

INSPECTION REPORT

THE CAVENDISH SCHOOL

Hemel Hempstead

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117528

Headteacher: Mr Michael Griffin

Reporting inspector: Mr John Beardsmore
16429

Dates of inspection: 17 – 21 January 2000

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Anne Woodcock
Date of previous inspection:	16 October 1995

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J Watson	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well the school cares for its pupils The school's partnership with parents
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D Walker	Team inspector	Special educational needs English as an additional language	
P Quest	Team inspector	Religious education	
E Bray	Team inspector	Music	
M Whalley	Team inspector	Modern languages	
G Preston	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
		Design and technology	
J Hall	Team inspector	Science	
B Newton	Team inspector	English	
J Allcorn	Team inspector	Mathematics Equal opportunities	
M Naish	Team inspector	Geography	The curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils
B Barratt	Team inspector	History	The school's results and pupils' achievements How well the pupils are taught

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The Cavendish School is a mixed, community comprehensive school with 1152 pupils aged 11 to 18. The majority of its pupils come from the immediate neighbourhood, where there is a mixture of publicly and privately owned housing, though many come from surrounding areas, as the school is popular and over-subscribed. Its intake is genuinely comprehensive and represents the full range of attainment, though pupils' attainment on entry is just below average overall. Around a quarter of the pupils in Years 7 to 11 are on the school's register of special educational needs, rather higher than the average for the area. Only 31 of the pupils come from ethnic minorities. Twenty-six come from homes where English is not the first language.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an effective school, which is very well led and is well placed to achieve further progress. A high proportion of the teaching is good or very good. Standards are rising at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form and, to a lesser extent, at Key Stage 3. The school is very well managed, its sixth form is cost-effective and it provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Attainment at GCSE is above national averages.
- Examination results have improved significantly in the past two years.
- The headteacher provides very effective leadership.
- The quality of teaching is good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- The staff work hard to improve the quality of education by monitoring teaching and reflecting on their practice.
- The school values and encourages its pupils, whatever their level of ability.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils, and between pupils are very good.
- There is a wide range of high quality extra-curricular activities.
- Links with the community make a very good contribution to pupils' learning.

What could be improved

- Standards should be further raised, and teaching strengthened, especially at Key Stage 3.
- Target setting, based on the assessment of pupils, needs to be made more rigorous and systematic, especially at Key Stage 3.
- National Curriculum requirements for information technology are not yet fully in place at Key Stage 4.
- The time allocated for religious education at Key Stages 3 and 4 is inadequate.
- The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in October 1995 and has made good improvement since then. The quality of teaching has improved significantly. Line management and accountability have been strengthened. Pupils' behaviour has improved. Standards of attainment have risen, especially at GCSE and GCE Advanced level. Underachievement by boys has been reduced.

The school has addressed most of the key issues of the last report, but not those relating to the provision of religious education at Key Stage 3 and a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. It now meets National Curriculum requirements for history, geography, art, music and information technology at Key Stage 3. However, it does not meet requirements for information technology at Key Stage 4. The school now fully meets the requirements of the Code of Practice for pupils with special educational needs.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1999	1998	1997	1999	
GCSE examinations	B	C	D	C	well above A average above average B average C below average D well below E average
A-levels/AS-levels	C	D	D		

Pupils' standards of attainment on entry to the school are just below national averages. At the end of Key Stage 3 attainment has been close to national averages over the last three years, with no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls. The above table shows that GCSE results have improved steadily over the last three years and in 1999 were above average for all schools and in line with the average for schools with a similar intake of pupils. Standards seen during the inspection showed a similar pattern, with the only below average work being seen in art, information technology and religious education. Boys' attainment improved significantly in 1999, thus narrowing the gap between boys' and girls' attainment to match the national difference. Standards have also improved at GCE Advanced level and now match national averages. Inspection evidence confirmed these standards overall. However, sixth form work seen in English, mathematics, modern languages, history and religious education was of a particularly high standard. The school has given a high level of importance to raising standards in recent years and the targets set for further improvement are realistically ambitious. The standards achieved by pupils, when compared with their earlier attainment and standards in similar schools, are satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Most pupils like the school and show interest in their work. A small minority, mainly boys, lack interest and motivation.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Overall, the behaviour of the great majority is good both in lessons and around the school. A few pupils, mainly boys, require firm and skilful handling.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships between pupils are very good. Most take advantage of the opportunities provided to develop initiative and work independently. Some older pupils become involved in helping younger pupils with their work.
Attendance	Levels of attendance are above average and have improved in the past two years.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Good	Satisfactory	Good	Good

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

In the lessons seen during the inspection teaching was satisfactory or better in 95 per cent of lessons, good or better in 63 per cent and very good or better in 22 per cent. In four per cent of lessons the teaching was judged to be excellent. Teaching was strongest at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. In most subjects, over half of the teaching was at least good. Practice was of especially high quality in English, history and physical education, where a high proportion of the teaching seen was good and often very good and, in some lessons, excellent. The small amount of unsatisfactory teaching seen occurred in mathematics, design and technology and modern languages. On the other hand a high proportion of the teaching seen in modern languages was good and often very good. Teaching in English is good at both Key Stages 3 and 4. In mathematics it is satisfactory, and in science it is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4. The skills of literacy are well taught. The teaching of numeracy is satisfactory. The extent to which teaching meets the learning requirements of all pupils varies across subjects and the key stages. Practice is better at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form than at Key Stage 3, where challenge varies and work is not always sufficiently well matched to the full range of learning needs in mixed ability classes, sometimes hindering progress. Overall pupils' progress and achievements are satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Provision for pupils with special educational needs, the most able pupils and those with English as a second language is satisfactory overall. There is a clear focus on making provision for pupils of the highest ability at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form but strategies are less well developed at Key Stage 3. Strategies for teaching pupils with English as a second language are not well developed.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The quality and range of the curriculum are good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in the sixth form. However, the provision of information technology is inadequate at Key Stage 4 and there is insufficient time for religious education at Key Stage 3. The curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of good quality extra-curricular activities and careers and personal and social education programmes. Links with the community are very effective.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The school makes satisfactory provision for pupils with special educational needs and those withdrawn for work in small groups are well taught. The requirements of the national Code of Practice are fully met.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Provision for the few pupils whose mother tongue is not English is satisfactory, though it is not monitored consistently.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for moral, social and cultural development is good. The school has an effective code of conduct and teachers provide good role models. Pupils are encouraged to develop attitudes of tolerance and respect and to take responsibility in various ways. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. Significant opportunities for pupils to reflect on moral and spiritual issues are provided in some subject areas and in assemblies, though tutorial time is not well used for this purpose. There are good opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of their own culture but contact with other cultures is less frequent.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school takes considerable care to ensure the safety and well-being of its pupils. It has very good procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour and for monitoring and eliminating bullying and racism. Teachers know their pupils well. Year heads and form tutors provide strong pastoral support. They monitor pupils' personal development effectively but their role does not include monitoring pupils' academic progress. Test and examination results are used well to set targets for pupils to improve at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, but not yet at Key Stage 3.
Partnership with parents	Parents have a high opinion of the school, which takes care to communicate effectively and maintain good links with them. The quality of information provided for parents, including reports on their children's progress, is good.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides highly effective leadership and gives a very clear educational direction to the work of the school, strongly supported by the other members of the senior management team. Effective leadership is also provided by most heads of curriculum areas and heads of year. Planning and monitoring are strong features of the school.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are well informed about the work of the school and have an excellent working relationship with the headteacher and other senior managers. Their work is well organised and they exercise their functions very effectively, though the school does not yet fully comply with statutory requirements regarding information technology and the provision of a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school takes care to review its effectiveness in a number of ways, for example, by seeking the opinion of parents, staff and pupils and by analysing its test and examination results. Its use of such results in setting targets for pupils and subject areas is still relatively undeveloped at Key Stage 3.
The strategic use of resources	The teaching staff are well qualified to teach the curriculum, which is supported by a sufficient range of books and other learning resources. The number of computers is below average for the size of the school and some are out of date. Accommodation and specialist facilities are satisfactory overall. Financial planning and monitoring are very good and the school takes considerable care to secure best value for money.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of relationships in the school • The openness of the school in responding to parents' questions or concerns • The way that pupils are known and valued, whatever their ability • Teachers' high expectations of good behaviour • The leadership of the headteacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few feel that they are not well informed about their children's progress • A few feel that the school does not work closely enough with parents • A few are not happy with the amount of homework which their children receive

The inspection findings support the positive views of parents. In regard to the negative views, the school has good procedures for informing parents about their children's progress; links with parents are good; and appropriate amounts of homework are set regularly.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1 Pupils' standards of attainment on entry to the school are just below national averages. This is shown both in the results of tests on entry and in the standards of pupils' work shortly after their arrival at the school. At the end of Key Stage 3 attainment has been close to national averages over the last three years with no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls. In 1999 the National Curriculum test results were above the average for all schools in mathematics and science but below average in English. The pattern is broadly the same when comparison is made with the results in similar schools. However, the work seen during the inspection of pupils in Year 9 showed a different pattern. The standards being reached by pupils in Year 9 are above average in English and average in mathematics and science. In English, standards are rising, partly because it is now taught by specialist teachers in Year 8. Standards are not falling in mathematics and science. The 1999 National Curriculum test results in these subjects were misleading, because the school's average points score was very close to the national average and inspection evidence indicates that standards in the present Year 9 are very similar. In other subjects, the results of the National Curriculum teachers' assessment were above average in most and average in the rest. First hand inspection evidence confirms this picture apart from in information technology and art where the standards seen were below average. The levels being reached in religious education are below those expected by the locally Agreed Syllabus.

2 Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is above the national average for all schools and in line with that for similar schools. Standards have improved significantly over the last two years. In 1999 the GCSE average points score rose to 40.2 which compares favourably with the national average of 38.0 for all schools, and that of 39.0 for schools with a similar intake. In English the results were above the average for both all maintained and similar schools, in mathematics they were in line with the average and in science they were well above average. In all other subjects, the results were above or matched national averages apart from in art, geography and drama where they were lower. Standards seen during the inspection of pupils in Year 11 showed a similar pattern with the only below average work being seen in art, information technology and religious education. Boys' attainment improved significantly in 1999 thus narrowing the gap between boys' and girls' attainment to match the national difference.

3 Students' attainment at the end of the sixth form is broadly in line with course averages for both GCE Advanced level and GNVQ. The GCE Advanced level average points score improved significantly in 1999 to match national averages. During the previous three years results had been below average. The percentage of students gaining a qualification at GNVQ in 1999 was also in line with the average with the majority of students achieving qualifications with merit or distinction. Inspection evidence confirmed these standards with work of high challenge and good levels of knowledge, understanding and skills seen in English, mathematics, modern languages, history and religious education.

4 The trend of improvement in attainment, especially at the end of Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, reflects the high level of importance attached to raising standards in recent years. Realistically ambitious targets have been set for improvement and the measures needed to raise attainment have been carefully calculated and skilfully implemented involving staff, governors, pupils and parents fully in the process. They include a sharp and continuing focus on the quality of teaching and learning, close monitoring and mentoring, the detailed analysis of performance data and its use for target setting. Practice is most developed and effective at Key Stage 4. Systems for measuring value added and target setting post-16 are more recent and processes at Key Stage 3 are underdeveloped. Overall insufficient use is made of performance data to track pupils' progress and attainment systematically throughout their time in the school.

5 Speaking and listening skills are well developed through the opportunities offered in many subjects. Spoken language is generally clear, articulate and sometimes extended and pupils mostly listen attentively to each other and to the teacher. In history the quality of oral work is very good at all stages and pupils listen very well. In modern languages pupils are willing to listen carefully to quite demanding recordings in the target language to extract meaning.

6 In general there are too few opportunities for pupils to read aloud. Mostly pupils' reading skills are sufficiently developed for their learning needs though some lower attaining pupils in science in Year 7 had difficulty reading worksheets.

7 Pupils use writing effectively for a wide range of purposes. In modern languages there is good extended writing in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form; in history pupils' writing is usually fluent and increasingly well judged though there is some careless spelling and punctuation. There is well presented and accurate writing in religious education.

8 Pupils' numeracy skills are satisfactory at Key Stages 3 and 4, but not better than average. They competently apply their skills in science, geography, history and design and technology, particularly in graphical work. Standards are above average in the sixth form, supporting GCE Advanced level studies well in science, physical education, history, mathematics and design and technology. However, some students following GNVQ courses have difficulties in drawing and interpreting graphs. Pupils' achievements are not as high as they could be. Strategies for undertaking mental calculations are underdeveloped, because these are not systematically taught. For example, pupils are not confident at undertaking calculations such as 27×6 , although they have the basic times table skills that need to be applied.

9 Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language are making satisfactory progress, and the most able make good progress. Pupils' learning requirements are well known by teachers but work is not consistently well matched to their needs. Those with special educational needs make noticeably better progress when supported in lessons by learning support assistants. On the other hand, gifted and talented pupils are better supported in their learning by the more consistently high level of challenge at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. This is particularly evident in mathematics, science, modern languages and history. For instance, gifted girls make especially good progress in science at Key Stage 4 and the very able are very well challenged in their learning in history in the sixth form. Across the curriculum the level of challenge for pupils of the highest ability is more variable at Key Stage 3. The relatively few pupils with English as a second language make satisfactory progress overall but there are a few instances when their learning is impeded by inadequate support.

10 Pupils' achievements are satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. The standards achieved at the end of Key Stage 3 indicate satisfactory progress when compared with prior levels of attainment and standards in similar schools. Progress is better at Key Stage 4 where pupils gain standards at GCSE which are higher than national averages, whilst at Key Stage 3 their attainment matched the national average. Progress is also good post-16, resulting in standards which are significantly better than those achieved by the same pupils at GCSE.

11 Achievement and progress are more variable both within and between subjects at Key Stage 3 than at Key Stage 4 and post-16. For example, in English progress is consistently good at both key stages and leads to appropriately high achievement with pupils speaking confidently and clearly, reading increasingly complex texts, responding sensitively to poetry and drama, and writing well. In science, on the other hand, progress varies within and between key stages. At Key Stage 3, for instance, while achievements in Years 7 and 8 are satisfactory overall, there is not enough scope in lesson planning to give the very highest attainers extra challenging work. The very highest attainers in Year 9, however, make much better progress learning to write with great fluency, articulate their understanding clearly with good use of analysis, evaluation and scientific language. Pupils make significantly faster progress in science during Key Stage 4, especially the highest attaining girls who outperform boys, as they do nationally.

12 Progress varies also in modern languages. It is good overall at Key Stage 4 but in some mixed ability classes at Key Stage 3 higher attaining pupils are insufficiently challenged. While there is a wide range of achievement in art, there are weaknesses at both key stages in the development of skills, especially those of painting and drawing. There are also significant weaknesses in research and its use in final outcomes. Progress in music is significantly better at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form than at Key Stage 3, where only a minority of pupils are on course to achieve the expectation in music, but it is estimated that the majority will still be working towards the level expected nationally.

13 Pupils respond well to high levels of challenge throughout the school and especially in the sixth form, where overall the demands made of students are more consistently high, resulting in substantial gains in knowledge, understanding and skills. For example, students respond very well to the inspiration and challenge of the teaching in history and achieve very well in relation to their prior attainment at GCSE. In the Year 12 and 13 lessons seen during the inspection students were working at full stretch, constantly engaged in thinking and undertaking tasks which required effort, concentration and perseverance. Similarly students are working at a demanding level in English. For instance, in a Year 13 lesson on Ian McEwan's novel *The Child in Time* they demonstrated outstanding powers of critical analysis and a reflective, perceptive response. Good levels of analysis are also evident in geography. For instance, in a Year 13 lesson, students applied their skills very well in the analysis of a range of statistical data to classify hazards and compare their impact.

14 Sixth form students also show similarly well developed skills and a good depth of understanding in mathematics. This was demonstrated especially well in lessons seen in Year 13. In science students are also making good progress and achieve well in response to high quality teaching and through their own mature commitment to study. Students in Year 12, however, are generally on course to attain higher standards in GCE Advanced level biology, chemistry and physics than in Year 13. Work within the sixth form is of a high standard in religious education. This is well demonstrated by the students' good understanding of complex theological ideas and the religious dimension to contemporary moral and social issues.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

15 Pupils come from a wide variety of home and social backgrounds. The school has been very successful in establishing a clear set of expectations and consistent boundaries within which the pupils can develop.

16 Attitudes to the school are good. Pupils show enthusiasm and interest in their work. They participate eagerly in the wide range of curricular and extra-curricular activities that the school provides. The vast majority behave well in lessons and around the school. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. They are polite and helpful and generally show respect for their own and others' property. However, despite the school's strenuous efforts in recent years, a small minority continue to challenge the school's established norms and can be a disruptive influence in a few situations.

17 There is an absence of oppressive behaviour. The few minor incidents of bullying that occur are very quickly and effectively handled, with appropriate parental involvement. The use of inappropriate language is not tolerated. The percentage of permanent exclusions is low by national comparison, while the proportion of fixed term exclusions is broadly average. Exclusions are used only as a last resort when the school's effective range of lesser sanctions has been exhausted.

18 Pupils form very constructive relationships with each other and with adults in the school. Teachers know their pupils well and there is considerable mutual respect between them. Lunch and break times are pleasant social occasions. Pupils have a good understanding of the effects of their actions on others. They show respect for others' feelings and beliefs and often give constructive comments about others' work. Good examples of this were observed, for instance, in English, history and personal and social education lessons. Pupils are very willing to show initiative and take responsibility. Of particular note is the way in which older pupils support those in lower years.

19 The level of attendance in all year groups is above average and has improved in the last two years. Much of the unauthorised absence is caused by the school's proper refusal to accept other than valid explanations for absence.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

20 The quality of teaching is good. In the lessons seen during the inspection it was satisfactory or better in 95 per cent of lessons. It was good or better in 63 per cent and very good or better in 22 per cent. In four per cent of lessons the teaching was judged to be excellent. Teaching is strongest at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. In most subjects well over half of the teaching is at least good. Practice is of especially high quality in English, history and physical education where a high proportion of the teaching seen was very good and in some lessons excellent. In science over half the teaching was good or better. The only unsatisfactory teaching seen occurred in mathematics, design and technology and modern languages. On the other hand, over 60 per cent of the teaching in modern languages was good and often very good, and over 30 per cent of the teaching in mathematics and design and technology was also at least good. Teaching has improved in quality since the last inspection when 20 per cent of the teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory.

21 Pupils make satisfactory progress in acquiring knowledge, understanding and skills at Key Stage 3 and good progress at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. In English, history and physical education, however, progress is good at all stages as a result of highly effective teaching. In these subjects pupils develop knowledge and skills of a high order from the outset, which they deepen and refine throughout their time in the school. Progress is less strong at Key Stage 3, often because work is not well matched to the learning needs of pupils in mixed ability classes and because skills are insufficiently developed and used. This is true, for example, in some instances in mathematics where, while basic number skills such as use of times tables, are often good, pupils' strategies to use them for mental calculation are not developed well enough. Similarly in design and technology, art and music, progress at Key Stage 3 is slowed by insufficient attention to certain aspects of skills development. In design and technology, for instance, pupils make less progress in developing a more rigorous approach to design. Insufficient attention is given to skill acquisition in music, and in art to the development of skills in drawing and painting.

22 Pupils concentrate well and work hard in most lessons. In the great majority a good pace of work is quickly established and sustained throughout lessons, with pupils responding with interest and quickly involving themselves in their learning. There are many instances of pupils learning and deepening their understanding through discussion and debate in productive group work. This is exemplified particularly well in history. Most have a good awareness of the levels of their achievement, are keen to do well and to help each other in their learning. It is only very rarely that a lack of interest or motivation slows learning. This usually occurs because of too low a challenge to sustain pupils' interest or, in a small minority of cases, as sometimes in modern languages, where a very few pupils remain disaffected despite the teacher's continuous encouragement. Pupils' commitment to their learning develops as they become older and, while there are many examples of a high level of commitment and initiative at Key Stages 3 and 4, such as higher attaining pupils in science in Year 9, it is particularly evident in the sixth form. Here, learning is typified by students' deep interest and enjoyment in their subject and mature response to the challenge and inspiration of the teaching.

23 Teachers' knowledge and understanding are good and in the great majority of lessons are skilfully shared with the pupils, often inspiring their interest and enthusiasm for the subject. Teachers' good expertise also ensures that the basic skills of literacy are well taught. The high levels of subject expertise are particularly beneficial across the curriculum in fostering learning of a high order at GCE Advanced level.

24 Lesson planning is detailed and provides for clear learning objectives, a good pace and sequence of learning and in the great majority of lessons, an appropriate level of challenge. In some cases, for example, in mathematics and science at Key Stage 3, insufficient attention is given to ensuring that clear learning outcomes are made explicit at the beginning of lessons. There are also instances, such as in history and modern languages, where, despite other aspects of planning being very effective, insufficient attention is given to ensuring that resources are well matched to the learning requirements of all pupils.

25 Teachers' expectations are appropriately high in the great majority of subjects but overall levels of challenge and inspiration are greater at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form than at Key Stage 3. For instance, in science, whilst the work is appropriately challenging in most instances, there is insufficient challenge for all pupils in the mixed ability classes in Years 7 and 8. In history the consistently high levels of challenge and inspiration at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form foster a real enthusiasm for the subject, while at Key Stage 3 there are occasions when some pupils lose interest as a result of too low expectations. There are exceptions to this pattern. For example, in a Year 7 lesson in mathematics pupils' learning was stimulated from the outset by the lively teaching resulting in very good achievement in the use of algebra to write mathematical rules. In most mathematics lessons, however, at Key Stage 3, the teaching, while encouraging pupils to work conscientiously, fails to inspire pace and excitement in the learning because of over reliance on text books.

26 Teaching methods are also more effective at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form than at Key Stage 3 where, whilst teaching strategies are satisfactory overall, in most subjects they are less consistent in their effectiveness. In English, history, modern languages, geography and physical education, however, teaching is consistently effective in promoting learning of a good quality. Particular strengths include enabling pupils to learn through group and pair work, and skilled questioning to test understanding and extend thinking. In other subjects, practice is more varied especially at Key Stage 3. In science, for instance, while there is a good blend of methods overall, progress at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is better than at Key Stage 3, because of the greater rigour in ensuring that pupils learn and develop scientific principles and skills. Higher attaining pupils at Key Stage 4, for example, make extensive use of chemical symbols and formulae, while at Key Stage 3 the use of symbols and formulae is not as well developed as might be expected. In mathematics, the teachers' over reliance on text books without adapting the subject matter to match the learning needs of pupils particularly affects the quality of pupils' learning in mixed ability groups in Years 7 and 8. Progress is better at Key Stage 4, where pupils are set by ability. In mathematics methods are especially effective and creative in the sixth form.

27 Learning is well supported in the great majority of lessons by the skilled management of pupils, good classroom relationships and behaviour. In the small minority of lessons where pupils become inattentive, it is usually because the work is not well matched to their learning requirements. At best any deviation is dealt with quickly and unobtrusively but there are some lessons, for example, in art, where unsatisfactory behaviour is not managed firmly and this hinders learning.

28 Time is well used in most lessons to maintain a good pace and momentum in the learning. The use of resources is also well judged with instances, as in English, of a good range and variety in the resources used, including very good use of video and overhead projectors to ensure clarity of understanding. White boards are also used to good effect in this respect. The use of information technology to enhance learning is underdeveloped. Support staff are effectively deployed to assist the learning of pupils with special educational needs. The support available to pupils with English as a second language is overall less effective.

29 Pupils' work is marked regularly and mostly thoroughly. Most marking is accompanied by written comments, though these vary in the extent to which they provide useful guidance for raising standards. Some at Key Stages 3 and 4 are too superficial to be helpful especially to higher attaining pupils. Assessment results are used to monitor progress and to set targets for improvement, though this is not consistent both across and within subject departments. In particular, the use of baseline testing to monitor progress and to set targets for attainment at Key Stage 3 is inconsistent.

30 Much importance is attached to homework as an integral part of learning. It is set regularly to extend and to prepare for the next stages of learning. It is also used well to assist pupils in the development of study skills, especially in the sixth form. Occasionally at Key Stage 3 too little time is allowed for the discussion of the homework set to enable pupils to understand fully what is required. Lower attaining pupils are sometimes at a disadvantage as a consequence.

31 The extent to which teaching meets the learning requirements of all pupils varies across subjects and the key stages. On the whole, practice is better at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form than at Key Stage 3 where work is not always sufficiently well matched to the full range of learning needs in mixed ability classes. The requirements of pupils with special educational needs are well known and tasks are set to match their targets on individual educational plans. However, these are not always sufficiently specific to support progress within subjects. Pupils make the best progress when withdrawn for assistance with the development of particular skills and when supported in lessons by learning support assistants. Provision for pupils with English as a second language is less well developed. Their numbers are relatively small and most are competent in the use of English. However, insufficient attention has been given to ensuring that there are effective strategies to support the learning of pupils with a very limited understanding of English.

32 Awareness of the needs of the most able varies and provision is most effective at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. At these stages, focused attention is given to provision for the pupils of the highest ability. This has resulted in a significant increase in pupils' average points scores at GCSE and an improvement in attainment at GCE Advanced level. The teaching at GCE Advanced level is a particular strength in many subjects in setting appropriate expectations, demands and challenge for students and enabling them to work to full capacity. Overall, however, strategies for ensuring that the needs of gifted and talented pupils are well met are not fully developed and co-ordinated. At Key Stage 3 insufficient attention is given overall to making sure that the needs of highly able pupils in mixed ability classes are fully met.

HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?

33 The quality and range of learning opportunities that the school offers are good in Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in the sixth form. The statutory curriculum is now largely in place, with the exception of religious education in Key Stages 3 and 4 and information and communication technology in Key Stage 4. There is too little time to cover the local Agreed Syllabus in religious education at Key Stage 3 and, at Key Stage 4, pupils' progress is impeded by long gaps between the religious education units in the GCSE humanities programme. In Key Stage 4, the statutory requirements for information and communication technology have not been addressed, although there are examples of good practice in some subjects.

34 The curriculum is broad, balanced and relevant to the lives of the pupils in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form, but the lack of attention to information and communication technology in Key Stage 4 means that breadth and balance are unsatisfactory at this stage. The enquiry course in Year 7 provides pupils with a sound start to the development of their study and learning skills. German and drama are added to the curriculum of all pupils in Year 8. Personal and social education begins in Year 7 and this carefully planned and well-taught course continues through Key Stage 4. There is a strong core curriculum in Key Stage 4, where all pupils study English, mathematics and science and also English literature, a modern language, design and technology, humanities, physical education and games. The options at Key Stage 4 are well organised and only a very small number of pupils are not able to study their first choice of subject. A new pre-vocational course has been introduced to try to meet the needs of a small group of pupils disapplied from the National Curriculum.

35 In the sixth form, the balanced range of GCE Advanced level subjects and GNVQ courses at Advanced and Intermediate levels is complemented by the personal and social education programme, which is well tailored to students' needs. There is an induction course for all students. In Year 12, students undertake community work in the school for at least two hours a week. The Year 12 programme also includes religious and moral studies and an information and communication technology course. Students are involved in the ASDAN scheme, which provides valuable stimulus for personal development. A wide range of sporting and recreational activities is available.

36 A constructive and appropriate policy for equal opportunities is in place and the senior staff provide good role models and a strong lead in this area. All pupils have equal access to the curriculum, but experience in information and communication technology is not consistent for all pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4. The underachievement of boys has been recognised as a matter of concern for some time and a range of appropriate strategies is addressing this situation.

37 The school's provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. The school has a slightly higher number of pupils than the national average on its register of special needs and a very wide range of needs, but pupils with special educational needs are well supported and encouraged to participate in all school activities. Withdrawal time is kept to the minimum and is carefully chosen to interfere least with the main timetable. Statements are given full consideration and all provision detailed on them is met. Provision for the small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language is satisfactory overall, though its effectiveness is not systematically monitored by the school.

38 Plans for the development of a whole-school literacy policy and the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy are well advanced following the appointment of a literacy co-ordinator in September 1999. At present literacy is most effectively promoted by science, geography, history and modern foreign languages and, of course, English. Science provides a particularly rich language environment with displays of technical words for science and vocabulary lists to support pupils' writing, as well as displays of pupils' written work. In modern languages routine classroom phrases are displayed, there is good display of written work and pupils have vocabulary books. In all these subjects - as well as strongly in English - there is good use of pair and group work which helps the development of pupils' speaking and listening skills. Written work in science includes note-making and note-taking, reporting, summarising and the presentation of information through cartoons on dissolving and solutions. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, pupils also write analyses, explanations and evaluations as part of their course assignments. In geography, although the emphasis is on writing to provide information, there are opportunities for pupils to write more imaginatively in the forms of newspaper reports and letters. In history, pupils also have good opportunities to present information in a range of forms.

39 Strategies for the effective teaching of pupils' basic numeracy skills are not well developed. There is no whole-school policy to support subject areas in developing practice. The needs of pupils with weak numeracy skills are not well met in Years 7 and 8, where teaching in mixed ability groups in mathematics does not sufficiently address their learning needs. Good opportunities occur in science, where specific strategies to support low attainers are in place. In science and geography, pupils competently use and interpret information presented in charts and graphs. However, teaching in art is not very successful in developing pupils' spatial skills. The mathematics faculty has yet to familiarise itself with the work of the National Numeracy Project recently introduced in primary schools.

40 The school has made a number of improvements in the curriculum since the last inspection. The statutory requirements for art, geography, history, music and information and communication technology are now met in Key Stage 3. However, religious education still fails to cover the Agreed Syllabus in Key Stage 3 and the provision for information and communication technology in Key Stage 4 does not meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. Provision for pupils with special educational needs now follows the Code of Practice. The choice of subjects at Key Stage 4 has been improved and now includes history, geography and physical education. There is now much less time lost at the start of lessons in the main school.

41 Pupils are well prepared for the world of work by the school's very good provision for careers education and guidance. This begins in Year 9 and is consolidated by a week's work experience in Year 11 and by the Insight into Industry programme in Year 12. The outcomes of these are well integrated into the curriculum. Strong support is provided by the local careers service and by a large number of local employers. Pupils make good use of the school's excellent careers library and computerised guidance systems. Sixth form students are well supported in making their applications to universities.

42 The school makes very good provision for extra-curricular activities. These include a wide range of sports, residential visits, musical and drama events and many visits to theatres, lectures, exhibitions and museums. GCE Advanced level art students will exhibit their work at the Tate Gallery in St Ives later this year. These opportunities are very much valued by both parents and pupils and significantly enhance the curriculum of the school.

43 Provision for personal and social education is good. It has recently been very successfully revised and is now given by specialist teams of teachers and outside speakers, so that it is now of higher quality than at the time of the last inspection. Since then attention has also been devoted to making more structured use of tutorial time but this has not always been fully implemented in all tutorial groups.

44 The school places a high priority on building good relationships with the wider local community and in this it has undoubtedly been very successful. It receives strong support from the local council and is used as a model in the county for community work. Significant sums are raised for charity. The school has received recognition by a Sports Council Award and, most recently, by the Football Association Charter Mark for services to the community. The school enjoys constructive relationships with its many feeder primaries and with other schools and colleges in the area. The overall result is a significant enhancement of pupils' learning opportunities.

45 The school makes good provision for pupils' moral, social and cultural development and satisfactory provision for their spiritual development. The school's aims express a clear commitment to create a community characterised by respect and tolerance. It places a strong emphasis on the fact that each individual member of the school community is valued and appreciated.

46 Different subjects, particularly English, history, geography and the enquiry course in Year 7, include time for reflection on spiritual issues. Study of topics, like the Holocaust and slavery in history and First World War poetry in English, provoke reflection on fundamental questions of life and death, morality and justice. Further discussion arises from study visits to battlefields and on a modern language faculty visit to a former concentration camp. Religious education allows time for pupils to reflect on their own and other peoples' values and beliefs and to consider spiritual issues. However, opportunities for reflection are missed in some subjects because this aspect of the pupils' development is not planned and co-ordinated.

47 During the inspection week the assemblies observed were lively and interesting and caught the pupils' attention. Assemblies make a positive contribution to the pupils' spiritual, moral and social development, though this is limited by the fact that each pupil attends only one per week. On other days this time is spent in tutor groups, which is not normally used for reflection or worship. Because of this, the school is not complying with the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of worship for all pupils. There has been no change in this respect since the last inspection.

48 The provision for moral development is good. A well-understood code of conduct, which pupils helped to draw up, lies at the core of the school's provision for moral development. This is positively reinforced daily by staff, who provide good role models themselves. A well-designed and well-taught programme of personal and social education deals with moral and social issues and this is reinforced in many subject areas, such as science, English and the humanities, where moral issues are discussed.

49 The provision for social development is good and is evident in many aspects of the school's life. Prefects play an active role in the school not only in performing duties that assist in the day to day running of the school, but also by providing support for pupils throughout the school. Sixth form students help pupils in Year 7 settle into their new school by accompanying them on a residential visit. Form representatives take their responsibilities seriously and some act as representatives on the Hemel Youth Council. In the classroom, pupils are encouraged to work collaboratively and expected to take responsibility for their work. Good examples were seen in science and history, where higher attaining pupils are encouraged to work with lower attaining pupils. In the sixth form students take part in community service.

50 The provision for cultural development is strong in some areas but weaker in others. A number of subjects, including English, art, music and history, provide good opportunities for pupils to explore their own cultural traditions. There are fewer opportunities to develop an appreciation of non-European cultures except in art and religious education.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

51 The school places a high priority on creating a caring, supportive and secure environment, which enhances and promotes pupils' learning. Teachers know their pupils well and tutors and year heads stay with their pupils as they move up through the year groups. Interactions between teacher and pupils are professional, supportive and responsive to pupils' welfare. Liaison with support services is good. Arrangements for child protection and health and safety are secure. Good procedures are in place to support higher levels of attendance and very good support is provided by the Educational Welfare Service. Certificates are awarded on a regular basis for excellent attendance. Statutory requirements are met.

52 The effectiveness of the support and guidance provided by the school to raise pupils' achievements is good in the sixth form, satisfactory at Key Stage 4, but, overall, less successfully developed at Key Stage 3.

53 There are satisfactory procedures in most subjects for assessing and monitoring pupils' attainment and progress. In some, procedures are good, for example in history, modern foreign languages and the Year 7 enquiry course. They are less well developed in design and technology, information technology, art and music, resulting in unreliable Key Stage 3 National Curriculum assessments. The use of data on pupils' performance to inform curriculum planning also varies. It is used well to review the effectiveness of curriculum provision in English, history and physical education. For instance, in English it led to a review of activities to improve the performance of boys, and in physical education to an increase in indoor winter activities to encourage more positive attitudes towards sport from girls.

54 The computer database on pupils' performance is much improved since the last inspection and is used well to predict GCSE grades. This has a positive influence on pupils in Year 11, motivating them to work hard and to succeed. However, it is not yet used to predict Key Stage 3 National Curriculum results, giving both pupils and teachers information on what should be achieved. The good relationships between staff and pupils encourage older pupils especially to seek help out of lessons. In some subjects, such as science, where GCSE results are among the best in the school, additional revision sessions are provided.

55 Form tutors work closely with their heads of year and with parents to improve attendance and behaviour. This effectively supports the positive attitudes of pupils to learning. Mentoring benefits identified pupils in Years 10 and 11. For example, the Year 10 pupils taking the new vocational course have benefited from being well supported through mentoring and are making good progress.

56 There is satisfactory support for pupils with special educational needs. In English, pupils taking the non-GCSE Certificate of Achievement course are given good access to computers to improve their confidence and achievement. While the very small number of pupils at the early stages of learning English receive satisfactory support, in general teachers' awareness of their needs in lessons is not fully developed.

57 The use by subject areas of the information collected on pupils' attainment and progress to set targets, with individual pupils and for groups of pupils, is still at an early stage. There is little evidence that targets, set by pupils on their annual subject reports, are reviewed at a later date either by subject teachers or form tutors. This was an area identified for development at the time of the last inspection.

58 Sixth form students receive good information on their progress. Predicted GCE Advanced level grades together with detailed constructive guidance provided by teachers in marking students' work, help them to raise standards. In design and technology students are involved in the assessment process, giving them helpful information on the standard of work expected for the highest grades.

59 A rigorous analysis of the differences in performance of boys and girls has led to a clear focus on the need to review curriculum provision for boys, supporting an improvement in their achievements. However, there is insufficient analysis of how the performance of other groups of pupils, such as those with English as an additional language or special educational needs, compares with that of other pupils.

60 Good procedures are in place to support higher levels of attendance and very good support is provided by the Educational Welfare Service. Certificates are awarded on a regular basis for excellent attendance. The school now fully complies with statutory requirements for registration. Since the last inspection the school has devoted considerable efforts to improving standards of behaviour and discipline. Its practices have been well codified into a very good behaviour policy which is consistently implemented. A good anti-bullying policy has also been developed and its implementation is very carefully and effectively monitored.

61 The well-established system of awarding credits for good work, attitudes and behaviour is valued by pupils. Pupils with learning or behavioural difficulties are mentored daily and parents are involved when necessary.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

62 Parents are generally very satisfied with what the school provides and achieves. This is reflected by the very high numbers of parents who seek admission to the school for their children. Parents are seen as important partners and are always welcomed into the school. The great majority of parents are very satisfied with the quality of the school's relationship with parents and with the way it responds to any concerns which they express.

63 The school's prospectus and annual governors' report to parents are good and meet statutory requirements. There is an excellent, informative weekly newsletter that is produced by the pupils and sent to all parents. Well-structured pupil profiles are issued to all parents each year. They include self-appraisal by pupils but some targets for achievement are imprecise, for example, in science and mathematics, where they do not help pupils to understand how they can improve their work. The school also holds twice-yearly meetings between parents and teachers, at which foreign language interpreters are provided if required. These are well attended and provide a useful channel of information with parents. Parents of children with special educational needs are appropriately involved in regular reviews of their child's progress.

64 There is a regular consultation with parents on topics such as uniform, homework policy and the recently introduced home/school agreement. Each pupil's homework and achievement diary provides an additional means of communication with parents but these are not consistently used by all parents. The school goes to considerable lengths to consult and involve parents where there are any concerns. The School Association is active in organising a range of social and fund raising events and these together with the voluntary parental subscription provide a valuable supplement to the school's resources.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

65 The high quality of leadership and management in the school is a major factor in the progress which the school has made in recent years. Noteworthy examples of this are the significant improvement in the quality of teaching since the last inspection and the rise in standards, especially at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. The behaviour of the pupils has also improved and relationships between teachers and pupils and amongst the pupils themselves are now very good. The school is heavily oversubscribed and very highly thought of by the parents.

66 The headteacher provides a high quality of leadership and sets out a very clear vision of what sort of a community the school should be and what it should strive to achieve. He is highly regarded by parents, staff and pupils. A noteworthy feature of the school is the degree of common purpose, and the mutual trust and regard shared by the headteacher, his colleagues in the senior management team and the members of the governing body. The relationship between the headteacher and the governing body is open and frank. Governors are well informed about the strengths and weaknesses of the school, ask relevant questions and are appropriately involved in planning and monitoring. There is a high degree of unanimity between senior staff and governors about the key aims of the school, for example, the importance of ensuring equality of opportunity for all pupils regardless of their prior attainment and extending higher attainers. As a result, the governing body is effective in exercising its functions, though the school does not meet statutory requirements in respect of information technology at Key Stage 4, religious education and providing a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. Senior managers work very effectively as a team and in close partnership with both the headteacher and the governing body.

67 Another feature of the school is that the teachers reflect on their practice and share a commitment to improving their teaching. The induction of teachers new to the school, including those who are newly qualified, is well structured and very effective. Systematic observation of classroom teaching is now well established in every subject area and applies to all teachers. Lessons are observed on a regular basis by the teacher's line manager (usually the head of faculty), feedback is provided on the lessons and targets for improvement are agreed. This has had a very positive effect on the standard of teaching. Working parties of teachers have examined a number of issues, for example, ways of improving the climate for learning, and pupils' standards of behaviour and attainment, which have then become the focus of staff training days. The observation of teaching in this inspection has demonstrated clear evidence of the positive outcomes of this approach and a very marked improvement since the last inspection.

68 Relationships between staff – both teaching and support staff – are open and productive. Staff morale is high. The headteacher combines firmness of purpose with a supportive approach to those who experience difficulties. Delegation is clearly defined in job descriptions and understood in practice. The principle of accountability is well established through the line management system, which has been strengthened since the last inspection. As a result, the work of those in middle management (heads of faculties and heads of years) is effectively monitored and supported and, through them, that of those for whose work they are responsible. The quality of leadership at middle management level is variable, though never less than satisfactory. The newly appointed heads of expressive arts and humanities have taken an effective lead in their respective areas. The results of strong and effective leadership are evident in science, where standards have risen, though less so in mathematics, where standards have remained static. The line management system works well in ensuring consistency, for example, in faculty planning. The one failure of the system has been the management of religious education, where the requirements of the county Agreed Syllabus have not been met. Heads of year provide effective leadership to their teams. However, they are not yet fully involved in monitoring their pupils' academic progress, because of the way their role is defined, and this prevents them from having a full overview of each pupil's progress.

69 Planning for development is a strong feature of the school, which enables it to translate its aims into a practical plan for action. The whole school priorities are very appropriate and are related to its over-arching aim of raising standards. Each of the priorities has a realistic related action plan and the faculty and other constituent plans have recently been produced to a common formula. The school development plan as a whole provides a useful and realistic tool for the further development of the school, though it could be even more effective if it made more explicit the link between whole-school and faculty plans.

70 The school evaluates its performance in a variety of ways, so that governors and senior managers know its strengths and weaknesses and can take appropriate action. Senior managers and heads of faculty have a very good understanding of the quality of teaching through the lesson observations described above. The school has procedures in place for dealing with any cases of lack of competence and there is documentary evidence that these have been used in recent years. Governors receive regular reports from heads of faculties on progress in their areas. Senior managers systematically review the work of faculties over the year, following an agreed pattern, through the line management system. This includes an annual review of the results of National Curriculum tests and GCSE and GCE Advanced level examinations and does involve analysis of the reasons for successes and failures. It does not yet involve setting agreed faculty targets for subsequent examination results, which would give it a sharper focus. The school has set realistic targets for its GCSE results. However, although it uses nationally validated tests to assess pupils' potential on entry, it has not yet set targets based on these at Key Stage 3. In the sixth form, students' potential and performance are analysed using the nationally recognised ALIS system. The school also evaluates the success of developments by surveying parents' and pupils' opinions, for example, the views of sixth form students on all aspects of sixth form provision, and by comparing its performance with that of other schools.

71 Financial planning and control are excellent. Every care is taken to ensure that finance is devoted to the educational priorities of the school, and to minimise expenditure by comparing costs and seeking best value for money. The sixth form is viable in that the income which it attracts matches its cost. In order to allow teachers to concentrate on their main task, administrative tasks are undertaken, where possible, by support staff rather than teachers. The school administrator is a member of the senior management team, which ensures that financial and educational decisions are closely linked. Governors are extremely well briefed on spending decisions and expenditure.

72 The level of staffing, both teaching and support, is satisfactory and there is a good match between the qualifications and expertise of the teachers and the subjects which they teach. With the planned building programme, accommodation is adequate overall for the needs of the curriculum. The provision of learning resources is satisfactory, though not in information and communication technology. The number of computers is below average for the size of the school and some of these are out of date. The library is well stocked, though, despite some recent pruning and replacement, some of its stock is also out of date.

73 The school receives an average level of funding and overall makes good use of the resources at its disposal, including books, equipment and other learning resources. Information and communication technology is well used in the administration of the school, though it is not yet sufficiently integrated into the pupils' learning. The intake is slightly below average and pupils make good progress overall. Both the ethos of the school and the quality of teaching are good. Taken together, these factors indicate that the school is giving good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER

Improve achievement and teaching at Key Stage 3 by ensuring:

- that work and materials are well matched to pupils' learning requirements (paragraph 21); *
- consistent and appropriately high expectations of pupils' achievements and attainment (paragraph 25);
- greater challenge and rigour in teaching (paragraph 26);
- clear strategies for the provision for the most able pupils and those with English as a second language (paragraphs 31, 32);
- secure procedures for National Curriculum teacher assessment in all subjects (paragraph 53);
- systematic target setting for attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 (paragraphs 4, 54). *

Meet statutory requirements for the curriculum by:

- planning and monitoring the provision of information and communication technology at Key Stage 4 (paragraph 34);
- allocating sufficient time to religious education to meet the requirements of the Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus (paragraphs 33, 34).

Move towards meeting statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils by:

- reviewing the use of tutorial time to allow pupils to reflect on spiritual and moral issues (paragraph 47).

* (These matters are being addressed in the school's development plan)

Other Issues

In addition to the key issues above, the school should seek to ensure that standards in mathematics rise in line with those in English and science (paragraph 95); and that pupils' achievements in art continue to improve, so that they match those in other subjects (paragraphs 113, 114).

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	192
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	41

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
4	18	41	32	5	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	985	167
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	78	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	26	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	252	2

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	26

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	11
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	31

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.2
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.5
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	1999	103	93	196

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	55	69	65
	Girls	73	68	57
	Total	128	137	122
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	66 (57)	70 (56)	63 (50)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	19 (35)	39 (36)	27 (27)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	61	69	91
	Girls	78	73	79
	Total	139	142	170
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	71 (61)	72 (60)	87 (61)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	30 (30)	42 (36)	41 (30)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	91	98	189

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	40	81	87
	Girls	55	87	88
	Total	95	168	175
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	50 (46)	89 (87)	93 (91)
	National	46.3 (44.6)	90.7 (89.8)	95.7 (95.2)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	40.2 (34.7)
	National	36.8 (37.8)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0	N/A
	National		N/A

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	24	23	47

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	17.5	15.5	16.5 (12.2)	6	8	7 (0)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (17.6)	2.7	2.8	2.8 (2.8)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	33	85
	National		N/A

International Baccalaureate		Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all they studied	School	0	N/A
	National		N/A

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	5
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	1
Indian	6
Pakistani	11
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	6
White	1106
Any other minority ethnic group	15

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	
Black – African heritage	0	
Black – other	1	
Indian	0	
Pakistani	0	
Bangladeshi	0	
Chinese	0	
White	44	3
Other minority ethnic groups	1	

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

Teachers and classes**Qualified teachers and classes:
Y7 – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	69
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	1:16.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

**Education support staff:
Y7– Y13**

Total number of education support staff	20
Total aggregate hours worked per week	393

**Deployment of teachers:
Y7 – Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78.6
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	25.23
Key Stage 4	20.41

Financial information

Financial year	1998-9
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	£
Total income	2,892,285
Total expenditure	2,882,316
Expenditure per pupil	2,481
Balance brought forward from previous year	85,814
Balance carried forward to next year	95,783

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1152
Number of questionnaires returned	152

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	44	48	8	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	57	38	5	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	33	55	10	0	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	18	66	14	2	0
The teaching is good.	36	56	4	0	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	36	49	13	2	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	47	51	0	0	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	66	30	2	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	28	51	16	0	5
The school is well led and managed.	42	52	4	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	46	46	3	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	50	39	8	0	3

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

ENGLISH

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

75 During Key Stage 3 English is taught as part of the enquiry course in Year 7 and by the English faculty in Years 8 and 9. Most pupils, including higher attaining pupils, make good progress across the key stage. As a result, they reach above-average levels of attainment by the end of Key Stage 3. Those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. Pupils' language skills develop well. Most pupils speak confidently and clearly and are increasingly able to adapt their language to different contexts. In group and pair work pupils often discuss and negotiate thoughtfully, mostly express themselves clearly and are able to advance and defend a point of view effectively and usually fluently. They listen well to each other and to their teachers. Reading develops well with pupils showing understanding of increasingly complex texts and higher attaining pupils in particular reading aloud expressively - such as in a Year 9 lesson where pupils were comparing cultural aspects of the novel *Walkabout* with Jaques "seven ages of man" speech from *As You Like It*.

76 Written work also develops well - in Year 7 pupils' suggested alternative endings to a Roald Dahl short story were often imaginative, sometimes extended, mostly well expressed. Some were very competently word-processed. By the end of the key stage pupils' written work shows increasing control and accuracy in a range of different kinds of writing, including effective note-making and drafting. Presentation is mostly good.

77 The attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 in the national tests in 1999 was close to the national average at level 5 and above, and below the national average at level 6 and above. These results were below average compared with schools with pupils from similar backgrounds. Taking the four years 1996-1999 together the performance of pupils in English is close to the national average. The performance of both boys and girls over that time span was close to the national average. The standards reached by pupils in the present Year 9, which are above the national average, indicate that standards in English are rising.

78 At Key Stage 4 pupils, including those with special educational needs and higher attaining pupils, make good progress in the development of their language skills. Listening skills develop well and speaking shows increasing control of form and sense of audience and appropriateness. In a Year 11 lesson on *The Crucible*, pupils in groups negotiated with each other very effectively to organise group presentations of their responses to a scene from the play. Their discussions showed good understanding of the play and their spoken contributions to the feedback session were lucid and appropriate. Reading aloud from the text to each other within groups was expressive and accurate. Written work at Key Stage 4 shows generally good use of note-making and drafting, increasing accuracy and sensitive response to poetry and drama in particular. Some work is very effectively word processed and attractively presented.

79 The department's policy is to enter as many pupils as possible for both English and English literature at GCSE. In both examinations in 1999 the percentage of pupils gaining the higher A*-C grades was above the national average for all maintained schools and almost all pupils who entered the examination attained at least a pass grade. These results are an improvement on the previous year and the trend of results is upwards.

80 In the sixth form, students make good progress in the GCE Advanced level English Literature course, showing a generally mature spoken and written response to their work. Written work shows good development with evidence of detailed research and there are some very accomplished pieces of writing though lower attaining students sometimes have difficulty in managing the appropriate language. There are well-organised notes, annotations, analytical writing and critical responses. Lively seminar discussion between the teacher and students about characterisation and language in *Much Ado about Nothing* in a Year 12 class showed students' mature debating skills and their good understanding and knowledge of their text. A Year 13 lesson on Ian McEwan's novel *The Child in Time* indicated that students have a very good knowledge of the text and that they can effectively analyse and compare different parts of it. Their discussion as a group was reflective, perceptive and collaborative - building upon each other's contributions and demonstrating their ability to use textual evidence to support their arguments.

81 In the 1999 GCE Advanced level the percentage of students entered for the English Literature examination who attained a high grade A or B grade was below the national expectation but the overall pass rate was in line with national expectation.

82 At both key stages and post-16 most pupils have very positive attitudes to their work, nearly always showing interest, responding enthusiastically to the tasks set for them and maintaining good concentration and focus - often thanks to skilful teaching and the very good relationships between teachers and pupils. Pupils work well together when asked to do so and show respect for each other's ideas. They are supportive of each other and show appreciation for each other's efforts. They respond very well to their teachers and are orderly and considerate. When opportunities arise pupils are keen to take initiative or accept responsibility such as in feeding back from a group discussion to the class or in taking a leading role in group activities. Much of the effective use of computers for word processing work is undertaken on the initiative of pupils.

83 Teaching is good at all stages. In half of lessons teaching is very good or excellent. In almost all lessons teaching is good, very good or excellent. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. The very good relationships which teachers maintain with pupils and the high quality of most of the teaching contribute significantly to pupils' progress, their enthusiastic response to most lessons and their good behaviour.

84 Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of the subject and are nearly always effective in presenting information and ideas to pupils, enabling them to increase their understanding. Lesson planning is well grounded on the department's schemes of work and resource materials. Expectations of what pupils can achieve are almost always appropriately high and pupils respond very well to the demands made upon them and to the praise and encouragement with which teachers support their efforts. Teachers use a variety of teaching methods and offer pupils a wide range of stimulating learning activities. There is very good use of pair and group work and also very good whole class teaching. Pupils are managed very well: the interesting, varied and demanding work, and the good relationships with teachers, contribute to the good behaviour. Learning resources - particularly materials produced by the department - are effectively deployed. There is particularly effective use of video extracts to promote understanding. In nearly all lessons time is well used - pupils keep working productively to the end of lessons - and the pace of learning is brisk.

85 Written work is marked and teachers' comments are aimed at encouraging pupils but there is generally insufficient indication to pupils on how to improve (except in the sixth form). In lessons teachers are good at assessing what pupils are doing and suggesting directions for improvement. Homework is used effectively to move learning on and to prepare for work to come. Teachers are sensitive to the needs of all pupils in their lessons.

86 The English curriculum is well planned to meet the needs of all pupils. The organisation of groups - mixed ability in Year 7 and Year 8 and grouped by attainment level from Year 9 - is effective in providing appropriate learning environments for pupils of different levels of prior attainment. Many lessons give rise to opportunities for pupils to consider wider moral, social, spiritual and cultural issues - often to do with relationships and behaviour represented in the texts which pupils are reading. Although teachers are generally good at discussing these issues, there are no departmental guidelines or policy to help ensure that opportunities are not missed or to help ensure consistency. The department enhances the curriculum through opportunities for pupils to take part in extra-curricular activities, such as theatre visits, a poetry competition in Year 8 and Year 9 and a public speaking contest.

87 The head of faculty provides good leadership and clear direction for the department, well supported by his colleagues. The faculty has an ethos of high achievement and of collaboration and contribution. Teachers work well together and they work hard to maintain a supportive and effective learning environment to help all pupils reach their full potential. Development planning is good, directed to raising standards and regularly evaluated. Monitoring of the progress and the work of the department is well done through both formal and informal procedures. The head of faculty is aware of the need to review and develop the faculty handbook to provide a shared working document as guidance to agreed practice and to help ensure consistency.

88 While the faculty has made good progress since the last inspection in improving teaching, encouraging private reading and tackling weaknesses in technical presentation, it has made little progress in improving access to word processing facilities and in developing the use of information and communication technology.

Drama

89 Drama is taught to all pupils in Year 8 and Year 9 by specialist drama teachers within the expressive arts faculty. At Key Stage 4 drama is a popular GCSE option for pupils. Post-16 theatre studies is offered as an A level course.

90 The percentage of pupils attaining GCSE higher grades of A*-C in both 1998 and 1999 was below the national average, though in 1999 all pupils entered for the examination achieved a grade. All pupils entered for GCE Advanced level theatre studies in 1999 passed but none attained the higher grades.

91 Drama is well managed and the teaching observed was always at least satisfactory and was often good, and sometimes very good or excellent. Relationships between teachers and pupils are generally good. Most pupils respond positively to work in drama, bringing enthusiasm, concentration, self-discipline and desire to do well. Their abilities to adopt and sustain a role with increasing sensitivity and awareness, to work creatively with each other in groups and to explore ideas and issues through drama all develop well. However, progress in drama at both key stages is impeded for some pupils by their limited control of the skills required to maintain focus and concentration. Their ability to adopt and sustain roles and to work sensitively with others is under-developed.

92 The curriculum and schemes of work for drama are effectively developed to establish continuity and progression between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 for those pupils who opt for drama. Drama makes an important - and planned - contribution to pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development through regular contributions to school assemblies as well as through the opportunities it presents for pupils to reflect upon themselves and their relationships by putting themselves imaginatively in other people's places. A Year 13 theatre studies lesson offered a striking example of this through the use of masks to explore the extent and effects of our reactions to personal appearances.

93 Drama contributes to extra-curricular opportunities for pupils, in particular through the annual whole-school performance produced by the expressive arts faculty - currently *The Little Shop of Horrors* - and through theatre visits.

MATHEMATICS

94 Standards are in line with national averages at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 and above average at the end of the sixth form. Overall performance in Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests over the last four years has been in line with that nationally. In 1999 it was just above the national average, with an increase in the number of pupils attaining the highest levels. It was in line with the national average for similar types of school and slightly better than that expected on the basis of the pupils' attainment on entry to the school. This was an improvement on 1998, when results were below the national average.

95 Performance at GCSE has been in line with that nationally over the last three years. There was a slight drop in A*-C grades to just below the national average in summer 1999, a result lower than expected given the above average Key Stage 3 National Curriculum test results of this group of pupils in 1997. Pupils' performance in science and English has improved over the last two years. Pupils now perform better in science than in mathematics and at an equivalent level in English. Two years ago pupils performed better in mathematics.

96 Performance at GCE Advanced level has been above that nationally over the last three years. Results at the highest A/B grades are higher than the national figure. In summer 1999, the four pupils who took the examination gained A grades at further mathematics, an excellent result in this particularly demanding examination.

97 There are no significant differences in the performance of different groups of pupils, except at Key Stage 4, where girls perform slightly better than boys at the higher A*-C grades. Nationally the performance of boys and girls is equivalent. Since the last inspection there has been no notable improvement in results at all three key stages, when compared with national averages.

98 The attainment of current Year 9 pupils matches the national average. The highest attainers are doing above average work. However, across the four equal, upper-ability groups the quality of work and the teaching seen was variable. Insufficient challenge in some tasks and questioning in lessons prevent all pupils in these groups gaining secure knowledge and understanding of work at the highest levels. Attainment also matches the national average in Year 11, where the very highest attainers undertake demanding work such as using iterative methods to solve equations. However, not all pupils in the middle sets are working with sufficient understanding at the higher levels to ensure A*-C grades at GCSE. By Year 9 pupils' number skills are generally secure, they have a good understanding of the angle properties of triangles and quadrilaterals and can solve simple algebraic equations. Graphical work is well developed for the higher attaining pupils. In both Key Stages 3 and 4 pupils are making satisfactory progress, but rarely achieve at levels higher than expected. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall, but it is better in Years 9 - 11 than in Years 7 and 8. In the latter, teachers do not always meet individual pupils' learning needs within the mixed ability groups. Students taking GCE Advanced level mathematics in the sixth form achieve well, and attainment is overall above average for current Year 13 students.

99 Pupils' numeracy skills are satisfactory, as they were at the time of the last inspection. They are well applied in geography and science, particularly in the use and interpretation of graphs. Basic number skills, such as multiplication tables, are often good. However pupils' strategies in using them for mental calculations are not developed well enough. Pupils are unable to use the principle of one per cent of a £1 being 1p to work out questions such as 37 per cent of £3 mentally. They are not always confident at working out calculations such as 26×7 in their head.

100 Pupils have good attitudes towards learning and wish to do well in mathematics. They work hard in the majority of lessons and make satisfactory progress, even on those occasions when teaching is uninspiring, badly structured or lacking challenge. Behaviour is generally good. Pupils respond particularly well to teachers who encourage and praise their efforts. In these classes they readily answer teachers' questions, knowing that answers, whether right or wrong, are received sympathetically. Good co-operative and independent learning was observed in the sixth form.

101 Teaching was at least satisfactory in 86 per cent of the lessons observed and good or, occasionally, very good in around 40 per cent. It was unsatisfactory in 14 per cent of lessons, all of which were at Key Stage 3. Teaching is particularly good in the sixth form, contributing to the high standards obtained. All the teachers of mathematics have good subject knowledge. However, a shortcoming in a significant number of lessons is the teacher's failure to deliver the subject in an inspiring and interesting manner, and thereby enable pupils to make the best possible gains in learning. The most effective lessons are well structured, with detailed planning identifying clear outcomes for the learning to take place. They move at a quick pace, having enough time at the end to recapitulate what has been learnt. This reinforces and checks pupils' understanding of key ideas. Introductions are lively, capturing pupils' interest and stimulating their learning, for example, a Year 7 lesson introducing pupils to the use of algebra to write mathematical rules. Mathematical patterns were developed through a story, with pupils clearly involved in sharing ideas and contributing their views. This resulted in nearly all pupils, including the lower attainers, achieving well, being able to express mathematical rules algebraically. Pupils' learning is also well consolidated when teachers' questioning requires pupils not only to give the correct answer, but to explain why. This supports not only their understanding but also that of other members of the class.

102 Weaknesses in teaching are attributable to insufficient planning of lessons. Too often teachers rely on the text book resource, without adapting the subject matter to match the learning needs of pupils and to make it interesting. This particularly affects the quality of pupils' learning in mixed ability groups in Years 7 and 8. In these lessons work on a significant number of occasions meets the needs of either the lowest attainers or the highest attainers, but not both. Progress is better for those groups of pupils in Years 9-11, which are set by ability. In these, teachers are able to provide work more accurately matched to the pupils' needs. However, opportunities are not always taken to use practical resources, although the use of computers and graphical calculators to support pupils' learning is now good, an improvement since the last inspection. The mathematics rooms, with no whiteboards or screens, do not enable easily the use of an overhead projector, a useful tool for the teaching of mathematics.

103 The narrow range of teaching styles, inhibiting pupils' learning experiences, was a key issue at the time of the last inspection. Actions taken by the faculty to address this have not been effective, hence there has been no significant improvement in standards. The head of faculty runs the faculty effectively on a day-to-day organisational basis, but there is no clear view where the faculty intends to be in the future. Assessment procedures are sound, but analysis of information on pupils' attainment is at an early stage. It is not yet being used sufficiently to identify areas for improvement and to set targets for examination results to raise the expectations of both teachers and pupils. Homework is regularly set and generally makes a good contribution to pupils' learning. Marking and feedback to pupils is inconsistent, in particular, with too few comments for pupils on how their work can be improved.

104 The faculty recognises that it needs to improve the Key Stage 3 scheme of work and good progress is now being made in this area. The development of a whole-school numeracy policy should accompany this. The faculty will need to familiarise itself with the work of the National Numeracy project, introduced into all primary schools this year. Pupils' achievement will be improved if the shortcomings identified in teaching are addressed. Lesson plans need to have a clear structure with interesting activities that motivate pupils and match their learning needs.

SCIENCE

105 Standards in science on entry to the school in Year 7 are average when compared with schools nationally. The standards of work seen in the inspection are in line with the standards reported at the last inspection. In Key Stage 3 pupils, including those with special educational needs, the highest attainers and pupils for whom English is an additional language, are acquiring satisfactory levels of scientific knowledge, understanding and practical skill in relation to their prior learning. The standard of work seen during the inspection is similar to that found in other schools. The average National Curriculum points score for science attained by pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 last year was just above that for similar schools, although the proportions of pupils attaining at the lowest and highest levels was broadly in line with national averages. When the attainment in science is compared over the last five years, Key Stage 3 standards have improved in the last two years. The current Year 9 are achieving standards broadly comparable with the 1999 performance. The recent improvements in standards in science are, in part, due to the re-organisation of the Year 9 classes where teachers are matching work better to the needs of the higher, average and lower attainers than they are in the mixed ability science classes in Years 7 and 8. The science department is now planning to make even better provision for the very highest attainers in Year 9 by planning work at the highest Key Stage 3 National Curriculum levels and by providing access to the Key Stage 4 Programmes of Study.

106 In Key Stage 4, the standard of work seen in GCSE single and double science is above average, as it was in GCSE science examinations last year. There has been a significant improvement in GCSE science results in the last two years, especially the performance of girls. The percentage of girls reaching GCSE grades A* and A in single and double science has risen sharply in the last two years and is well above average. The rise has been faster than that of the highest attaining boys. During Key Stage 4, science teachers monitor carefully the GCSE science grade predictions but they are not yet making enough use of all their assessments to ensure that all pupils are working to their individual capacity. There is some exemplary assessing, recording and monitoring of progress in Key Stages 3 and 4, but these procedures are not consistently in place across the science team. Standards of work seen in Year 13 in GCE Advanced level biology, chemistry and physics match the standards found in other schools. The results in chemistry have been lower than those in biology and physics in recent years. New, more rigorous assessment, monitoring and target setting procedures have been introduced in chemistry this year by a new chemistry team and standards in chemistry are now improving.

107 In Years 7 and 8, pupils are gaining a broad understanding of science across the National Curriculum Programmes of Study for biology, chemistry and physics. They are learning to follow instructions, a weakness reported at the last inspection, developing a scientific vocabulary and learning investigative skills. Achievements in Years 7 and 8 are generally satisfactory but all pupils tend to learn at the same pace. There is not enough scope in lesson planning to give the very highest attainers extra challenging work. The needs of pupils with special educational needs and those who have English as an additional language are also not being fully included in lesson plans. Although these pupils may experience difficulty in accessing reading and writing tasks and sometimes when talking about their work, they do make good progress in the development of their practical skills. The very highest attainers in Year 9 write with great fluency, articulate their understanding clearly with good use of analysis, evaluation and scientific language. They have, for example, a good understanding of the reactivity series of metals and of the relationship between photosynthesis and respiration. Generally they are not making as much use of chemical symbols and formulae as is expected at this level.

108 Pupils are making satisfactory progress during Key Stage 3 but significantly faster progress during Key Stage 4, especially the highest attaining girls who outperform boys, as they do nationally. In Key Stage 4 the highest attainers in single and double science are making extensive use of chemical symbols and formulae; and in double science they have a well above average understanding of the formation of ions from atoms. These pupils are supported by very good teaching using imaginative resources; by their own very positive attitude to learning; and by having constructive relationships with peers and the teacher. Pupils across the attainment range achieve higher standards in chemistry and physics investigations than in biology. Pupils in middle sets in Key Stage 4 attain above average standards compared with standards nationally, for example, when understanding and calculating heat of reactions and when relating electronic structure to the position of elements in the periodic table. In the sixth form, students are making good progress and achieve well in response to high quality teaching and through their own mature commitment to study. Students in Year 12 are generally on course to attain higher standards in advanced level biology, chemistry and physics than in Year 13.

109 Pupils behave well in science and their response overall to the subject is good, enabling them to acquire new knowledge, understanding and investigative skills steadily during Key Stage 3, the greatest gains being made by the highest attainers in Year 9, where commitment to learning is excellent. The pace of learning in science then increases significantly during Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, where the quality of teaching is generally of a higher standard than in Key Stage 3, where the match of tasks to stages of learning is better than in Key Stage 3, and where there is a significant improvement in pupils' attitudes to learning as they get older. The exception is a small minority of lower attainers in Key Stage 4 who learn slowly, because they waste time in lessons, finding it difficult to settle and apply themselves to their tasks. Pupils respond very positively to the imaginative range of methods used to promote their active involvement in learning science, including role-play, presentations to peers, visual aids, key word cards to promote their literacy skills, investigative and research work, model making and tasks to get lessons off to a prompt start. Pupils also respond very positively when completing their course work investigations in Key Stage 4, making good use of information and communications technology for research and for the presentation of diagrams, results and analyses. Some of the best quality diagnostic marking and feedback to pupils is in the assessment of this course work.

110 Since the last inspection teachers have improved their planning of opportunities to use information and communications technology but rightly recognise in the department action plan that the use of information and communications technology is still an area for development. There are not enough computers in the science department. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection and it is now good in over half the lessons and very good in over a fifth. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. No longer is time wasted at the start of lessons. In Key Stage 3, the quality of teaching is satisfactory and occasionally it is very good. In Key Stage 4, two thirds of the teaching is at least good and occasionally very good. In the sixth form the great majority of the teaching is good and frequently very good. The introduction of individual target-setting is beginning to help pupils understand how they can improve but is not yet fully established and there is no overall academic target-setting for the end of each key stage. Targets set in annual reports to parents are not specific enough to guide and monitor progress.

111 Pupils benefit from having a team of science teachers who are very knowledgeable about their subjects and who have the skill of imparting this knowledge clearly and accurately. In Key Stage 3 the methods inform but do not always inspire pupils as much as they do with older pupils. In these lessons pupils' responses are frequently short and inaudible. Teachers mainly manage pupils securely, so that no learning time is lost. The regular provision of homework is carefully planned to extend pupils' understanding of the topics they are studying.

112 Since the last inspection, some laboratories have been refurbished to a high standard, which only serves to highlight the ageing fixtures and fittings in other laboratories. There continue to be significantly more pupils studying single science in Key Stage 4 than is the case nationally but they choose for the positive reason of widening the range of subjects studied. Some progress has been made in improving the stock of library books but more updating is still required. The post of head of science is currently filled on a temporary basis. Once the post is filled permanently, the department can plan over a longer period of time to effect the improvements identified in this report. Progress since the last inspection has been good, facilitated by the temporary head of science who is providing a strong lead and who has done much to create a very effective team who share their ideas and methods very productively.

ART

113 GCSE examination results have risen year on year from an extremely low base at the time of the last inspection. The proportion of candidates achieving grades A*-C at GCSE in 1999 was still below the national average, 52 per cent compared with 60 per cent for this type of school. Pupils generally attain lower grades in art than in their other subjects. This is particularly so for boys. Sixth form results from a very small number of students have been average recently, with some good GNVQ grades, especially from the 1998 group.

114 Pupils' attainment is below average at the end of Key Stage 3. Whilst girls often attain the standards expected of them across a wide range of art skills and understanding, boys' performance pulls the overall average down very considerably. Some aspects of mark-making and craft-based work show the expected spread of attainment, for example, in studies of aboriginal art and artefacts completed recently in Year 9. Some stencilling and string prints in Year 8 show an average range of competence. Drawing, however, is weak throughout Key Stage 3, particularly amongst boys. The standards of many are well below average by the end of Year 9. Standards of painting are improving in Key Stage 3, and in lower years are as expected for pupils' ages.

115 Attainment is also below average overall in Key Stage 4, with the difference between girls' and boys' attainment remaining greater than average. Girls' standards are, again, broadly average. Most higher attaining pupils are girls, as in the 1999 examination results. Many lower attaining pupils, especially boys, take art in Key Stage 4, bringing with them literacy difficulties which reduce the standards of investigative work necessary at this key stage. Pupils' work often also shows the residual weakness in drawing from Key Stage 3, which again diminishes its quality. Pupils' strengths lie in their confidence in using a wide variety of media and scale. They frequently produce final pieces which are significantly better than the standards of their visual or practical research. This is too frequently insufficient or shallow, including too little first-hand observational study.

116 Sixth form work shows the range of standards expected for the GCE Advanced level, AS level and GNVQ courses. Here, work takes on the individual characteristics and style essential for success. Students continue to explore a good range of media, and benefit considerably from their visits to galleries. Their experience at St Ives, for example, has informed a recent project well, creating good attainment in much of their two and three dimensional work. Year 13 have been invited to mount an exhibition at the Tate Gallery in St Ives, and much of this work shows good learning from their visit.

117 Attitudes to art vary considerably. Many lessons are characterised by a purposeful, focused atmosphere, where pupils learn well. Here, they apply effectively what the teacher demonstrates or discusses. A clear link exists between the teaching and what pupils learn, leading to satisfactory progress. In some classes though, this link is missing. Pupils' attitudes are dismissive and sometimes confrontational. Here, behaviour, especially of boys, is unsatisfactory. A significant, identifiable minority, usually of boys, are too noisy, do not work well, are truculent and challenging, and greatly detract from the learning of others. The effect of this behaviour on learning at both key stages needs to be addressed. Attitudes in the sixth form are good. Students are articulate and show mature responses to stimulus, developing their own individual styles.

118 The teaching observed was always at least satisfactory and sometimes good. It was notably good in the sixth form. Here, teachers' good understanding of the requirements of different examinations is very helpful to students' learning as they remain focused well on the different demands. Good relationships with sixth form students create the mature responses noted above. In Key Stages 3 and 4, class management is often good, leading to pupils who would otherwise be wasting time developing standards which are appropriate for their ability levels. This is often achieved through sensitive individual sessions with pupils. In plenary sessions, teachers often explain carefully and patiently what is required, how pupils can improve their work, and what the learning objectives are. Where teaching is less effective, poor behaviour is insufficiently well managed to allow for good learning. Drawing needs to be taught more rigorously to support standards in other media. Many pupils need more help in the literacy aspects of the subject.

119 Art was much criticised in the last report. The department has improved in major areas since then, but some shortcomings remain. National Curriculum requirements are now met. Examination results have improved; planning for improvement in key painting and drawing skills has improved but is, as yet, far from effective in its objective. Most lessons now occur at a reasonable pace, and have a clear direction. After recent upheavals in staffing, the new team is cohesive and well poised for future development. A recently appointed head of faculty has begun analysing areas for improvements across the whole expressive arts faculty. For the art department these must include assessment, which is not yet used to identify or redress skills deficits such as drawing, although information on this does exist. The continuing under-achievement of some pupils, especially boys, remains of great concern. Inclusion of effective use of information technology in the department is also an issue. Accommodation for art is sufficient, but the state of cleanliness is poor, creating an environment far from conducive to good learning.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

120 At the end of Key Stage 3, pupils reach standards in line with the national average with around 60 per cent achieving level 5 or better. Although Year 7 pupils start school with limited practical skills, they make satisfactory progress in the next three years and achieve standards in line with those in most schools. Most pupils produce sound skills in graphical work and often present their design ideas well. This is most evident in the Year 9 work on design logos where high attaining pupils used computer graphics well. Pupils also gain a basic understanding of control technology and have practical experience of using a range of different materials including food, timber, textiles and plastic. However, pupils make less progress in their understanding of some aspects of systems and control, and in developing a more rigorous approach to design. Furthermore, pupils' practical making skills are less developed than they might be, because there are long gaps between working in the different areas of food, textiles, and resistant materials.

121 Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are close to the national average, though there is considerable variation between the different courses. GCSE standards at the end of Key Stage 4 have been mostly sustained since the last inspection, with some fluctuation between courses. Results in GCSE graphic products have improved significantly with 78 per cent of pupils achieving grades A*-C in 1999 compared with the national average of 49 per cent. These standards are reflected in current project work, where pupils demonstrate a range of graphical and model making techniques, with folder work showing good design ideas and effective use of information technology. GCSE food technology results have fluctuated considerably in recent years and, overall, have been below national average. More recently, pupils have been achieving standards closer to expectations, with most showing secure practical skills, and with the higher attaining having a stronger grasp of the process of product testing and evaluation. Both resistant materials and textiles technology have sustained better than average GCSE results that compare favourably with similar schools. The current standard of design work is less strong in both courses, reflecting the larger number of pupils who are lower attaining and those with special educational needs. A number of these pupils are making unsatisfactory progress because of a poor attitude and application. However, most pupils in those courses are achieving appropriately and in some cases, better than expected. For example, in GCSE resistant materials, an excellent automation toy project combined a good understanding of mechanisms and the design and make process. In GCSE textiles technology a pupil with special educational needs gained considerably in confidence and practical skills in a rag doll project. The school has just introduced a combined catering and construction vocational course for 20 pupils, mostly with special educational needs, and their progress is good. This was evident in a catering lesson where pupils were developing their practical and organisational skills.

122 The GCE Advanced level design and technology students are reaching standards close to the national average. Most are achieving in line with expectations, with particular strengths in research skills and graphical presentation.

123 Teaching was at least satisfactory in nearly nine out of ten lessons observed and was good and, on occasion, very good, in over a third. Teachers share strengths in class management and specialist knowledge, and have clear expectations about work, effort and behaviour. Their good class management ensures that pupils stay on task and work productively. This was evident in the Year 10 vocational course where a number of challenging pupils were handled sensitively but firmly and made good progress. Most staff have a firm grasp of their specialist area and use it effectively in areas such as graphics to help higher attaining pupils gain higher grades in GCSE and GCE Advanced level. In food and textiles too, staff give informed and constructive guidance to pupils, enabling them to develop more secure practical making skills. However, the few instances of unsatisfactory teaching were the result of temporary staff who did not have the skills to support pupils effectively in design work and the use of information technology.

124 Staff place considerable emphasis on pupils showing care and accuracy in written work and this is reflected in well-presented folders in which the higher attaining can evaluate their design work. In more successful lessons, teachers use questioning well, enabling pupils to explain their ideas and recall previous learning. Most teachers provide opportunities for pupils to use their number skills, mostly in measurement, and are able to support pupils in their understanding and use of information technology in controlling devices and producing graphics. The team of teachers are clear about the requirements of GCSE work, though are sensitive to the need to match those demands to the needs and skills of pupils. In this way a pupil with special educational needs in a textiles technology lesson followed a special project with additional classroom support, while in a graphic products class, predominantly higher attaining pupils were set a challenging pace and were achieving high standards. Those high expectations extend to regular and significant amounts of homework in all years, that most pupils duly complete.

125 On the other hand, in the two areas of planning and assessment, teaching is less effective in supporting learning. The planned Key Stage 3 teaching and learning activities are sometimes repetitious and do not always provide sufficient range, in terms of National Curriculum attainment levels, to meet the needs of all pupils. On occasion, there is insufficient practical work, particularly in early part of the key stage, to make full use of resources and provide new and interesting learning opportunities. Assessment at Key Stage 3 is less secure in terms of the end of key stage judgements, and does not make sufficient and explicit use of attainment levels to help pupils understand how they can achieve higher standards.

126 The subject was judged to be good in all respects at the last inspection and the conscientious faculty team have worked hard in an effort to sustain those standards. A number of factors have made the task harder including staff shortages and prolonged staff absence that have affected the leadership of the faculty and coverage of courses. Standards have largely been maintained at GCSE level in spite of this, and resources continue to be good though information technology facilities are becoming dated. The school now needs to strengthen the faculty team and improve some aspects of curriculum planning and assessment, particularly at Key Stage 3.

GEOGRAPHY

127 When pupils enter the school in Year 7, their attainment in geography is just below the average. By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is in line with the national average. In Key Stage 4, all pupils study humanities to GCSE level. This course contains a significant element of geography and attainment in humanities is above the national average. A relatively small group study geography to GCSE (32 pupils in 1999, and only 16 in the current year). Pupils opting for the geography course tend to be average and lower attainers and, by the end of the key stage, attainment for this group is below the national average. By the end of their course in the sixth form, students' attainment is in line with the national average. Girls tend to achieve better than boys across the age range.

128 Attainment at Key Stage 3 has improved since the last inspection, when it was described as being below expectations. In Key Stage 4, standards have been maintained in the humanities GCSE and remain well above the national average. In the geography option at GCSE, standards remain below the national average. In 1999, although 100 per cent gained Grades A* to G, only 31.2 per cent achieved A* to C Grades. At GCE Advanced level, standards have remained above the national average and in 1999, were significantly above this, when all ten students were in the range A to C and 80 per cent gained Grades A or B.

129 In Key Stage 3, pupils make good progress and achieve standards which are in line with the average. Those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. In Year 7, pupils make a good start to the acquisition of basic map skills and begin to develop reporting skills based on their visit to Yorkshire. Teachers encourage pupils to develop a range of enquiry skills through the analysis of a variety of information and data in Years 8 and 9. Pupils respond well to the challenge which this offers. In Year 8, for example, they can analyse a complex diagram of the earth's structure. In Year 9, they work from a cross section to make well-informed decisions about the best location for a village. They use language effectively to discuss their work in small groups and report their findings accurately in written work, maps and diagrams.

130 In Key Stage 4, this enquiry work is further developed in both the humanities course and the geography option. Emphasis is placed on acquiring thinking and decision-making skills. A higher proportion of pupils have difficulty in grasping key ideas in the geography option, particularly in Year 11, and many have difficulty in expressing their ideas clearly. Progress and achievement are unsatisfactory for the majority of this group, but the small number of higher attainers have a good understanding of concepts and report the results of their enquiries effectively. Lower attainers work at a slow pace and, despite the largely satisfactory teaching, do not complete enough work to a satisfactory level. When stimulated, for example, by the opportunity to work with computers, achievement is improved, but a minority of pupils still work too slowly. In Year 10 there is a higher standard of achievement and progress. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.

131 Sixth form students make effective use of research skills and this enables them to make good progress and achieve standards in line with the national average. In Year 12, for example, they analyse video news reports and printed media to extract evidence on regional inequalities. In Year 13, they use computers to research information on hazards through the Internet and CD ROMs. They are thorough in their enquiries and in recording their conclusions. This enables most students to build up a good level of knowledge and understanding. The best field and coursework reports are of a high standard.

132 The teaching of geography has improved considerably since the last inspection, when, at Key Stage 3, unchallenging and inappropriate activities were noted. Teaching is now never less than satisfactory and is good in 80 per cent of lessons in Key Stage 3 and in 50 per cent in Key Stage 4. In the sixth form, teaching is consistently good. Teachers work well together as a team to pool their good subject knowledge and plan lessons which challenge pupils to respond well and make good progress. This is rewarded by the positive attitudes and good behaviour of most pupils and classroom relationships are consistently constructive. Teachers are skilled at involving pupils in enquiry and the best lessons are very stimulating, enabling pupils to think for themselves and develop decision-making skills. The teaching promotes a high level of interest and concentration and pupils usually work at a good pace. Homework is well used to enhance learning.

133 There are no policy statements on strategies for the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy, but teachers provide a range of opportunities in these areas. Pupils are enabled to gain effective practice of using and interpreting numerical data across the age range. Good use is made of pairs and groups to promote oral work and teachers are beginning to use techniques, such as word displays, to help pupils develop writing and reading skills.

134 The subject area is well managed and various improvements are being put in place within the humanities faculty and, specifically, within the subject area. The main thrust at present is the thorough review and redevelopment of the curriculum which includes the development of differentiated materials to meet the needs of lower attainers and stretch higher attainers. This is linked with the development of a constructive assessment system which is now being implemented well. The lack of specialist rooms constrains the quality of classroom display, which at best is satisfactory.

135 The subject area has made satisfactory improvements since the last inspection, particularly at Key Stage 3, where teaching and attainment have improved. The statutory curriculum is now covered at Key Stage 3. With its effective leadership and strong teaching team, the department is well placed to continue improvements by raising attainment in the geography option at Key Stage 4 and developing the contribution of the subject to improving pupils' literacy and numeracy skills.

HISTORY

136 Pupils' attainment both on entry to the school and at the end of Key Stage 3 is broadly in line with the national average. The results of the National Curriculum assessments in both 1998 and 1999 were close to national averages with the results in 1999 showing a seven per cent improvement in the proportion of pupils gaining level 5 or above when compared with the results of 1998. In 1999 pupils also achieved standards which matched national averages in GCSE with the percentage of pupils gaining the higher grades of A* and A being well above average. This represented a significant improvement on the results in 1998, which were below average. Over the last three years there has been a steady trend of improvement at GCSE including a significant increase in the numbers taking the subject. Standards have also improved at GCE Advanced level with a steady increase in the percentage of pupils gaining the higher grades of A and B. The results in 1999 were broadly in line with the national average. The numbers involved were too few for a valid closer comparison.

137 Pupils' progress and achievement are satisfactory at Key Stage 3. Progress is faster in Years 8 and 9 than in Year 7 where, although pupils make satisfactory progress overall, the extent of their progress is restricted by the delivery of history in the context of the enquiry course. This has important implications for progression and continuity in their acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills in particular. In Years 8 and 9 pupils make rapid progress and achieve standards which are in line with the average. Their knowledge and understanding of topics studied are sound and, in the case of higher attaining pupils, they are good. There is also sound development of historical skills, especially those of source based investigation, chronology and empathy. Most pupils use their knowledge well to provide clear descriptions and explanations, and higher attaining pupils are beginning to draw well substantiated conclusions. Literacy skills develop well, with good development of well-structured extended writing.

138 Pupils' progress and achievements are better at Key Stage 4, where they build effectively on the secure grounding at Key Stage 3. Knowledge and understanding deepen. Higher attaining pupils demonstrate good knowledge and a secure grasp of complex issues. For instance, pupils of all levels of attainment in a Year 11 class confidently tackled a task set on the reasons for the Bolsheviks' success during the Russian revolution. They thought deeply and applied their knowledge well in making links and drawing well substantiated conclusions. History skills are well developed. Pupils become especially competent in the analysis and comparison of different sources of historical evidence. Average and lower attaining pupils also achieve well in comparison with their prior attainment, but in many cases their oral work is better than their written work. Most pupils use numeracy skills competently in the analysis and presentation of information.

139 At GCE Advanced level, students make good progress and achieve well in relation to their standards at GCSE. Those seen during the inspection were working at full stretch, constantly engaged in thinking and undertaking tasks which required effort, concentration and perseverance. Their knowledge and understanding at this level are sound and, in the case of higher attaining students, good. They are often used most effectively in lively debate and cogent argument. Historical skills become very well developed, with students working with a mature level of interest and involvement. Written work reflects thorough research in the majority of cases, but that of higher and lower attaining students varies considerably. In the case of the latter, work is not as detailed or well balanced, nor supported by evidence.

140 Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall though at times their progress is slowed by materials not being sufficiently well matched to their learning needs. Those with English as an additional language also make satisfactory progress but there are instances when the very few pupils with very limited knowledge of English are disadvantaged by a lack of strategies to meet their learning requirements. The most able pupils make good and often very good progress responding with relish to the high demands made of them in most lessons. There is no significant difference overall in the attainment of boys and girls.

141 The great majority of pupils respond very well to the high levels of challenge which characterise most lessons. It is only in a very few lessons at Key Stage 3 where there is some under-achievement, especially by boys, as a consequence of too little being expected of them. In the great majority of instances pupils work hard, with real interest and they concentrate well. They learn especially well when working together in groups or pairs and are very supportive of each other's learning. Good relationships and behaviour contribute strongly to the very good learning ethos in nearly all lessons.

142 The response is particularly impressive in the sixth form, where the teachers' very high subject expertise inspires students to develop a mature interest and enthusiasm for history. Learning at all stages is well supported by good subject expertise. It is a major factor in the clear vision for the work in history, in the setting of learning objectives and in the detailed planning, which ensures that these are well met. It also facilitates clear teaching, which is well adjusted to provide an appropriate level of challenge and to meet the learning requirements of pupils of different ability and at different stages of learning.

143 Teaching is of high quality. In the lessons seen during the inspection it was good or better in 80 per cent. In 40 per cent of lessons it was very good and in 20 per cent it was excellent. None of the teaching observed was less than satisfactory.

144 Pupils' positive response and progress in lessons are significantly enhanced by a good range of well-timed learning activities. Notable among these is the creative and skilled use made of group work which results in pupils of all levels of attainment learning through in-depth discussion and analysis of historical evidence. This was particularly well exemplified in a lesson in Year 10, where pupils were keenly involved in exploring the reasons for Hitler's rise to power and also in a humanities lesson in Year 11, where pupils in a lower ability set were assisting each other well in successfully grasping complex issues relating to the Cold War. The great majority of lessons are characterised by on-going challenge and stimulus. Questioning is used effectively to probe understanding and extend thinking. Pupils' interest is maintained by a brisk and purposeful pace and positive air of enjoyment in learning. Historical skills develop very well as a result of the strong emphasis on pupils working as historians from the outset.

145 Pupils' progress is assessed and recorded carefully. There is however, some inconsistency in the use of performance data to set targets for improvement, especially at Key Stage 3. Work is marked regularly with written comments to help pupils to improve their standards. Sometimes however, these are too brief to be helpful, especially in the case of higher attaining pupils. Homework is used well as an integral part of learning to extend learning and to prepare for the next stages of study. It is valuable in promoting study skills and pupils' responsibility for their learning.

146 The department is very well led and managed. This is a vibrant and thinking department where there is a soundly based vision and commitment to the teaching of history. Challenging targets are set for improvement and are being achieved within a systematic cycle of review and development planning which includes the close monitoring of work and lesson observation. Teachers are very well supported, especially by the detailed planning and support for professional development. The arrangements for teaching the subject within the enquiry course in Year 7 provide a sound basis in skills development. However, the introduction Study Unit 1 of the National Curriculum being delayed until Year 8 places a great pressure on the teachers in delivering all four study units in two instead of three years. Planning takes good account of best value principles. Good use is made of all the resources at the department's disposal apart from information technology which is underused to support learning.

147 The department has made very good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have risen significantly and teaching has improved. The statutory requirements for history at Key Stage 3 are now fully met. History is now provided both within the humanities course and as a separate subject at Key Stage 4 and numbers taking the subject at both GCSE and GCE Advanced level are increasing rapidly.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

148 Pupils come to the school with information technology skills below average and standards remain below average at the end of Key Stage 3, with only around a half the pupils reaching the national expectation. The school has recently introduced specific information technology provision in Year 9, and within the enquiry course in Year 7, to offset the limited and uneven opportunities for computer use across the different subjects. These changes are beginning to have some effect but for most pupils, their Key Stage 3 progress has been unsatisfactory and they achieve less well than pupils in other schools.

149 During the three years of the key stage, pupils experience a range of applications, mainly in mathematics, science and design and technology, where they gain a basic understanding of modelling, measurement and control. Higher attaining pupils have a firmer understanding about how computers work and quickly learn to use new software. This was evident in a Year 9 design and technology lesson on computer graphics, where those pupils were able to create and modify their own logo designs. Higher attaining pupils worked with similar independence in the Year 9 information technology lesson, where they were combining photographs and text to create different newspaper layouts. However, most pupils require some teacher support to make progress, particularly where the software differs from that used outside of school. Pupils with special educational needs often need greater support to open applications and save their work.

150 The school has made only limited attempts to provide a range of opportunities in Key Stage 4 that build on earlier experiences and, in this respect, there has been little change since the last report. Any further progress which pupils make in developing information technology knowledge and skills depends on their personal interest in computers and the GCSE courses followed. Mostly, higher attaining pupils use information technology well in design and technology and science projects, and achieve good standards in word processing reports, combining text and pictures and using spreadsheets to produce graphs. Increasing numbers work in the library and at home and show greater competence in researching information using CD ROM and the Internet. There are also some effective uses of information technology for musical composition and graphic design. However, most pupils make limited progress in developing their information technology skills, though pupils with special educational needs following the vocational course now have new and increased opportunities.

151 Standards of information technology in the sixth form are below average, reflecting most students' limited prior experiences. Students in GCE Advanced level courses such as geography and sociology have specific skills in research methodology, and the new information technology core module is ensuring all students have some research and communication skills. The GNVQ Advanced business students benefit from a weekly taught lesson and reach the key skill level 3 standard.

152 Since the last inspection, overall standards have improved a little in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form, though they remain below average across all three stages. In Key Stage 4 and to a lesser extent, Key Stage 3, the restricted learning opportunities result in pupils making less than expected progress.

153 Most of the specific information technology teaching is provided by the co-ordinator and two mathematics teachers, with major cross-curricular contributions from mathematics, design and technology and science. Teaching in the discrete information technology lessons is uniformly good. The main strengths of that teaching include careful lesson planning, secure information technology knowledge, effective use of time and resources and good class management. The lesson booklets show considerable reflection in identifying clear learning outcomes, and interesting and well devised contexts, in which Year 9 pupils and sixth form students can apply their knowledge and skills. For example, the GNVQ learning and assignment activity was based around an estate agency that gave students a realistic work situation in which to apply their knowledge of word processing, spreadsheets and databases. The students clearly gained from this in learning about business communications and spreadsheets calculations. Although staff did not regard themselves as specialists, they showed a sound understanding of the main applications and used this well in supporting pupils' learning. In a Year 9 lesson, the teacher made very good use of a digital projector to explain to pupils how to create picture and text frames in producing a newspaper page. This enabled most pupils to make good progress, with the teacher providing extra help to the lower attaining, including those with special educational needs. Teachers manage the learning context well, engage the interest of pupils and maintain a good pace to learning through regular checking of pupils' work.

154 The main aspect of teaching that requires development is more careful recording of pupils' progress and assessing the levels of achievement. A significant amount of information technology teaching in Key Stage 3 takes place across a number of subjects, and previous attempts at assessing standards at the end of Key Stage 3 have been highly inaccurate. Few pupils have a clear idea of their current achievement in terms of National Curriculum levels or what they need to do to improve.

155 The school has recently appointed a new information technology co-ordinator who is in the process of establishing a more effective taught programme and improving the co-ordination and development of the curriculum, staff and resources. The school now covers the Key Stage 3 Programme of Study but does not meet statutory requirements for Key Stage 4. Furthermore, nearly half of National Curriculum subjects do not meet the requirement for planned information technology opportunities within their schemes of work. Considerable recent investment has been made to improve the inadequate information technology resources, though the number of computers is still below national average and much of the software is becoming dated. Progress since the last inspection has been both recent and limited. Resources and teaching have improved, and combined with a modest increase in access to computers, should begin to raise standards that currently continue to be below national average. Standards could be further improved by addressing the weaknesses outlined above.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

156 Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are in line with national averages with, however, relatively few pupils reaching the higher levels of 6 and above. Pupils' attainment at Key Stage 4 has improved over the past two years and especially so in French in 1999. It now lies above national averages in terms of GCSE A*-C grades in both French and German. Moreover, every one of the over 350 modern language candidates in the past two years has achieved at least a G grade. At GCE Advanced level there were candidates only in French in 1999. Their results were disappointing and below national averages. Current attainment within the sixth form, however, shows standards to be in line with nationally expected performance, with individual students potentially capable of the highest grades.

157 Towards the end of Key Stage 3, high attainers cope well with demanding listening tasks, such as dialogues recorded at near normal speed by native speakers. They have begun to write in short paragraphs to describe, for example, weekend activities, using the past tense accurately. Most top sets in Years 8 and 9 make good progress but in one or two instances coverage of the syllabus is slow and too much English is used. Most wide ability classes also progress well. Average and low attainers, including those with special educational needs, can use an appropriate range of expressions to give personal information. In writing they learn how to adopt a model by substituting words and phrases in order, for example, to describe their own house. In one or two of these classes, where there is a large number of pupils with special educational needs without learning support, progress is slow. The department maintains a detailed assessment scheme, which enables it to track pupils' progress effectively through Key Stage 3.

158 Towards the end of Key Stage 4 higher attainers are writing in more complex sentences over a wider range of topics with a developing knowledge of grammar. They make good use of opportunities to speak in the language and begin to use the past tense with growing confidence. Other learners, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in responding to a more limited range of language. For example, they work hard at pronunciation and can sustain a simple conversation on a familiar topic. In both key stages there are, however, a few pupils who, despite positive encouragement, are disaffected and are achieving little.

159 In the sixth form current standards are at least satisfactory and in some instances in French, high. Towards the end of their course, students can talk in French about the literature they are reading with confidence. They show a high level of commitment with several intending to study French at university. The best of their essay work shows an ability to argue a case considering a range of differing viewpoints, for example, when discussing whether sport fosters aggression.

160 Almost two-thirds of lessons observed were of good or very good quality with only a small proportion unsatisfactory. Teachers are well organised. They plan lessons with a variety of activities, usually taking good account of the need for pupils' involvement through, for example, pair-work. Pupils thus remain interested and practise an appropriate range of language skills. Resources and materials are often carefully adapted to meet the needs of different pupils. In the best practice pupils' learning is well consolidated because they are challenged to work first with support, for example, from a worksheet, and then from memory without support. Marking of written work is regular and detailed but there are too few written comments highlighting key errors that would help pupils to understand how they can improve.

161 Teachers relate well to pupils, creating a positive climate for learning. There is much evidence of good management of pupils, where teachers deal with poor behaviour effectively in a non-confrontational way. Teachers are invariably encouraging about pupils' attempts to speak in French and German. With few exceptions they provide frequent opportunities for pair work as well as whole class work, correcting error sensitively as appropriate. This results in many pupils at both key stages and in the sixth form showing a pleasing readiness to speak in the foreign language. To raise speaking standards further still the faculty should share its best practice, create more opportunities in both key stages for pupils to make extended utterances, for example, in the final phase of a lesson and make speaking a more prominent part of its rewards policy.

162 The faculty has made sound progress since the last inspection, in particular in raising standards in speaking and writing. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good, despite rooming arrangements which mean that some staff seldom teach two consecutive periods in the same classroom. There is a strong team ethos with much production and sharing of resources. The faculty has considerable talent and expertise. These now need to be more formally shared through reciprocal observation of classroom practice, so that the faculty can sharpen its focus on what its priorities should be. Agreed policies should then be reflected in an extended handbook and schemes of work. The faculty has a good range of visits abroad. These could be enhanced by the use of information and communication technology, which the faculty has identified as one of its development targets.

MUSIC

163 Standards in music at Key Stage 4 and post-16 are consistently high, with many students achieving results which are above the national average. Pupils consistently achieve results which are above the school's own average figures in both phases. Current standards in Years 11, 12 and 13 show students performing above the level expected nationally.

164 By the end of Key Stage 3, whilst a minority of pupils is on course to achieve the expectation in music, it is estimated that the majority will still be working towards the level expected nationally. Figures showing previous achievement in music at the end of Key Stage 3 are unavailable.

165 In all lessons observed pupils had the opportunity to develop their practical skills in composition and performance, to acquire new knowledge and to further their understanding of technical vocabulary. They demonstrated the ability to recall and build on previous learning. Pupils with instrumental skills in the upper school are achieving at a high level. Lessons generally meet the needs of all pupils, through tasks which differentiate through outcome. Whilst extension activities are available for the most able, no separate tasks were noted for students with learning difficulties, although these pupils are well known to staff.

166 Pupils enjoy their music lessons. They have positive attitudes towards learning and are eager to share their work. They work co-operatively at keyboards and show respect for the equipment they use. Behaviour is generally good. Some low level disruption was observed at Key Stage 3, which was usually dealt with effectively, but not always immediately. This resulted in impaired concentration for some pupils.

167 In the lessons observed, teaching was satisfactory and occasionally good at Key Stage 3, and good or very good at Key Stages 4 and 5. Teachers plan effectively and are able to demonstrate a secure grasp of subject matter and subject skills. High levels of musicianship are used to particular effect in the teaching of GCE Advanced level music. The level of challenge is appropriately high in most lessons but expectations of what pupils should achieve could be made clearer.

168 Although teachers rightly integrate the activities of performing, composing and listening, the proportion of time devoted to skill acquisition is inadequate, which affects the rate of progress of all pupils, and is one reason for their underachievement at the end of Key Stage 3. Limitations in resources and accommodation also affect progress. The need to share keyboards makes poor use of pupils' time, and affects the cultivation of good performing habits. The demand on accommodation, which is at times further compromised by the presence of instrumental teachers, also impedes group work.

169 Assessment of pupils' progress is satisfactory overall. Pupils receive verbal praise and encouragement for their efforts in class, and homework is used to extend or consolidate learning. Written work is regularly marked, with helpful comments from the teacher. However other aspects of assessment need to be improved. For example, assessment criteria are not shared with pupils, which would enable them to derive maximum benefit from this feedback. Whilst compositions are recorded on tape, there is no such record of performances, thus limiting opportunities for appraisal and reflection on progress. At Key Stage 4 the assessment scheme is unrelated to that of the GCSE music syllabus. There is little evidence of the use of self-assessment or of long-term target-setting to raise standards. Assessment post-16 on the other hand is thorough and constructive. Pupils benefit from re-drafting compositions, and from detailed correction, for example, in harmony exercises.

170 The extra-curricular programme remains a strength of the department, and provides opportunities for the more able players. The department is committed to extending these opportunities to a greater range of pupils. The provision for instrumental tuition is also to be commended, with free tuition offered to those pursuing the GCSE course. In two of the three instrumental lessons observed pupils were making good progress with a range of challenging tasks. However, the effective use and systematic monitoring of practice diaries was not always evident.

171 Under the leadership of the present head of department, the department has gone some way towards addressing the issues highlighted in the last inspection. Information technology now features as a priority in the department's development plan, and the purchase of new equipment has been budgeted for. Pupils at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form use technology in composition, and the acquisition of keyboards allows pupils in the lower school access to new sound sources. The school's planned building programme will significantly enhance the quality of its music accommodation. The provision for music at Key Stage 3 has been improved, with a weekly 55-minute lesson replacing the previous 'carousel' system, though numbers opting for music at Key Stage 4 remain relatively small. Schemes of work now incorporate many references to the musical heritage of other cultures and singing is integrated into the units studied.

172 In addition to the measures already planned, in order to raise standards further, the department should revise its assessment strategies, beginning with a more systematic appraisal of pupils' competence when they arrive in Year 7, and ensure that adequate time is devoted to the development of practical skills.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

173 On entry to the school in Year 7, pupils' standards in physical education are in line with those met nationally. Pupils of all levels of ability make good progress, so that by the end of both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, standards are above national averages. At the end of Key Stage 4, there have been entries in GCSE sports studies in the last two years. The results have been above the national average in terms of the proportion gaining grades A* to C and in line with the average in terms of those gaining grades A*-G. Within this general picture, girls' results were below the national average in 1998 and reached the national average in 1999. Boys' results were well above the average. Written work seen and lessons observed with the present Year 11 indicate that standards are now more even amongst boys and girls. The present Year 13 group will be the first to enter GCE Advanced level. Work and lessons seen show that they are reaching above-average standards. Since the last inspection, standards of attainment in physical education have risen.

174 Through all lessons seen, the intense motivation of pupils, coupled with highly organised teaching, have led to achievements well above average in a wide variety of activities. Pupils in Key Stage 3 progress quickly both in individual lessons and over time. In Year 7, pupils beginning table tennis make very fast progress in learning the essential strokes and understanding positioning. In Year 8, teaching conducted at a lively pace and demonstrating high expectations enables basketball skills to be developed and used accurately with a good understanding of tactics. Individual attention succeeds in helping those with difficulties master basic skills effectively. Those with the greatest skills are helped to higher standards by individual attention and opportunities for further work in extra-curricular sessions. These standards and patterns of help to individuals apply through all years in the physical education faculty. Lessons at Key Stage 4 demonstrate pupils refining their skills and their understanding very well. GCSE work is thorough, with strengths in careful presentation and much attention to detail. Sixth form written work is good. Longer pieces of writing have carefully presented depth of thinking. In trampolining, students produce more complex sequences with great care as to presentation. There are no general differences in the performance and achievements of boys and girls in any lessons or work seen.

175 Throughout the age range, there are examples of very effective self-evaluation by pupils of their own performances. Where this happens it plays a significant role in improving later levels of performance and thinking. In Year 12 and 13 trampolining, it is a major factor in the individual student's improvement on positioning and maintaining elevation. In Year 10 dance those with greater previous experience and skill work together to create flowing sequences for 1940's and 1950's dance. In Year 7 table tennis, pupils' coaching-style self and partner evaluation was a major factor in their intense progress. Application of these successful teaching and learning skills is needed in all lessons to improve the already high standards even further.

176 Pupils arrive quickly, determined to learn and enjoy. Very good, often excellent behaviour is coupled with keen listening and very good co-operative working. This enables pupils to make good or better progress.

177 Teaching is of high quality. In all the lessons observed it was at least satisfactory. Over two thirds was at least good and half was very good or excellent in equal proportions. The very positive pupils' attitudes are matched by teachers' own high motivation and clear plans for pupils' learning. In Year 10 soccer skills work, this combination of factors leads to the achievement of very effective tactics and of mature thinking. In Year 10 basketball, it produces successful alternative methods of lay-up and shooting not normally met at this stage. In sixth form work on stress and anxiety, the successful development of thinking and deduction comes as a result of the teacher's ability to put complex issues into clear language. A feature of the great majority of lessons is steady, often intense pace which enables much more to be done and higher standards to be reached, as in Year 8 girls' basketball. This is particularly effective in longer lessons so that learning does not flag.

178 The quality of leadership and management in physical education is very good. There is sensible allocation of responsibilities to well-qualified teachers, who cover the whole range of activities. The use of accommodation, resources and equipment is very good. Teachers use assessment well, for example, by changing the curriculum so that it helps girls achieve better. Extra-curricular activities make a very strong contribution to pupils' achievements and standards. These involve over 30 per cent of pupils. They cover a very wide range of activities and are recreational as well as providing the school's highly successful teams and supporting talented individuals.

179 Since the last inspection, physical education has not just maintained its standards but improved them, particularly in standards of work and progress in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Progress has been as much as could be expected.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

180 Religious education is taught as part of the enquiry course in Year 7 and on a modular basis in the humanities programme in Key Stages 3 and 4. There is a small GCE Advanced level group in the sixth form. During the inspection week it was possible to see classes only at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Work from Year 7 was seen and pupils from Year 9 were interviewed. There was no work available for Years 8 and 9.

181 Standards of attainment at Key Stage 3 are below those set out in the Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus. Pupils have a broad knowledge of the main beliefs and practices of the six religions that are covered by the syllabus but are not able to explain them in any depth. For instance, Year 7 pupils have a good knowledge of the major festivals that are held in a number of religions but this foundation has not been built upon, so that by Year 9 pupils' knowledge and understanding remain at the same level. Year 9 pupils can name the five pillars of faith in Islam but cannot go on to demonstrate the impact of these on the life of a Muslim in such events as the Hajj. They are fully aware of the fact that having a religious faith has an impact on people's lives but cannot describe the significance of such ceremonies as the Bar Mitzvah for a Jewish family. They have no real depth of knowledge of the major practices and beliefs of Christianity.

182 At Key Stage 4 pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of Hinduism, though their overall knowledge of the other major religions, including Christianity, is poor. They are aware of the way in which the two religions they are currently examining provide a framework of values. They can discuss in a sensitive manner such philosophical questions as "Who and what am I?". They cannot, however, bring to these discussions any depth of knowledge about the beliefs and practices of the major religions. Overall, therefore, standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are below those expected by the Agreed Syllabus.

183 Sixth form students taking GCE Advanced level religious studies have a very good knowledge of the complex theological issues covered. A group of students was handling the complicated teaching of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in a very competent manner. In the general studies group, students were discussing contemporary religious and moral situations in a thoughtful and sensitive way.

184 Wall displays and workbooks from Year 7 pupils indicate that pupils have made good progress in this year. In particular, the work of pupils with special education needs indicates very good progress. However, pupils in the present Year 9 have not studied any religious education units this year, so that their overall level of achievement is unsatisfactory. This has been caused by the long gaps between the units of study and by a lack of time allocated within humanities to religious education. For those taking GCE Advanced level, progress is good. None of the students had taken the subject at GCSE level but they were handling complex concepts and theories well.

185 In the eight lessons seen the standard of teaching was at least satisfactory, with six of the eight being good or better. Pupils' motivation and interest are maintained by lessons that are well planned using a variety of teaching methods and resources. At all times clear expectations and good classroom management resulted in a good standard of behaviour. In a particularly inspiring lesson a student was used to illustrate the Hindu concept of Atman. The specialist teacher's good knowledge helps pupils understand difficult concepts from other religions. This was well illustrated in a lesson dealing with a Hindu shrine. Creative work on sacred places from Year 7 demonstrated that the non-specialist teachers were well informed. At post-16 level a non-specialist teacher had prepared a very thorough lesson on difficult theological questions which challenged pupils to produce work of a high standard. When handling group discussion teachers effectively used brainstorming techniques to raise issues but did not always handle the resulting discussion so well. Homework is well matched to the subject being covered. Although encouraging pupils to use information and communication technology in research for homework, the department does not use computers in the classroom.

186 When religious education is being taught, books are well marked and progress is monitored satisfactorily. However, the lack of overall monitoring and reporting on progress is a weakness. There are no significant records of pupils' overall performance.

187 There are several significant factors which contribute to the unsatisfactory standards. Although the school follows the spirit of the Agreed Syllabus, a lack of time at Key Stage 3 does not allow it to be fully covered. This is compounded by large gaps of time between units, at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 so that pupils' knowledge is not regularly reinforced. Earlier deficiencies in the management of the subject, especially poor communications and consequent misunderstanding about the scheme of work, have meant that pupils in Year 9 did not receive their entitlement to religious education.

188 There has been no significant progress since the last inspection, although religious education has recently been given a much higher profile in the school development plan. The management problems have been addressed and units of work have been prepared for teaching later in the year. The time allocation and mismatch between the humanities GCSE and the Agreed Syllabus have yet to be resolved.