 and throughout the sixth form and very good progress at Key Stage 4. Students make gains in performance skills on classroom instruments and vocally in Key Stage 3 and on their chosen specialist instruments at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. They develop and consolidate skills and understanding in the use of written notation and its relationship to performed sound. They acquire composing and appraisal skills in Key Stage 3 that are then consolidated and developed by those students taking GCSE and GCE A level. Students with special educational needs make excellent progress at Key Stage 4 because of the well-planned tasks and the excellent support provided by the teachers. There is no significant difference in the progress made by boys and girls or in the progress of students from different ethnic backgrounds.

197. Students' attitudes are good and they are very good at Key Stage 4. In Key Stage 3 students are keen to answer questions and to perform in class and their behaviour is never less than good. Although concentration is generally good there are some lapses amongst a small number of boys. Throughout, there are positive relationships between students, and between students and teaching staff and this leads to good levels of collaborative work. Students in Key Stage 4 show high levels of interest and motivation and very high levels of concentration. There are also very high levels of perseverance and excellent relationships between students and students and staff that lead to a very positive working environment. Sixth form students have very good levels of concentration, articulating answers with confidence, both orally and written. They work with interest and enjoyment and there are good levels of collaboration leading to a good working relationship.

198. The quality of teaching is good at Key Stage 3 and at sixth form level and it is very good at Key Stage 4. Characteristics of this good and very good teaching are a considerable understanding of the subject with the use of appropriate examples and clear explanations and demonstrations. Teachers make effective use of question and

answer to inform teaching and assessment and to encourage independence of learning. They have high expectations of students and very clear objectives and targets. Lessons are well planned to challenge all students. Lessons are conducted at a good pace with tasks which are interrelated. Very good use is made of praise and encouragement to involve and challenge all students. All students' work is marked and with comments pertinent to learning and the marking criteria clearly stated; students are encouraged to assess their own work. However, there is inconsistent use of manuscript books at Key Stage 3 and time is wasted drawing staves. Student books are not carried over year groups in Key Stage 3, leading to missed opportunities for consolidation, and moderation of individual examples of teacher-assessed levels are not maintained by the staff. Individual education plans for students identified with special education needs do not have subject-specific targets.

199. The curriculum is balanced in its content and is broadly based covering all requirements of the National Curriculum at Key Stage 3 except that there is no provision included to fully deliver the use of information technology. Students with special education needs are effectively catered for within the department although there is no specific in-class support for these students and all work is matched to their needs either through presentation or outcome. The standard of assessment within the department is very good. Students' prior attainment is assessed upon entry. Assessments are accurate and supported by taped examples, but individual level descriptor exemplars are not kept to facilitate moderation. There is very good leadership and management of the subject, with the head of department providing a very clear educational direction for the subject.

200. The department has made good progress since the last inspection. The previous inspection report described attainment as average, it is now far above at GCSE and well above at GCE A level. The quality of learning was good; response is now good at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form and is very good in Key Stage 4. Teaching was described as generally sound or better, it is now good and at Key Stage 4 it is very good.

Physical education

201. In 1999, the proportion of students attaining GCSE grades A*-C was above the national average. All candidates gained a pass grade and in this respect too, they were above the national average. Students' results in physical education were significantly better than those they obtained in most other subjects. The results of boys and girls were in line with each other. In the sixth form, seven candidates, taught as part of a consortium of three schools taking the course, obtained pass grades in the GCE A level examination 1999, all at grade E.

202. In the work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the age of 14 are above the level expected of students of the same age nationally. For example, students in a Year 9 class demonstrated good individual skills in a soccer lesson. These skills were then used very effectively in a competitive game and students showed a higher than average appreciation of the principle of using width in their play when attacking in order to breach a defence.

203. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the age of 16 are above the level expected of students of the same age nationally. The GCSE files of work of students in Year 11 are well organised and indicate that the students are meeting course requirements and showing above average levels of attainment. Their work is neatly presented and demonstrates a good mix of completed worksheets and the students' own work. They show good levels of understanding across a variety of topics. For example, in considering principles that govern effective training techniques in sport, students draw upon their own experience to illustrate the difference between aerobic and anaerobic demands in exercise, and they show good levels of understanding.

204. Students in the sixth form studying on the GCE A level course attain standards in line with course expectations. Their written work shows good understanding of the course content across a variety of topics of a very different nature, from history to science. The written work of Year 13 students is comprehensive, well presented and the higher attainers in particular, show a good level of insight into different aspects of the syllabus. For example, a Year 13 class was able to distinguish accurately between aggressive and assertive behaviour in a sport of their choice when studying the phenomenon of aggression in different games and activities.

205. Students make good progress through Key Stage 3. Higher attainers make good progress in all three areas of planning, performing and evaluating the variety of activities they study, but middle and lower attainers are weaker in their ability to evaluate their own performance or that of their classmates against criteria that are most appropriate for the activity. For example in a Year 9 rugby lesson, all were able to undertake the activities and make good progress in their practical performance while higher attainers could analyse where play was breaking down and correct the mistakes. In a Year 8 gymnastics lesson, students of all levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs, made good progress. At Key Stage 4, students make good progress. For example in a Year 10 mixed badminton lesson, both girls and boys were able to consider how a newly acquired shot could be used to outwit an opponent. GCSE students make good progress in the knowledge and

understanding that they build up about the study of sport. They are able to take on diverse topics like the study of body types or the chemistry of different energy systems and apply them well to their own sporting experiences. A minority of higher attaining students make very good progress and lower attainers make good progress in relation to their prior attainment. Across the age ranges, there are no significant differences made in progress between the boys and the girls. In all lessons throughout the age range, students with special educational needs are well integrated and make progress in line with other students. Teachers know their students well and normally modify their methods to match the needs of these students. However, more formal planning and matching of tasks is needed to ensure that progress made by these students is consistent. There is no significant difference in the progress of students from different ethnic backgrounds.

206. In the sixth form, students are making satisfactory progress in their studies. Their files of work are impressive in terms of the volume of work produced and the care taken in presenting their notes. A number of students undertake the course having attained lower grades at GCSE. Many of these students find it difficult to make the change to a course of advanced study where the assessment is heavily weighted to their theoretical work as opposed to their GCSE course which was weighted to the assessment of practical work. As a result, while all students have earned a grade in the past two years, none have earned the higher grades A or B.

207. Students' attitudes are good. Behaviour in lessons is very good. They generally work hard and maintain their efforts and concentration and persevere to produce their best efforts. All the staff are careful to maintain high expectations in this regard and they are rewarded by students who take responsibility for their own behaviour and generally take a pride in their work. The responses of students in lessons are good, they enjoy their lessons and are interested and keen to impress and do well. Relationships are good even in the very competitive situations in which they find themselves during games. They work well in pairs and groups. When challenged directly by their teachers to produce their best efforts, there is a positive response. For example in a Year 8 gymnastics lesson, students of all levels of attainment worked hard to improve the quality of their movement, some at a very basic skill level while others worked at complex movement sequences. Lessons are characterised by the way that students continue to work effectively outside the immediate and direct control of the teacher, and when given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning they respond very positively.

208. The quality of teaching is good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and satisfactory at sixth form level. Teachers are confident in their subject knowledge and prepare their lessons carefully. They mostly organise effective lessons where good quality learning takes place and students make good progress. On occasion, lessons lack pace where teachers do not give enough attention to making the transition between different activities smooth enough. For example in a Year 10 hockey lesson, students spent too long watching as demonstrations were set up and taught rather than observing a correct demonstration that had already been established. The teachers have high expectations of the efforts and behaviour of their students. As a result, behaviour is always good and often very good and students respond to the impact of good teaching by producing their best efforts. This was very well demonstrated in a Year 8 netball lesson where students watched carefully and listened attentively. As a result, they were able to plan their own practice and could analyse why a particular strategy was not working in the full game situation. In most lessons teachers match their methods closely to the needs of the students. They use question and answer sessions effectively to establish the levels of understanding and to modify their teaching. For example in a Year 8 gymnastics lesson, the first in a unit, the teacher departed quite radically from the planned lesson in responding to the particular needs of that class. As a result, the teaching was entirely appropriate and the students made good progress. Teachers need to plan more formally the different levels of tasks to match the needs of the students in their classes. There are occasions where the progress slows as all students perform the same tasks for the same amount of time. The individual education plans produced for students with special educational needs are too general to be really effective and the teaching does not address sufficiently closely the matching of tasks to the needs of particular groups of students in any one class.

209. Leadership and management is good and there is a high level of commitment to good standards in the department. The department has responded positively to the last inspection report. Standards have improved at Key Stages 3 and 4 and teaching has improved through the closer monitoring that takes place. The GCSE course is now well established and above average results are obtained. The GCE A level course is popular and students are attaining standards in line with course expectations.

Religious education

210. In 1999, the proportion of students attaining GCSE grades A*-C was well below the national average. The proportion achieving A*-G was above the national average. Boys and girls achieve similar results. There is no significant trend over the last three years although results have risen this year. Students' results in religious education were not significantly different than those they obtained in most other subjects. In 1998, four students were entered for GCSE A level religious studies and results were well below national averages. In 1999 results were still below national expectations, however because of the small numbers of students involved comparison

with national averages is not statistically valid. The proportion of students achieving grades A-E has risen over the last two years.

211. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the age of 14 are at the level expected in the agreed syllabus. Students can identify key events in the Christian calendar and link them to the life of Jesus. They can empathise with people from the past as seen in their work on Pentecost in Year 8. They recognise some of the characteristics of the faiths studied and the symbolism associated with the ritual that surrounds them, for example in preparation for prayer in Islam. Students discuss contemporary issues such as capital punishment in Year 9 and recognise that there may be different valid viewpoints.

212. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment at the age of 16 in the non-examination course are below national expectations. This is due in part to the restricted time allocation that reduces the opportunity to develop an understanding of religious teachings in relation to contemporary issues. The six-month gap between the two modules reduces the impact of earlier study and the consolidation of work covered in earlier years. Students investigate places of worship and consider the role of the church today. They consider the teachings of Christianity and can relate these teachings to problems in society, for example, prejudice. There are too few students taking the GCE A level course to make a secure judgement on attainment in Year 12 and no students are studying the course in Year 13. The Year 12 students have an understanding of the historical and geographical background of the faiths to be studied and can undertake independent research in support of student presentations.

213. Students make good progress at Key Stage 3. They develop an understanding of the effect of belief on the lifestyle of believers and the links between culture and religion as in the rituals associated with Sikhism. Lower attaining students make good progress due to the extensive use of worksheets although this does restrict the research and investigative demands on higher attaining students. The progress of students at Key Stage 4 is unsatisfactory. The allocation of curricular time to religious education is insufficient to fully deliver the agreed syllabus and leads to standards of attainment being below the level expected and students making unsatisfactory progress. Students who study for GCSE in religious education make satisfactory progress. Students explore rites of passage and discuss issues surrounding them, for example, the nature of love and marriage. They are developing an understanding of environmental and social problems and the work of organisations in alleviating them. Responses are at times superficial and closely related to information supplied, and interpretation of religious texts lacks depth. Progress at GCE A level is good. Students develop their skills of independent study and take greater responsibility for their learning. There is no significant difference in the progress made by boys and girls. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress at both Key Stages 3 and 4. There is no significant difference in the progress of students from different ethnic backgrounds.

214. Students' attitudes are good. Behaviour in lessons is generally positive and students have a good relationship with their teachers. Students listen to the opinions of their peers and in the majority of lessons treat the beliefs of others with respect although there was little sense of enquiry.

215. The quality of teaching is good at Key Stage 3 and at sixth form level; it is satisfactory at Key Stage 4. Lessons are well prepared with clear objectives and high expectations of students. Teachers display a secure knowledge and understanding of the subject and time is well used. A wide variety of teaching strategies is employed to stimulate interest and to respond to the needs of all students. Tasks are clearly laid out and designed to be accessible for all abilities. The use of topic outlines enables students to be involved in the progress of their studies. Written assignments are often imaginative and regularly marked with encouraging comment, although assessment lacks the precision necessary for diagnostic use. The relationship of the teachers with their students is a strength of the department. Teachers are good role models, treating the work and opinions of their students with respect whilst maintaining a high standard of behaviour.

216. The leadership and management of the department is good. Resources are organised for efficient use and schemes of work are clear and detailed, particularly for Key Stage 3, with clear assessment opportunities. The use of computers as a research tool and for presentation of students' work is encouraged and good results are achieved. Insufficient time is available for delivery of the agreed syllabus in Key Stage 4 and the lack of homework for the religious education course reduces the depth of study further. This was the situation at the time of the last inspection. In the sixth form only those students who are studying for the general studies A level in Year 13 receive a religious education. The school is failing in its statutory duty to provide a religious education for all students.

Sixth form

217. Sixth form provision is offered as part of a consortium with two other local schools. This enables a very good range of courses to be offered. Sixth form students move between the three consortium schools and are taught by staff from the three schools.

218. In the 1999 GCE A level examinations, the average A/AS points score of candidates entered for two or more GCE A levels or AS equivalent was below the national average. Based on the average for the last three years, the average A/AS level point score of candidates entered for two or more GCE A levels or AS equivalent was below the national average. In 1999, in the GNVQ all students obtained either full or unit accreditation.

219. At sixth form, students make good progress. Whilst examination results are generally below the national averages, many of the students entered the sixth form with relatively low GCSE grades. Students who are now in the sixth form are making good progress in lessons. They are coping well with the increased rigour of GCE A level courses and GNVQ. Students make good progress in mathematics, science, art, design and technology, history, information technology, music and religious education and satisfactory progress in English, geography and physical education. Students develop their skills of independent learning and take greater responsibility for their own learning.

220. A good programme of careers education guides students as they select their options for study in the sixth form. Similarly a good timetable of guidance is in place for sixth form students. Sixth formers are regularly involved in the young enterprise scheme, for instance last year they marketed mugs to commemorate the school's sixtieth anniversary. There is insufficient religious education provision for all students in the sixth form.

PART C: INSPECTION DATA

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

221. The team consisted of 13 inspectors who spent 51 inspector days in the school. During the week, 187 lessons were seen. Inspectors also observed many registration periods and attended a number of assemblies. All full-time teachers were seen teaching at least once and most were seen on several occasions. As many part-time teachers as possible during the week were also seen teaching. In addition extracurricular activities were visited. Sixty-six planned discussions were held with teachers, the Chair of Governors and other representatives of the governing body and with non-teaching staff. Inspectors looked at the written work of many students in class. All the work of a representative sample of six students from each year group was inspected. Planned discussions were held with these students and informal discussions with many more. A large amount of documentation supplied by the school was examined before and during the inspection. The Registered Inspector and his deputy held a meeting attended by 21 parents and the team considered 208 responses from parents to a questionnaire about their opinions of the school. These are published as part of the report.

DATA AND INDICATORS

Student data

	Number of students on roll (full-time equivalent)	Number of students with statements of SEN	Number of students on school's register of SEN	Number of full-time students eligible for free school meals
Y7- Y13	1223	30	164	132

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers (Y7 – Y13)

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent):	63.3
Number of students per qualified teacher:	19.32

Education support staff (Y7 – Y13)

Total number of education support staff:	14
Total aggregate hours worked each week:	345

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:	77.9
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Average teaching group size:	KS3	26
	KS4	24

Financial data

Financial year:	1998/99
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	£
Total income	2,437,908
Total expenditure	2,367,137
Expenditure per student	2,018
Balance brought forward from previous year	46,010
Balance carried forward to next year	116,781

PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out:	1223
Number of questionnaires returned:	208

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	24	63	10	2	1
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	25	63	5	6	1
The school handles complaints from parents well	14	57	21	6	2
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	19	69	6	6	0
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	23	60	10	6	1
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	25	64	8	2	1
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	27	57	12	3	1
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	19	68	7	5	1
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	19	64	12	4	1
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	12	62	18	6	2
My child(ren) like(s) school	30	54	11	5	0

Other issues raised by parents

Parents expressed positive views about most areas of the school's work.

Parents are particularly impressed with the standards of attainment in music and design and technology.

The school promotes good attitudes and values.

There is a good flow of information between the school and the home.

The behaviour of students is good.