

INSPECTION REPORT

THE ALBANY SCHOOL

Hornchurch, Romford

LEA area: Havering

Unique reference number: 102346

Headteacher: Mrs M Johnson

Reporting inspector: Dr Vivien Johnston
8402

Dates of inspection: 5th – 9th March 2001

Inspection number: 185659

Full inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

© Crown copyright 2001

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Broadstone Road Hornchurch Romford Essex
Postcode:	RM12 4AJ
Telephone number:	01708 441537
Fax number:	01708 437157
Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs J Hardy
Date of previous inspection:	November 1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
8402	Dr Vivien Johnston	Registered inspector	Equal opportunities	The school's results and pupils' achievements How well are pupils taught? What should the school do to improve further?
9053	Mrs Vivienne Phillips	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
24142	Mrs Sylvia McConville	Team inspector	English	
1503	Mr Terry Browne	Team inspector	Mathematics	
2396	Mr Michael Davidson	Team inspector	Science	
2495	Mr Brian Munden	Team inspector	Information and communications technology (ICT)	
23880	Ms Olivia Hall	Team inspector	Art Special educational needs	
15051	Mrs Lynne Kauffman	Team inspector	Design and technology	How well does the school care for its pupils?
10817	Mr George Rayner	Team inspector	Geography History	
2496	Dr Tony O'Sullivan	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
11746	Mr Robin Coulthard	Team inspector	Music Religious education	How well is the school led and managed?
22042	Mr John Challands	Team inspector	Physical education	

The inspection contractor was:

e-Qualitas Ltd, Langshaw, Pastens Road, Limpsfield Chart, Oxted, Surrey RH8 0RE.

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Complaints Manager, Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education

Alexandra House, 33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE.

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	10
The school's results and pupils' achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?	14
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS?	16
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	18
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?	20
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	21
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	24
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	25
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	29

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The Albany School is a mixed comprehensive school in a residential area of Hornchurch. It has 794 pupils, which is smaller than most other secondary schools. In almost all the year groups, boys outnumber girls. The proportion of pupils (8.1 per cent) known to be entitled to a free school meal is below the average for schools nationally, although pupils' socio-economic backgrounds are average overall. Few pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language; as they are not at an early stage of learning the language, they do not need extra help. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs (13.7 per cent) is below the national average. Twenty-seven pupils have statements of special educational need, mostly for learning or behavioural difficulties. This proportion is above average compared to schools nationally. Pupils enter the school with a wide range of attainment, but standards are broadly average overall at the start of Year 7.

The inspection of this school included a detailed inspection of its provision for pupils with special educational needs.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The teaching is good overall, enabling pupils to do well at GCSE. Standards are above average in English, well above average in ICT and very high in drama. In most other subjects, standards are average at the end of Years 9 and 11. Pupils' achievement over time is satisfactory, although the school is experiencing staffing turnover that has affected pupils' learning in several subjects. The leadership and management of the headteacher, senior managers and heads of department are satisfactory overall, though some areas of the school's work are not managed effectively enough. The school has a number of strengths. It has a very positive ethos, and is a very caring community. Pupils are well motivated, and their behaviour is good. Links with the community are very good. Overall, the school's effectiveness and the value for money it provides are satisfactory.

What the school does well

- The school's overall results at GCSE are improving, and the proportion gaining five or more passes at A* to C is well above the national average.
- Pupils do particularly well in drama, English and information and communications technology (ICT).
- Much teaching is good; teachers generally have high expectations of pupils and encourage them to do well.
- Pupils' attitudes are very positive, which contributes to the strong ethos of the school.
- Pupils are treated as individuals; the school is very caring, and is particularly effective in its provision for pupils' social development.
- The personal and social education (PSE) programme, careers education, provision for work experience and the school's links with the community are very good.

What could be improved

- The standards in religious education, which are too low because of weaknesses in teaching and too little time being given to this subject.
- The arrangements for staffing and managing the school, as they do not enable it to monitor, evaluate and develop all aspects of its work effectively.
- Some teachers' focus on enabling all pupils to learn as well as they should.
- Pupils' opportunities to use and develop their skills in ICT in most subjects.
- The attention paid to enabling pupils to develop spiritual awareness and to having opportunities for reflection.

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 November 1995. Its improvement since then has been satisfactory. Since the inspection, overall GCSE results have risen at a faster rate than nationally. Results in the tests at the end of Year 9 have remained broadly the same for the last five years. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is better. The subjects of modern foreign languages and ICT are now areas of strength, but the use of ICT within other subjects is still not managed effectively. The quality of teaching and learning are better, particularly in Years 10 and 11. The strengths in behaviour, relationships and pastoral support have been maintained. Some issues identified by the last inspection remain weaknesses. These include the provision for religious education, and meeting the requirement for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. Senior and middle management posts have been re-

organised, but the senior management team is still too large for a school of this size.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with				<i>Key</i>
	all schools			similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E

Results of the Key Stage 3 national tests were above average in English, mathematics and science in 2000. Compared to similar schools, they were average in English and mathematics, but below average in science. The results in English and science have varied considerably, but in mathematics they have followed a broadly upward trend for the last five years. The overall trend for these three subjects is below the national trend of improvement as the 2000 results are similar to those of 1996 and 1997.

The school's overall GCSE results (the average total point scores) have risen at a rate faster than the national trend. In 2000, the percentage of pupils who gained one or more GCSE grade G or better was well above the national average, while the percentage gaining five or more grades A* to G was above average. Year 11 pupils' results at five or more grades A* to C were above average, and well above average when the results of the ICT examination most took in Year 10 are counted in. Boys did better than girls in 2000, and in two of the four preceding years. Compared to similar schools (those with a similar proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals), the results at five or more grades A* to C and at one or more grade A* to G were well above average, while the results at five or more grades A* to G were above average.

Pupils' work and the lessons observed during the inspection showed that standards are average overall in Years 9 and 11. In relation to their prior attainment, pupils' achievement is satisfactory in all year groups. In English, standards are above average and pupils' achievement is good. Standards in drama are very high, and pupils' achievement is very good. In mathematics, science, and most other subjects, standards are average and pupils' achievement is satisfactory, as it is in literacy and numeracy. However, standards in music are below average, although pupils' achievement has improved recently and is now satisfactory because of better teaching. In religious education, standards are well below what is expected, and pupils' achievement is poor because of weaknesses in teaching and a lack of time for the subject.

The school met its targets for GCSE results in 2000. The targets for 2001 are slightly lower than those for 2000, and were based on the pupils' results in the tests in Year 9. The standards being attained by pupils now in Year 11 indicate that these examination targets are likely to be met.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good attitudes to learning. Pupils enjoy their work, and the extra-curricular activities provided.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. In some lessons, their behaviour is exemplary, but occasionally weaknesses in teaching lead to restless or inappropriate behaviour.
Personal development and relationships	Good personal development and relationships. Pupils take their responsibilities very seriously, and use opportunities for initiative very well. However, pupils' awareness of others' beliefs and values is much more limited because of a lack of regular opportunities for reflection, debate and critical thinking.
Attendance	Satisfactory. Attendance is usually close to the national average, as is unauthorised absence. Pupils' punctuality is satisfactory.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The teaching was very good or, occasionally, excellent in 27 per cent of the lessons observed during the inspection, and satisfactory or better in 94 per cent. The proportion of good or better teaching (63 per cent) was higher than in many schools inspected, but the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching (6 per cent) was about average. The quality of pupils' learning was similar to that of the teaching, and slightly better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. Teaching and learning are good in English, design and technology, French, history, ICT and physical education, and excellent in drama. They are satisfactory overall in mathematics and science, although some weaknesses were found in both subjects. In other subjects they are satisfactory. Staff turnover and a lack of expertise contribute to some unsatisfactory teaching, especially in religious education, and have affected pupils' learning.

The effective teaching was characterised by high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour, and good planning for all to make progress. Teachers questioned pupils well, and in the best lessons they encouraged them to reflect and evaluate for themselves. The pace of learning was good, and pupils worked willingly and enjoyed the challenges. In a small proportion of lessons, teachers' expectations were too low and the work did not match the pupils' needs. Some pupils became inattentive, and their behaviour was not checked firmly enough. They learned too little in these lessons. Generally, however, pupils are confident and independent learners who do their best.

The skills of literacy and numeracy are taught satisfactorily across the curriculum, though better attention is paid to developing reading and writing than to numeracy. The school meets the needs of most pupils, including those with special educational needs, well. Although the teaching in some subjects does not expect enough of higher-attaining pupils, gifted and talented pupils have good opportunities to take extra GCSE courses.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good overall. A wide range of subjects is taken at GCSE, including over half of the pupils taking an ICT examination in Year 10 and another in Year 11. The PSE programme is well planned, and careers and work experience arrangements are very good. The school's community links make a very good contribution to the curriculum. However, religious education does not meet requirements, and the provision for ICT in other subjects is inconsistent. Good extra-curricular activities.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Pupils are well-integrated in mainstream lessons, and given good support. Almost all are entered for GCSE examinations, with increasing success. However, the school provides too few opportunities for pupils to opt for work-related courses.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Sound overall. The provision for pupils' social development is very good, and it is good for their moral development. The promotion of cultural awareness is satisfactory, but the provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory because opportunities are missed.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good procedures to ensure pupils' welfare, and for assessing how they are doing academically and to set targets. Teachers' use of assessment information to guide their planning is unsatisfactory.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	Good links with parents, and information about their children's progress. Parents are supportive, and contribute well to their children's learning at

	school and at home.
--	---------------------

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Satisfactory overall. The headteacher is very dedicated, and leads by example. She provides an effective role model by maintaining a very high standard in her own teaching. The senior management team have clearly-defined responsibilities that they carry out conscientiously. However, some aspects of the school's work are not managed well enough.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Sound involvement in shaping the direction of the school. However, the governors have not ensured that the school has sufficiently effective arrangements for managing all aspects of its work. They have not ensured that all statutory requirements are met, including the provision of a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. Overall, they have not fulfilled their responsibilities satisfactorily.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory overall, with a strength in the school's focus on raising GCSE examination results and boys' attainment. The system for keeping a check on the quality of teaching is not rigorous enough. Some areas of the school's work are not evaluated carefully to find out what needs to be improved
The strategic use of resources	Unsatisfactory overall. Staffing, accommodation and learning resources are unsatisfactory. There is an imbalance in the staffing at senior and middle management levels, with too many senior staff for a school of its size. Several subjects have too few resources, and the library has insufficient space and books. The accommodation is insufficient for the needs of the curriculum, and in a worn condition. Financial management is satisfactory. The school applies the principles of best value satisfactorily.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children are expected to work hard and achieve their best. • The school is approachable if they have questions or a problem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of homework their children are set. • The information they receive on how well their children are getting on.

The inspectors agreed with parents' views that pupils are expected to do well and that the school is approachable. They found that a satisfactory amount of homework is generally set, and that annual reports to parents are informative although, as a few parents said, they often do not give pupils precise targets for improvement. The timing of the Year 8 reports is too soon after the Year 7 reports, but other information is provided later in the school year.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. In this report, the term 'standards' refers to pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage, in relation to a benchmark such as National Curriculum levels. 'Above average' standards, for example, means that an above-average proportion of pupils has attained the level expected nationally for pupils of that age (or a higher level). 'Achievement' refers to how well pupils have done in relation to what one would expect of these particular pupils. The pupils' prior attainment, what they could already do, is the reference point for pupils' achievement. 'Similar schools' refers to those schools with a similar proportion of pupils known to be eligible for a free school meal.
2. Standards on entry in Year 7, as shown by pupils' results in the national tests at the end of Year 6, are broadly average. However, the results of other tests carried out by the school at the start of Year 7 are below average. Some evidence showed that a higher proportion of boys than girls enter the school with above-average standards.
3. Results of the Key Stage 3 national tests were above average in English, mathematics and science in 2000. Compared to similar schools, they were average in English and mathematics, but below average in science – overall, they were average. Girls and boys performed equally well overall and in English and mathematics. In science, boys did better than girls. The results have varied considerably in English and science, with both subjects experiencing a significant fall followed by an improvement in the last year or two. The school's view is that the English results fell in 1999 because of the impact of staffing difficulties which have now been overcome, leading to improved results in 2000. The mathematics results have followed a broadly upward trend over the last five years. The overall trend for these three subjects is below the national trend of improvement as the 2000 results are similar those of 1996 and 1997.
4. The school's GCSE results have improved since the last inspection. Results at five or more GCSE grades A* to G have risen from 91 per cent in 1996 to 96 per cent in 2000, which was above the national figure of 91 per cent. The percentage who gained five or more grades A* to C doubled between 1996 and 2000, when 63 per cent gained these grades compared to 47 per cent nationally.
5. The picture at five or more grades A* to C is complicated by the fact that many pupils take a GCSE in information and communications technology (ICT) at the end of Year 10, and another ICT subject at the end of Year 11, and some do the same in design and technology. Almost all are very successful in the examinations they take in Year 10, and gain grade C or higher. When only the Year 11 results are taken into account, the school's results at five or more grades A* to C were above the national average, but if the Year 10 results are also counted the school's results were well above average. In both cases, boys did better than girls overall, as they did in two of the four preceding years.
6. The average total points score, which is calculated by totalling each pupil's score for the GCSEs taken and then averaging the scores of all the pupils in the year group, has risen at a rate faster than the national trend. It has been well above the national average for the last three years. This overall comparison with national results is favourable because the number of GCSE examinations taken is higher than in most schools. Most pupils are successfully entered for at least ten subjects. In addition to the opportunities for many pupils to take GCSE a year early, some pupils take extra GCSEs through the lunchtime and after-school study opportunities offered by several departments, including art. These are often pupils who have been identified as likely to gain at least a grade C.
7. Another factor to be taken into consideration is that in many subjects a higher proportion of the year group has taken the examination. For example, 98 per cent were entered for science compared to 81 per cent nationally. Despite this, in almost all the subjects in which an above-average proportion of the year group has taken GCSE, pupils' average points score is close to the national figure, showing that the results are better than nationally. The school's policy is that all who complete a GCSE course will be entered for the examination, and the results indicate that lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs have been supported well and so enabled to be successful.

8. The results show that the school has been very successful in enabling lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs to gain GCSE qualifications. In 2000, 99 per cent of pupils gained at least one grade G or better, compared to about 96 per cent nationally, and 96 per cent gained five or more grades G or better compared to 90 per cent nationally.

9. Another way of evaluating the school's GCSE results in 2000 is to compare them with the pupils' results in the tests at the end of Year 9 two years earlier. This showed that the results for pupils gaining one or more grade G were above average, whereas at five or more grades G or better the results were average. At five or more grades C or better, the Year 11 results were average, but when the Year 10 ICT figures are counted in the school's results were above average. The average total points score was well above the national figure for pupils with similar Year 9 test scores.

10. The school met its targets for GCSE results in 2000. These were that 58-59 per cent of the pupils would gain five or more grades A* to C, and 98 to 100 per cent would gain one or more grade A* to G. The target for average GCSE points score was 45 to 49. The targets for 2001 are slightly lower than those for 2000. The targets were based on the students' results in the national tests when they were in Year 9. The standards being attained by the pupils now in Year 11 indicate that these examination targets are likely to be met, despite the staffing turnover that the school is currently experiencing in several subjects.

11. The evidence of classroom observations and a scrutiny of pupils' written work was used to evaluate the standards attained in Years 9 and 11. This evidence showed that, overall, standards are average in both year groups. In relation to their prior attainment, including the evidence of results at the end of the previous key stage, pupils' achievement is satisfactory in Key Stages 3 and 4.

12. The progress made by pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory at both key stages, and so they achieve the standards expected in relation to their prior attainment. Pupils in Year 7 with particular weaknesses in literacy are given good extra help in a lunchtime club and in some lessons. Pupils withdrawn for additional reading make good progress as a result of their positive attitudes and value the very good relationships with the learning support assistant. The pupils achieve well in many areas of the curriculum, including art, design and technology, drama, English, French and ICT. This is because they are fully involved and interested, and the work is successfully targeted to raise their expectations. A scrutiny of pupils' work provided during the inspection showed that their achievements in planning, organising and presenting written work are satisfactory although some pupils' handwriting skills are weak. At Key Stage 4, pupils with special needs make good progress in enhancing their study skills through well-focused additional support to improve literacy and numeracy skills. Where pupils' achievement is less than expected, for example in science, work is not adapted to the needs of these pupils.

13. Gifted and talented pupils make satisfactory progress during Key Stage 3, and their achievement matches that of other pupils. In Years 10 and 11, the school makes good provision for high-attaining pupils to take extra courses, for example through the after-school study sessions, and so their achievement is good overall. However, undemanding teaching in several subjects leads to the gifted and talented pupils not being challenged sufficiently, and so not making the progress of which they are capable. For example, in art and design, pupils have too few opportunities to extend their knowledge of artists' techniques and to see original paintings, and this contributes to the comparative lack of higher GCSE grades.

14. Standards in English are above average in Year 9 and Year 11, and pupils' achievement is good. Pupils show strengths in their writing skills as a result of the strong emphasis teachers place on careful planning, drafting and editing so that finished pieces of written work are pupils' best efforts. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 9 compare novels they have studied and analyse plays and poems, skilfully identifying points of similarity and difference with well chosen quotations to support their opinions. Year 11 pupils approach literature work confidently. They understand and express quite complex ideas about character and structure. As a result of the good guidance they receive from their teachers, they write effectively in their coursework essays, showing detailed knowledge of the texts and good analytical skills.

15. Standards in literacy across the curriculum are satisfactory. Pupils use their skills to write neatly and present their work with care. By Year 11, most pupils write appropriately for a variety of tasks and purposes. They make notes and are capable of developing their ideas at length. Many make good use of

word processing for their homework assignments and of the Internet for research. Given encouragement, pupils read independently for information and interest, though pupils' use of the library for wider reading is restricted by its poor resources. However, some teachers miss opportunities to reinforce the importance of literacy skills and are not consistent about the standards that are expected.

16. In drama, the standard of work attained is very high at the end of Year 9, with a strength in performance. Pupils show a very good knowledge of techniques, and ability to adapt them. Standards are also very high at the end of Year 11, and often excellent in performance work. Pupils deliberately seek difficult challenges and they employ a wide range of dramatic devices with marked confidence.

17. Standards in mathematics are broadly average in Years 9 and 11, and pupils' achievement is generally satisfactory. Standards are lower than the test and GCSE results last year, partly because of the impact of current staffing difficulties. This was evident in the inconsistent quality of some Key Stage 3 pupils' work over time. At Key Stage 4, high-attaining pupils are methodical in solving algebraic equations and applying trigonometry. They have built up good skills for investigating within mathematics, leading to some high quality coursework. Lower-attaining pupils calculate competently. Pupils are hardworking and teachers prepare them well for examinations, both factors that contribute to pupils doing well at GCSE.

18. Numeracy across the curriculum is satisfactory overall. A whole-school numeracy initiative has identified some appropriate targets and there is good practice in some individual subjects. For example, science has a booklet for each pupil and a series of lessons to link the subject to developing skills in numeracy. In design and technology, pupils use scale and measurement competently. In ICT, pupils make good use of spreadsheets and databases.

19. Standards in science are average in Year 9. They are higher in the area of scientific knowledge than in the areas of understanding and the skills of planning, carrying out and recording scientific investigations. Standards are also average in Year 11. The highest-attaining pupils, on course for the higher GCSE grades, are producing substantial amounts of work which are well focused on examination requirements. Other Year 11 pupils are experiencing broadly the same curriculum and they also are generally keeping up a satisfactory rate of work. In both key stages, pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall.

20. In art and design, design and technology, geography and physical education, standards are average in Year 9 and Year 11, and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Sociology is taught as an option in Years 10 and 11. Standards are average and pupils' achievement is satisfactory.

21. In history, standards are above average in Year 9, and pupils' achievement is good. Many pupils are developing good skills in analysing sources and in classifying causes, such as the long and short-term reasons for the First World War. Some higher-attaining pupils have produced detailed projects, based on good enquiry. Standards are average in Year 11, and pupils' achievement is good overall. They have a sound knowledge of the events that they have studied, and recall and use this appropriately. However, some pupils copy relevant information from sources, but do not synthesize it.

22. In ICT, standards are well above average in Years 9 and 11. Pupils achieve well because they receive very good individual teaching in ICT lessons. Year 9 pupils have developed good levels of knowledge and skill in word processing, desktop publishing, spreadsheets, databases, elements of measurement and control and in their understanding of the applications and effects of computers on society. They use computers confidently. The GCSE courses enable pupils to build well on their work in previous years.

23. The use of computers elsewhere in the curriculum is under-developed. This means that those pupils in Key Stage 4 who do not take an ICT course do not make the progress they should through applying and extending their ICT skills in other subjects. Some good use of ICT is made in history, geography, design and technology, and science and music are developing this aspect of their curricula.

24. In modern foreign languages, standards in French are average in Year 9, whereas standards in German are below average. Overall, pupils' achievement is satisfactory in both languages at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4, achievement is now good in French, and satisfactory in German. Year 11 pupils' work is of an average standard in French, but well below average in German. The specialist German teacher has

recently left the school, which has had a negative impact on the pupils' confidence and on the standard of their work, though results of mock GCSE examinations suggest the potential for final results being in line with national averages.

25. In music, standards are below average in Year 9. Pupils have not systematically developed a working knowledge of the elements of music prescribed in the National Curriculum over the key stage. Therefore they do not compose and perform confidently, and their knowledge of musical theory is limited. Their achievement has been unsatisfactory, but is now good because the new head of music is providing challenging work. Standards are below the national expectation for those following the music option in Year 11. Pupils' achievement in relation to their previous attainment is, however, good. Few have flair in composing and performing, and generally pupils' knowledge of musical theory and their facility for analysing music they hear is very limited.

26. In religious education, standards in Years 9 and 11 are well below the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus and pupils' achievement is poor. Their written work is too brief and often perfunctory, because of time constraints and non-specialist teaching. Too much time has been spent on undemanding illustrating of their written work. Pupils' contributions to class discussions are mostly lightweight, and there is too little evidence of pupils learning from religious education how to empathise with others or to understand the value for believers of a personal creed.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

27. Improvement in pupils' attitudes, values and personal development has been steady since the last inspection. Pupils are very positive about what the school offers them. Their attitudes to learning are very good. They appreciate the opportunities to try a wider range of subjects in more depth than was possible at primary school and to be successful in subjects where their achievement had seemed modest before. They enjoy all the extra-curricular activities provided, including their first experience of competitive sport. They are happy to work conscientiously in lessons, especially when teaching is focused sharply on what individuals need to do to learn effectively. When teaching is stimulating, pupils relish chances to express their feelings and become absorbed in their learning.

28. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good, in general. Pupils respond well to the school's codes of conduct and the expectation that they will act responsibly. In the best lessons, such as in drama, their behaviour is exemplary. When teaching does not meet the needs of everyone in the class, those individuals who are bored or find the work too hard, sometimes behave badly and disrupt other pupils' learning. In a few instances, weak classroom management triggers episodes of restless or inappropriate behaviour. This reduces the amount of learning that takes place, on occasion to an unsatisfactory level. As parents suggested, the behaviour of a very small minority of pupils spoils particular lessons for others. In most circumstances, almost all pupils are polite, helpful and self-disciplined, following the lead set by the headteacher's quiet authority.

29. Pupils are clear that they feel safe and well supported while in school. Bullying is rare. Inspectors found that the school takes care to deal promptly and effectively with all identified incidents, but understand the concern of individual parents about incidents of bullying that have not been resolved to their satisfaction. The school excluded 27 pupils in the year prior to inspection. Two of these were permanent exclusions. Exclusion is used sparingly but appropriately, noting current national guidance. The rate of exclusions, both permanent and temporary, is about average.

30. Personal development is good overall. Pupils take their responsibilities within the school community very seriously and use opportunities for initiative very well, as was very clear during a special lunch to celebrate community links. Many are active in supporting these community links, including fund-raising for charity. Pupils benefit from excellent opportunities within drama and some English lessons to understand the effect people have on others and their feelings. Their understanding of other people's beliefs and values is more limited because of the lack of regular opportunities for reflection, debate and critical thinking in many subjects, including religious education lessons. This aspect of their personal development is also weaker because assemblies are infrequent (once or twice a week at most) and in form time, provided for a

maximum of two twenty-minute sessions a week, tutors pay too little attention to promoting pupils' personal development.

31. Relationships are good. Pupils work together very well when given the chance, as in physical education and design and technology, for example. They get on well with most adults, particularly where there is mutual esteem and their contributions are valued, as in drama and music. Pupils recognise and appreciate the extra effort that many teachers make on their behalf to encourage and bring about high achievement. This commitment and shared sense of purpose results in strong relationships based on trust and respect, which underpin the standards reached by pupils. In a few lessons observed during the inspection, relationships were not so productive because adults criticised and discouraged pupils rather than noticing what they did well and trying to bring out the best in them. Pupils value each other's successes and are quick to acknowledge the breakthroughs and milestones reached by everyone, including those with special educational needs.

32. Attendance is satisfactory. It is usually close to the national average, but was below average in the year before the inspection, partly because of significant amounts of illness. Unauthorised absence is average. Close scrutiny of absences indicates that a few pupils are away more often than would be expected, sometimes with parental consent. These pupils do not always find their lessons as rewarding as others usually do, and their absences affect their rate of progress. The school is energetic in its efforts to reward good attendance and discourage unnecessary absence. This works well with conscientious and successful pupils but the attendance of the few pupils who have frequent absences has not improved. This has slowed the school's overall rate of improvement in attendance. Punctuality in the mornings is satisfactory.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

33. Teaching is good overall, at both key stages. The teaching was very good or, occasionally, excellent in 27 per cent of the lessons observed during the inspection, and satisfactory or better in 94 per cent. The proportion of good or better teaching (63 per cent) was higher than in many schools inspected, but the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching (6 per cent) was about average. The quality of teaching is now higher than was reported by the last inspection, although the strengths and weaknesses reported then are similar to those found in this inspection. Overall, the teaching observed at Key Stage 4 was slightly better than at Key Stage 3, whereas the last inspection found that the teaching of the older pupils was weaker. At both key stages, pupils' learning is also good.

34. Teaching and learning are good in English, history, ICT and French, and excellent in drama. They are good overall in design and technology and physical education, in both of which they are good at Key Stage 3; at Key Stage 4, they are very good in design and technology, whereas they are satisfactory in physical education. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in religious education. In the other subjects, including mathematics and science, they are satisfactory.

35. A strength in teaching is that most teachers have high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour. This was also noted by the last inspection. The pace of the best lessons was swift, with effective use of question-and-answer in the early part of the lesson to remind pupils of what they already knew and to pose new challenges. Many teachers had planned appropriately challenging work for the class to do. Teachers who explained early on what they expected the class to learn that lesson were generally the most successful in motivating the pupils, who enjoyed the challenges they were posed and worked hard and productively as a result. In practical lessons, including in science, the well-planned use of resources often led to busy lesson in which pupils learned well. They could see how the new work built on their previous learning, and so were able to tackle it confidently.

36. Relationships between staff and pupils are good, contributing to pupils' positive attitudes towards learning and their generally good effort. In most lessons, pupils concentrate well and work productively. They often show their interest by asking thoughtful questions. They work co-operatively in pair and small-group activities, sharing ideas and resources well. Most take care over their written work, and some have put much effort into presenting coursework attractively using ICT, often at home.

37. Some teachers make good use of ICT, but overall this is a weakness in teaching. Opportunities are missed to extend the knowledge and skills pupils have learned in ICT lessons, and to apply them in new contexts. In design and technology, for instance, more advanced ICT work in modelling and control are not covered, which leads to a lack of challenge for higher-attaining pupils. Instances of good use of ICT were seen in the teaching of geography and history.

38. The teaching of the skills of literacy and numeracy is satisfactory overall, though the provision for developing literacy is more consistent. In most subjects, pupils are expected to learn and use technical vocabulary, and several subjects encourage pupils to improve their writing by basing it on guidelines. In science, a course of lessons makes a useful contribution to Year 9 pupils' knowledge of numeracy-related topics such as graphs and percentages.

39. In the most successful lessons, teachers made very good use of questioning and observation to monitor how well the pupils were learning, and adjusted their teaching accordingly. They adapted their questions unobtrusively, so that pupils of all levels of attainment were encouraged to think hard. In a particularly successful drama lesson, the teacher led a plenary review of Year 9 pupils' performances, which provided excellent evaluations that gave all the pupils confidence that they had achieved well while leaving them with positive suggestions for improvement. Pupils value the challenge to reflect and think for themselves in such lessons. In other subjects, they are given too few opportunities for thinking creatively, for reflection on themselves and others, and for developing spiritual awareness.

40. Teachers have a clear focus on GCSE examination requirements and the criteria for success, for example in English, drama, science and art. The pupils respond well to clear information on what they need to do to attain the desired grades. However, teachers have often made too little use of the available information on pupils' attainment at the end of the primary stage, as a starting point on which to base Year 7 work, and as a benchmark against which to measure individuals' progress and how well the boys and girls do.

41. The marking of written work is satisfactory overall. It is usually thorough and consistent, and some marking gives pupils constructive advice. A strength in English is that pupils are set specific targets at the end of each piece of work. However, in some subjects, pupils are unclear about how to improve their written work in future because they have had too little feedback and guidance from teachers.

42. Teaching is satisfactory overall in mathematics and science, but in both subjects the evidence of the lessons observed and pupils' written work showed that some teaching is unsatisfactory. Additionally, in both these subjects and in some others, a number of lessons that were judged to be satisfactory on balance had some significant weaknesses that slowed pupils' learning. Sometimes, the cause was the teacher's lack of subject expertise, and at other times it was that the teacher's expectations were too low. This particularly affected the learning of the higher-attaining pupils, for example in science. Sometimes, teachers' planning was weak, and did not consider the needs of all the pupils in the class. When too little use was made of questioning to find out what pupils already knew and how much they were learning, the teaching was usually undemanding, pupils were not actively involved in the lesson, and they made insufficient progress.

43. Occasionally, teachers' management of pupils was inconsistent, leading to some disruptive behaviour affecting pupils' learning. Undemanding work and a pace which was too slow also contributed to pupils making too little progress in some lessons. This was observed in both one hour and 30-minute lessons. For example, when the teacher talked for too long, the pupils became restless although they concentrated willingly when they were set work to do for themselves. The 30 minute lessons in the library, for those Key Stage 3 pupils who are not taking German, are not planned and taught appropriately. Consequently, this time is largely wasted and pupils learn little.

44. The teaching, learning and support for pupils with special educational needs were good overall in the lessons observed, for both mainstream and withdrawn groups. Teachers and learning support assistants have very good relationships with special needs pupils. They know their pupils well, and generally use effective methods to explain and demonstrate tasks so that pupils improve their skills. In a support studies lesson, for example, pupils learned how to multiply and divide through systematic and progressive steps. As a result, they became increasingly accurate and successful in recalling their nine times tables. Pupils'

individual education plans and behaviour support plans include achievable social, literacy and numeracy targets. However, the use of these targets by subject teachers is inconsistent. In particular, non-specialist teachers often do not plan varied practical and multi-sensory approaches for special needs pupils. Day-to-day assessment is satisfactory overall, but planning between teachers and learning support assistants is inconsistent and learning support log-books record insufficient information on the pupils' progress.

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

45. The school offers a broad curriculum in Years 7 to 9, including taught courses in ICT and personal and social education (PSE). The overall quality of the curriculum for these pupils is good, with particular strengths in the curriculum planning for English, drama, ICT, design and technology, geography, physical education and music. The current arrangements provide a satisfactory balance overall. The opportunity to learn German as a second foreign language, offered to one third of the pupils in Years 8 and 9 is a good feature of the provision for these pupils. However, religious education is allocated insufficient time for effective teaching of the locally agreed syllabus. Pupils who do not study German have a half-hour lesson for reading and improving their library skills. This time is not used well. The school intends to improve these arrangements for the next school year, by incorporating the half-hour lesson into the English curriculum and giving extra time for religious education.

46. In mathematics, science and languages, pupils in Years 7 to 9 are generally grouped in sets on the basis of their attainment. In order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning and so raise attainment, and in response to staff preferences, the school has created extra teaching groups to provide smaller classes. However, this strategy is expensive in terms of the requirements for staffing and accommodation, and contributes to the difficulty the school has in providing all classes with specialist teachers and in grouping the subject classrooms in specialist areas.

47. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is broad, and has a satisfactory balance of time allocated to subjects. Pupils follow a substantial core course of English, mathematics, science, a modern foreign language, design and technology, physical education and PSE. Their curriculum is completed with choices from a good range of options, including drama and sociology. The ICT option is particularly strong. It involves early entry for GCSE information technology in Year 10, followed by GCSE information systems in Year 11. The quality of curricular planning is similar to that in Years 7 to 9, except in religious education, which lacks a properly-developed scheme of work, and in music, where a new scheme is still being put together. As in Years 7 to 9, the school has chosen to create small classes to support pupils' learning.

48. The school has developed a curriculum which is well matched to the abilities and aspirations of most pupils. Past and present pupils expressed satisfaction with the range of subjects they could study. However, few vocational subjects are offered as alternatives to GCSE. The school has various plans to remedy this. A small group of Year 11 pupils is following a pilot GNVQ course in partnership with the local college of further education.

49. The school teaches the full National Curriculum, but its thinking and planning are also strongly influenced by a desire to offer the broadest possible range of educational experiences. However, it fails to comply with statutory requirements on the teaching of religious education as insufficient time is allocated for full coverage of the syllabus. The provision of opportunities for pupils to use ICT in other subjects is also a weakness. Although good work is done in some subjects, pupils are not enabled to develop their ICT skills in areas including mathematics, languages, art and some aspects of design and technology.

50. The quality and range of learning opportunities overall for special needs pupils is good. They are well-integrated in mainstream lessons. Almost all are entered for GCSE examinations, with increasing success. Pupils with statements are withdrawn for extra computer-based literacy skills and individual reading. This provision is appropriate to their needs. At Key Stage 4, pupils may opt for a support studies lesson instead of an extra GCSE, in order to catch up with coursework and improve their literacy and numeracy skills. This helps them to gain at least one qualification at grade G or better. However, the school provides too few opportunities for lower-attaining and special needs pupils who have behaviour and learning difficulties to opt

for work-related courses. Planning at both key stages includes appropriate ICT experiences for all pupils. Pupils have good opportunities to develop their social skills in lunchtime activities, such as the Scaffold Club, but there is no homework club for them.

51. Much has been done to improve the provision for pupils' literacy development, and it is now satisfactory. A detailed reading and spelling policy has been established. It is being implemented by subjects, although not yet consistently. Some subjects plan well for helping pupils to develop their writing skills. Pupils in Year 7 with particular weaknesses in literacy are given good extra help in a lunchtime club and in some lessons. The provision for numeracy across the curriculum is also satisfactory overall. A whole-school numeracy initiative has identified some appropriate targets, and there is good practice in some subjects.

52. The curriculum is supported and enriched by a good extra-curricular programme in which sport is a strength – a very good range of activities of high quality is provided, including competitive fixtures with other schools. For several years, the school has been given the Education Extra Distinction Award for the quality and number of its extra-curricular activities. Mathematics offers master-classes, and pupils have taken part in the national Mathematics Challenge. Music offers a band and choir, and there are taught sessions in art. Other well-supported activities include drama and a chess club. Study support sessions are offered in a wide range of subjects during lunchtimes and after school.

53. The school's concern to provide pupils with equal opportunities is reflected in the curriculum by the wide range of subjects offered and the small classes for many subjects. Pupils have good access to all aspects of the curriculum with the exception of ICT across subjects. Higher-attaining pupils at Key Stage 4 are provided for well through the opportunities to take additional GCSEs, both by early entry in Year 10 and through the after-school classes provided in several subjects. GCSE general studies is also offered as an extra subject, taught during lunchtimes.

54. The PSE programme is comprehensive and very well co-ordinated. In all year groups, each class is taught PSE once a week. The programme covers health, sex and drugs education well. It also has units on business education, finance and the world of work, study skills, aspects of personal awareness and relationships, and aspects of citizenship. The planning is very thorough, covering each week of the school year. As a result of the effectiveness of this programme, pupils are successful in gaining a certificate in life skills. PSE also makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development through the topics it covers. However, it is not supported by links to form tutor time.

55. The provision for careers education is very good. It is comprehensive and very well planned, and includes three weeks of work experience in Year 11. This is very well supported by staff and by local industry, business and commerce. Pupils have good access to a very well-resourced careers library, and are given effective support by the careers officer attached to the school. The local careers service no longer guarantees a careers interview for every pupil.

56. Overall, the quality of the curriculum is similar to that reported by the last inspection. The issues of lack of time for religious education and the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship have not been dealt with.

Community links

57. This area of the school's work continues to be a strength. Improvement has been good. The contribution of the community to pupils' learning is now very good. The school has a very strong community ethos and encourages pupils to recognise their responsibilities and privileges within this. There are longstanding, robust links with local employers and other organisations such as the senior citizens club, charities and community police. The school's achievement of Charter Mark status for excellence in public service to the community celebrates its successes in this aspect of its work. Those pupils who are involved in organising fund-raising for charity, representing the school in extra-curricular activities, running the school bank and helping others in various ways, benefit greatly from the rich range of links.

58. There is no formal community education or voluntary service programme to build on these links to nurture and extend pupils' intellectual and personal development, particularly those with limited aspirations, experience and achievement. Opportunities are missed to use pupils' well-developed skills in ICT to link with people in the wider and international community in order to enrich and extend knowledge and mutual understanding. The school's justifiably acclaimed work experience programme has a significant impact on pupils' willingness to study and their motivation to achieve.

59. The school has very constructive relationships with its main feeder primary schools, sixth forms and colleges and local training institutions. Links with employers are particularly strong, and benefit from enthusiastic and energetic work with Havering Business Education Partnership (HBEP). The school collects, but does not always make full use of, the valuable data obtained from primary schools about pupils' attainment, personal development and their specific strengths and weaknesses. Pupils are given very good help with choices of what to do at age 16.

Pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

60. Improvement in the provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development has not been fast enough since the last inspection. In particular, the provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory. This is because opportunities to encourage reflection, provide awe-inspiring moments and develop critical thinking skills are missed. In contrast, the school focuses well on achieving its aims of developing existing talents and interests and discovering new ones, and developing independence and a sense of belonging to a community. The headteacher sets a clear, positive example of concern, consideration, respect for others and of personal responsibility for everyone to follow.

61. In subjects such as drama and English, there were wonderful examples of pupils responding to very moving experiences, but these were isolated occasions that contrasted with the content of other lessons and time wasted in many tutor periods. In many lessons, open-ended questions are scarce because of a focus on basic knowledge rather than deeper understanding. In rare cases, religious education lessons provide meaningful opportunities for pupils to think about and discuss questions of belief and personal values, as in a Year 9 lesson about the Resurrection. There are too few regular occasions on which pupils are encouraged to develop a sense of curiosity through reflecting on their own and other people's experiences and beliefs. This is partly linked to the school's decision not to find a way of providing a daily act of collective worship for all pupils, or an equivalent period of worthwhile reflection.

62. Provision for moral development is now good, having improved since the last inspection. The school has developed a very strong statement about expectations of responsibilities and privileges, which pupils helped to shape. They are clear about the difference between right and wrong. They are encouraged to grasp the principles of fair play in sport. The house system is used well to develop a sense of responsibility and concern for others through charity initiatives. Occasionally, adults offer weak examples of the right thing to do when criticising pupils unnecessarily and focusing on their mistakes, rather than on their efforts to understand, or do what is asked. The strong moral code guiding the school's everyday activities is very clear otherwise.

63. Provision for social development is very good. Wide-ranging opportunities for pupils to exercise initiative and responsibility are a key factor in this. They can take part in games involving competition, discipline and teamwork. They are responsible for organising their own fund-raising activities on a house by house basis and these include imaginative, highly popular events such as an annual talent show. Year 11 produce a lively, colourful hard cover yearbook, negotiating with the parents' and friends' association for it to be bound. Within lessons, there are some good opportunities for pupils to collaborate on projects and work co-operatively, for instance, to agree on key vocabulary that indicates the genre of a piece of writing.

64. Provision for cultural development is satisfactory overall. Pupils are given valuable opportunities to learn about their own cultural heritage in many subjects, but cultural diversity is too infrequently celebrated although there is some good practice in a few subjects. In English, drama and music, pupils have many chances to experience and enjoy the cultural traditions within this country, and those of other communities as in good work on African music. In history, pupils learn about Native Americans, and in modern

languages they learn about non-European French-speaking countries. Design and technology lessons include lively, positive work on different lifestyles, food and textiles from around the world.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

65. The school's procedures to ensure pupils' welfare are good overall. Child protection procedures are in place. The arrangements to assess pupil's attainment and progress are good, and generally used well to support pupil's academic and personal development. However in most subjects too little use is made of assessment information to inform curriculum planning.

66. Pupils are treated as individuals, ensuring that all support and intervention is in the context of their particular needs. Parents commented on this as a strength of the school, at the meeting prior to the inspection. The school's procedures to ensure the welfare, health and safety of the pupils are good. The effective and well-resourced house system places care of pupils in the context of a family approach. Placement of pupils is carefully managed, helped by liaison visits to the partner primary schools. Pupils stay with their form tutors from Year 7 to Year 11 whenever possible. New pupils join the same house as their brothers or sisters. This well-planned emphasis on continuity builds up a rapport between the school and the home.

67. The arrangements for child protection are good. They deal sensitively with any concerns raised by pupils or adults, and any child protection issues that arise are handled with empathy and efficiency. The school has also produced a thoughtfully-constructed confidentiality policy, to give everyone confidence in the system.

68. The policies and procedures for health and safety are good. All safety equipment and evacuation procedures are checked regularly by internal and external inspection. Departments have completed risk assessments of their workspaces. The governors' premises committee monitors health and safety. However, a few health and safety issues were identified during the inspection. Some carpets are so badly worn that they are a potential danger, and doors in the sports hall are a cause for concern.

69. Good behaviour is strongly encouraged. The school makes it very clear to pupils that bullying will not be tolerated, and deals swiftly and firmly with the occasional incidents that are drawn to its attention. Parents commented on the effectiveness and promptness of the action taken. The school has effective systems for tracking pupils' behaviour and academic progress if issues arise. Heads of house check that the strategies adopted are working effectively. This may include whole-group monitoring as well as checking on individuals. For example, a review of Year 7 recently raised concerns about whether they were doing as well as they should. Year 7 lessons were monitored for a short period, enabling the senior management team and headteacher to discuss how to improve the pupils' responses and to feed back information and ideas to heads of department.

70. Heads of house are pivotal to monitoring pupils' personal development, and it is done well. Form tutors also make some contribution to this, although the time they have with their forms is often not used productively enough. Good practice was identified in Year 11, however, as considerable time is invested in helping pupils to complete their National Record of Achievement. PSE also makes a valuable contribution to pupils' personal development through its well-planned programme of topics.

71. Procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are good. Attendance records are checked regularly and absences, including the unexpected rise in 1999/2000, are followed up with care. Expectations are high, reinforced with certificates for 100 per cent attendance and strong messages about the link between absence and poor progress.

72. Pupils with special educational needs are identified early. Very good contacts are made with the pupils' primary schools, to ensure a smooth transition to Year 7. Support from specialist agencies is used effectively, including specific disability-related provision. Pupils with statements and those on Stage 3 of the register are monitored effectively. Annual review assessments meet statutory requirements. Those with statements, and those on Stages 2 and 3 of the Register, have individual education plans and their progress is tracked regularly. A particular strength is that pupils with statements are aware of their own targets

because a copy of the individual education plan is kept in their planners. However, some individual education plans for pupils at Stage 2 are not sufficiently specific to the subjects of the curriculum. The quality of support and guidance provided to pupils with special needs on a day-to-day basis is unsatisfactory because of the co-ordinator's high teaching commitment, which means that little time is available to make contact with pupils and their parents during the day.

73. The school has good procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress. They have improved since the last inspection. A good amount of assessment information is recorded, based on teachers' marking and tests results. For example, in modern languages, thorough marking, end-of-unit test results and portfolios of evidence are used to build up a picture of each pupil's performance. Pupils' work is carefully assessed in the core subjects. For example, in English there is good, helpful marking, and in mathematics and science the marks from regular tests are recorded in databases.

74. Academic support and guidance for pupils are satisfactory overall, with good practice in several departments. The procedures are very good in ICT and design and technology, and on the GCSE courses in history and music. In design and technology, pupils have targets and their progress is checked at the end of each lesson. In English and drama, the on-going assessment ensures pupils know how well they are doing and have a good understanding of exactly what to aim for to attain a higher standard in future. The idea of target-setting is well-established, that teachers should attach realistic short-term targets to written work, providing an opportunity for pupils' self-assessment. However, the targets are sometimes too general, as in geography and history. As a result, target-setting has not had enough impact on pupils' understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in their learning in many subjects, and of what to do to improve in future. However, the headteacher provides each Year 11 pupil with an individual interview, to agree revision targets, which is a helpful arrangement that encourages them to do well at GCSE.

75. The use of assessment information to guide curricular planning is a weakness. Thorough measures of pupils' prior attainment are not yet established as a basis for evaluation. For example, the school introduced standardised tests in Year 7 and in Year 10 only in the last couple of years. In many subjects, previous test results are kept but not sufficiently evaluated or used. More analysis of data is needed, including in mathematics, history, geography and art. Analysing the performance of boys and girls and making comparisons with national data are yet to be used extensively to guide curricular planning. However, there is some very good practice, as in design and technology where the teams of teachers regularly use assessment information when developing modules of work.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

76. Improvement in securing and maintaining partnership with parents has been good. Parents have positive views of the school and believe that it is doing a good job overall, because of its high expectations. A few parents do not feel that the school provides the right amount of homework – either too much is given, or too little. However, pupils feel that the amount of homework is about right, except where not enough has been covered in the lesson and they have to do extra work at home. Parents attending the meeting prior to the inspection expressed some concern about the behaviour of a very small minority of pupils, which spoils lessons for others, although they are generally positive about discipline.

77. The school's links with parents are good. They find the school welcoming and the staff approachable, in general, although a few parents do not feel that the school works closely with them. The school contacts parents quickly when it has concerns about a child's attendance, progress or behaviour, usually through the head of house. There are good opportunities for parents to contribute to the life of the school through its parents' and friends' association, Supporters of Albany School (SAS), by notes in planners, meetings and support with homework. Parents helped to produce the home-school agreement, which is displayed well around the school in poster form. The impact of parents' involvement on the work of the school is good.

78. The quality of information provided is good. Parents find the content of the reports helpful. A significant minority of parents has reservations about how well they are kept informed about their children's progress, particularly in relation to the timing of reports, particularly in Year 8. Inspectors agreed with both these views. Reports give useful information about progress and personal development, and overall targets

are set for each pupil by the headteacher. Subject reports sometimes place too much emphasis on a pupil's approach to work and behaviour and too little on the knowledge and skills learned, with precise targets for improvement. The Year 8 reports are sent to parents too soon in the school year, but parents have other opportunities later on to find out how their children are doing.

79. The prospectus and new entrants' pack present a very good first impression of the school. The quality of the inserts is not as consistent and sometimes less inviting and readable than the professionally produced folder. The governing body's report to parents is very long and detailed, covering all that is required. A summary of the report is provided to all parents, who are invited to request the full report if they wish to receive it. Letters home are generally clear and informative, and parents appreciate this.

80. Parents contribute well to children's learning at school and at home. They are keen to see their children achieving, so usually do whatever they can to encourage regular attendance, positive attitudes to work and an active interest in all the learning opportunities offered. They attend meetings to discuss their children's progress. They find the new entrants', careers and options evenings invaluable as sources of information to enable them to help and support their children.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

81. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The headteacher is very dedicated to the school and works tirelessly for its further development. She leads by example and provides an effective role model for the staff by maintaining a very high standard in her own teaching. Her present teaching commitment is for over a third of each school week, partly to cover the current shortage of teachers in some subjects. This commitment is too heavy, as it reduces the time she has for leading and managing the school's development.

82. The two deputy headteachers and four assistant heads each have clearly-defined responsibilities that they carry out conscientiously. These cover assessment and curriculum; pupil support and premises; finance and timetabling; teaching and learning, in-service training, literacy and teachers' performance management; community liaison; administration, cover and a house headship. Members of the senior management team are based in different parts of the school, to ensure the orderliness of pupils and the maintenance of routines. All members of the senior management team also have a substantial teaching commitments, which gives them a way of knowing what goes on in departments. Each senior manager is a member of a different department, which ensures regular liaison between these departments and senior management. This arrangement covers most of the subjects, but is an insufficiently effective means of monitoring and evaluating. While staff have open access to the head and other senior managers, the lack of a formal management system is a disadvantage for departments such as music and physical education. Religious education lacks secure management.

83. The school is dedicated to the principle of 'quality for all'. Its worthwhile aims are to provide an environment where each pupil can achieve the highest possible academic standards and further their individual interests, and to cultivate independence, a respect for learning as a life-long process, and an understanding of the responsibilities and privileges of a community. This sense of community is fostered successfully through a house system. Pupils are carefully allocated to houses on arrival to ensure an appropriate academic and social balance amongst them. These houses form the basis of the school's pastoral system, and pupils remain in them throughout their time in the school. The positive attitudes and values which the school cultivates through this system are clearly reflected in the well-ordered and friendly ethos, which is a conspicuous feature of the school.

84. The headteacher delegates to members of the senior management team responsibilities which capitalise on their strengths. All have up-to-date job descriptions. Since responsibilities are not awarded as the result of an exhaustive analysis of what needs to be done, however, the management and monitoring of significant aspects of the school's provision are unsatisfactory. These areas include the provision for pupils' spiritual and cultural development, the role of the form tutor and the constructive use of tutor time, ICT across the curriculum, the development of the library, the use of the reading or library skills lesson for those

not taking German in Years 8 and 9, numeracy across the curriculum and the provision of religious education in the absence of appropriate specialist staffing.

85. Literacy is now well managed as a whole-school issue and this has led to some improvements. Heads of department are generally effective, and responsible for the good standard of teaching which is achieved across the school. Subject management is very good in English and drama, good in design and technology, modern foreign languages and music, and satisfactory in mathematics, science, art, geography, history, ICT and physical education. The management of religious education is poor.

86. The organisation of the special needs department is effective due to the commitment of the special needs co-ordinator, largely in out-of-school hours. However, too little non-teaching time is allocated for managing the department, and so monitoring, evaluating and developing of pupil support are too limited. This is having an adverse impact on the quality of welfare and care afforded to pupils on the special needs register and, in particular, on the pupils with statements. Opportunities to make contact with pupils and parents during the day are restricted because of the co-ordinator's high teaching commitment away from the department. The deployment of learning support staff to some areas of the curriculum is too limited. Learning support assistants have good expertise, but too little training in positive strategies for behaviour support has been provided for teaching staff. Individual education plans have been improved since the last inspection.

87. The governing body contains a wealth of experience. Members are well informed about developments in the school. They scrutinise examination results and set challenging targets. Heads of department regularly make presentations to the governing body. Governors are not individually linked with departments but they make visits in connection with specific issues, such as the provision for special educational needs. Visits may include some monitoring of lessons. Governors play a significant and independent role in shaping the direction of the school. They discuss and influence the school development plan. However, the governing body does not fulfil its responsibilities satisfactorily overall. Governors have responded effectively to some of the key issues in the previous inspection report, but some remain unresolved. The governors have not ensured that an act of collective worship is provided daily for all pupils, and that National Curriculum requirements for ICT across the curriculum are implemented fully. The time for religious education remains lower than is needed to cover the requirements of the local Agreed Syllabus. The governing body has not evaluated the effectiveness of the senior management team, nor the relevance of senior managers' responsibilities to the actual needs of the school. Currently, the senior management team do not all fulfil responsibilities commensurate with their salaries and give value for money.

88. The school has established a satisfactory system for the performance management of teachers, but procedures for the monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching are unsatisfactory. The headteacher carries out regular monitoring of lessons, and reviews pupils' written work from all year groups weekly. She reviews the examination results with heads of department each September and sets targets for future results. Informal monitoring takes place in several subjects. However, monitoring currently lacks rigour, points for development are insufficiently directed towards raising standards and there is no formal system for subsequent review. An assistant headteacher with responsibility for teaching and learning has recently been appointed, and her work is beginning to have an impact on standards. This is an improvement in the systems for managing and improving teaching and learning. Other senior managers have no formal responsibilities, within their subjects or generally, for raising pupils' levels of attainment.

89. The school development plan is wide-ranging. It covers short-, medium- and long-term plans, and contains worthwhile initiatives. It has an appropriate concern for the continued raising of attainment in public examinations. Departments include whole-school and subject-specific initiatives in their plans for development. However, there is not a clear enough focus at whole-school or department level on improving teaching and learning, and on the use of assessment to raise pupils' attainment. Criteria for measuring success in meeting objectives are better than at the time of the previous inspection, but it is unclear who is responsible for the achievement of each objective.

90. Teachers are committed and conscientious and have made a major contribution to the improvement of the school's overall examination results since the last inspection, at a rate above that found nationally. Staff play a positive role in the school's planning through the school development group. The school has a

satisfactory capacity for developing further, but this is dependent upon co-ordinating the work of the head, the senior managers and those at middle management level more closely. Stronger strategic management by the governors is required, informed by a more evaluative approach to analysing the school's provision and its needs. More systematic and rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning is a fundamental requirement for positive future development.

91. The school has benefited in the past from having a relatively stable and experienced staff. At the meeting prior to the inspection, parents commented that the turnover of staff has been quite high recently, and the inspection confirmed that the school has had difficulties in recruiting specialist staff. This affected teaching and pupils' learning in English during a previous school year, and is now affecting other departments including mathematics. Although the school has done its best to find suitable staff to replace those who leave for promotion or other reasons, staffing is unsatisfactory overall.

92. The school has tried hard to provide specialist teachers for all classes. Contingency plans include the employment of supply teachers, covering classes with non-specialist teachers, employing instructors, re-arranging teachers' timetables so that classes get at least one lesson a week with a subject specialist, and members of the senior management team teaching extra lessons. Significant difficulties have been experienced in mathematics, science and religious education, and in German in the upper school.

93. The school has a supportive programme for inducting new staff and newly-qualified teachers, and it is working well. A key action point of the last inspection report was to review the size of the school's senior management team, the middle management structure and the distribution of posts of responsibility. The size of the senior management team was reduced to the current arrangement of a headteacher, two deputy headteachers and four assistant heads. However, the action taken was insufficient to provide an effective balance between senior and middle management levels.

94. Financial management is satisfactory overall, with a strength in the efficient management of the budget but a weakness in the strategic use of financial resources. Spending has been focused well on the school's target of improving its ICT resources. Financial planning is careful and systematic, except that it is not linked sufficiently to the school's development plan. The school has not looked carefully enough at the consequences of the current staffing arrangements. At the moment, too much is spent on senior managerial posts that do not carry major curricular responsibilities. However, the principles of best value are applied satisfactorily overall. Appropriate consultation is undertaken to inform decisions on spending. Comparisons are made with spending in other schools, parents are consulted to find out what they would like to be improved by the school, and fair competition takes place in the placing of contracts to provide external services.

95. Resources are unsatisfactory overall in range and quality, with some strengths but important areas in which they require improvement. Resources are best in design and technology, geography, modern languages, physical education and for teaching ICT as a subject. Good organisation, to which a significant contribution is made by support staff, enhances the effectiveness with which resources are used in design and technology, geography and physical education. A new computer network, with substantially improved Internet access, provides a good resource for the ICT course. Science, geography and history have their own computer clusters, enabling pupils in these subjects to make use of ICT in their learning. Because of the demand placed upon the centralised resources by the widely taught and successful ICT course, other subjects have too little access to computers. This contributes to the requirement for ICT in other subjects not being met overall.

96. Several subjects suffer from inadequate resources for learning. Religious education lacks artefacts and videos. A shortage of tuned percussion instruments limits the music curriculum. Resources for textiles are much worse than for the other areas of design and technology. Drama suffers from a shortage of storage space for the few, teacher-produced resources that are possessed. The resources in the library are unsatisfactory in quantity and quality, limiting its use for research and wider reading. The number of books is just below the recommended minimum for the number of pupils in the school, and many of those that are available are old and worn. The reference section is inadequate as it has insufficient up-to-date books to meet the demands of the modern curriculum.

97. The accommodation is unsatisfactory overall. Whilst some specialist accommodation is adequate, there are too few science laboratories, the library is small, the food and textiles rooms are not suitable for delivery of the current National Curriculum, and the drama and music areas are unsatisfactory. Teachers work hard to use the accommodation to best effect but the condition of some classrooms is poor. In many areas cleaning is unsatisfactory. The condition of the carpet is very poor in some areas, and is a potential health and safety hazard. Although there has been some refurbishment, the external condition of most buildings is poor, as is the state of repair of some pathways between buildings.

98. Although the school has sufficient classrooms, the occupancy rate is high because pupils are grouped into small classes for some subjects, particularly English and mathematics, and so extra classrooms have to be used. Some teaching has to take place in temporary classrooms. The school has tried to provide a classroom for each teacher, located in subject areas to facilitate co-operation and communication within departments. This has not been possible for all subjects. Consequently, the teaching of some subjects is spread across the school. For example, English is taught in three buildings. This makes it harder for staff to work efficiently.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

98. In order to raise standards further and improve the quality of education provided by the school, the governing body, headteacher and staff should:

- (1) increase the time allocated to religious education so that the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus can be met more effectively, and improve teacher expertise in the subject to improve the quality of teaching. Increasing the time allocated to this subject was identified as a key issue by the last inspection, and the school has made insufficient progress in dealing with this. *[Paragraphs 26, 87, 205, 210, 212]*
- (2) revise the arrangements for managing and staffing the school so that all aspects of its work are developed, monitored and evaluated effectively. Reviewing the size of the senior management team and the middle management structure was identified as a key issue by the last inspection, but insufficient progress has been made in dealing with this. *[Paragraphs 82, 84, 87, 88, 89, 91, 92, 93, 94, 129, 138, 205, 210]*
- (3) improve the quality of teaching in those areas in which weaknesses were identified:
 - ensure that the high-attaining pupils are sufficiently challenged by the planned activities *[13, 42, 123, 132, 136, 157, 166, 200, 204, 210];*
 - improve the management and pace of lessons, in particular the involvement of pupils in active learning *[42, 43, 126, 136, 137, 210];*
 - making better use of the 30-minute lessons, especially those that take place in the library *[43, 110, 157];*
 - use marking and other assessment information to give pupils a clearer idea of how well they are doing and what action to take to improve in future *[41, 74, 157, 158, 159, 166, 169, 202];*
 - make better use of assessment information to guide curricular planning and for monitoring pupils' progress *[40, 75, 142, 152, 159, 169];*
 - endeavour to improve the match between staff subject expertise and the demands of the curriculum *[42, 46, 120, 124, 126, 138, 178, 185, 190].*
- (4) provide pupils with planned opportunities to use and develop their skills in ICT in other subjects, as is required by the National Curriculum, and improve the planning for and management of cross-curricular ICT. Reviewing the co-ordination of the teaching of ICT and implementing fully the National Curriculum requirements was identified as a key issue by the last inspection. The school has made recent progress towards dealing with it by improving the computer resources and staff training *[23, 37, 49, 95, 107, 127, 137, 175, 178, 190];*
- (5) give more attention to enabling pupils to develop spiritual awareness and to having opportunities for reflection throughout the curriculum, building on the good practice that already occurs in the school *[30, 60, 61, 136].*

In addition to the above issues, the governing body may wish to include the following minor issues in its action plan:

- providing a daily act of collective worship for all pupils, as was identified as a key issue by the last inspection *[87];*
- improving the accommodation and resources for learning, including the library *[95, 96, 97, 98, 197, 212];*
- making more productive use of form tutor time *[30, 70];*
- providing vocational alternatives to GCSE courses *[48, 50];*
- providing better day-to-day support and guidance to pupils with special educational needs *[72, 86];*
- dealing with the minor health and safety issues drawn to the attention of the school and governing

body [68, 204].

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	142
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	55

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
4	23	36	31	6	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	794
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	64

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	27
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	109

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	6

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	14
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	16

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	9.5
National comparative data	5.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.4
National comparative data	0.4

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	94	59	153

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	71	71	72
	Girls	49	48	38
	Total	120	119	110
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	79 (64)	78 (70)	71 (53)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	29 (17)	53 (43)	30 (17)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	62	72	54
	Girls	48	47	34
	Total	110	119	88
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	73 (88)	78 (68)	60 (47)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	21 (40)	48 (40)	29 (16)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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
	2000	94	62	156

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	58	90	94
	Girls	41	59	60
	Total	99	149	154
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	63.4 (49)	96 (96)	99 (99)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	49.4 (45.8)
	National	38.4 (38.0)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	0
Indian	6
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	5
White	771
Any other minority ethnic group	3

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	25	2
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	42
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	19

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	21
Total aggregate hours worked per week	427

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	82.7
---	------

Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25
Key Stage 4	19

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
----------------	-----------

	£
Total income	2,156,299
Total expenditure	2,161,711
Expenditure per pupil	2,737
Balance brought forward from previous year	207,869
Balance carried forward to next year	202,457

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	794
Number of questionnaires returned	209

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	25	63	8	4	0
My child is making good progress in school.	26	61	7	2	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	14	61	11	3	11
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	16	60	16	5	3
The teaching is good.	21	65	5	2	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	21	55	18	5	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	41	52	3	3	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	54	41	3	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	23	56	16	1	4
The school is well led and managed.	33	53	5	1	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	32	56	4	2	6
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	23	55	10	4	8

Other issues raised by some parents

Their children's education has been affected by staff changes.

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

ENGLISH

99. Results in the national tests in English at the end of Year 9 rose in 2000. They were above the national average, and broadly in line with those of similar schools. The results showed a good recovery from a fall in 1999, but did not reach the high point of the previous three years. Pupils' results in 2000 were similar to those in mathematics but better than in science. Girls outperformed boys to the same extent as found nationally.

100. The evidence of pupils' work and the lessons observed showed that the standard of work attained at the end of Year 9 is above average. Staffing difficulties that affected pupils' learning two years ago, and that contributed to the fall in test results in 1999, have been overcome and the curriculum has been improved. Pupils show strengths in their writing skills as a result of the strong emphasis teachers place on careful planning, drafting and editing so that finished pieces of written work are pupils' best efforts. Higher-attaining pupils compare novels they have studied and analyse plays and poems, skilfully identifying points of similarity and difference with well chosen quotations to support their opinions. Pupils who listened to Martin Luther King's speech "I have a Dream" drew well on details of his delivery and use of emotive language in their discussion. Subsequent writing reached a high standard, and was in the style expected at GCSE. Average- and lower-attaining pupils also cover a wide range of work. In preparation for the national tests in the summer, they have studied Shakespeare's play 'Macbeth' and put isolated sections of dialogue into sequence. This has resulted in good discussion and increased thinking about the main character's motives and how he changes. They have been well prepared for their summer test papers, but an area of weakness for the lower attainers is their reading, which is sometimes slow and hesitant.

101. When pupils enter the school in Year 7, the standards they have attained in English are average. In relation to these prior levels of attainment, the achievement of pupils in Key Stage 3 is good. Pupils quickly respond to the high expectations they find in Year 7 and start the pattern of drafting their work in order to achieve their best. They write about themselves, read a variety of books, research the authors, study ballads and plan formal presentations to the class. They immediately benefit from the system of marking which includes a clear target for next time and to which they add their own target. This is a strength in the teaching which helps them to make progress. By Year 8, pupils are writing more accurately as a result of refined planning and drafting. Though they are sometimes careless, they understand and are constantly reminded about the importance of correct spelling and punctuation. They meet more challenging tasks. Pupils are helped to access and enjoy literature often reserved for older pupils. For example, study of 'Ozymandias', the poem by Shelley, caught pupils' imagination and their work showed a fascination with the enigmatic stone head in the sands of Egypt. Higher-attaining pupils wrote about it with feeling and the lower attainers described it well. Pupils read and write sonnets, compare short stories, compose letters and write personally and factually. They begin to analyse literature using the correct technical terms and parts of speech. The progress they make equips them well to develop their English skills later on.

102. GCSE results in English have improved significantly over the last five years. In 2000, they were above the results for comprehensive schools nationally. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A* to C rose. Almost every pupil gained at least a grade G, which was better than the national average. Pupils did better in English than in mathematics and science in 2000. All pupils are also entered for GCSE English literature, in which the results have risen considerably over the last five years. The improvement in results is even more marked when the higher proportion of boys than girls is taken into account. In English and English literature nationally, boys are outperformed by girls. The school's improved results in 2000 narrowed the gap between boys' and girls' results to less than the national figure.

103. Standards are above average in the current Year 11. Pupils approach literature work confidently. They understand and express quite complex ideas about character and structure. As a result of the good guidance they receive from their teachers, they write effectively in their coursework essays, showing detailed knowledge of the texts and good analytical skills. For example, higher-attaining pupils have examined themes of corruption in 'Hamlet', a text usually reserved for post-16 study at Advanced level,

and have produced fairly sophisticated responses. As part of a media topic, they have examined cinema, competently identifying the elements of a successful horror film. Sensitive personal writing emerged from an autobiographical unit. Average- and lower-attaining pupils applied good intellectual effort to their study of 'Hobson's Choice' when comparing Victorian and contemporary family attitudes. Their discussion was guided by sensitive but rigorous teaching. Whilst occasionally work has an imaginative, individual sparkle, the good standard is generally achieved through pupils responding with effort to difficult challenges, and planning and improving their work with good drafting techniques. Boys have made particularly good progress in response to short, specific tasks and tightly-organised written work. Pupils respond well to their targets, know how well they are doing and, as a result, their achievement is good.

104. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because teachers are well aware of their individual needs and set work accordingly. They appreciate the help they are given, including extra support in class.

105. Overall, teaching and learning are good. They were very good in about half the lessons observed, and stronger at Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour, to which pupils respond by trying hard. For example, much of their work is word processed immaculately though, because of lack of easy access to computers in school, many rely on using equipment at home. Teachers emphasise the importance of writing correctly, as is illustrated by the time pupils are given for planning and refining work. Homework assignments are detailed, and help pupils to write extended coursework essays in Years 10 and 11. Marking is thorough and consistent throughout the department, a strength being the targets set at the end of each piece of pupils' work. Teachers have a clear focus on examination requirements and the criteria for success. However, they make insufficient use of the pupils' results in the Year 6 English test and in the tests the department sets early in Year 7, as a starting point from which to measure individuals' progress and the relative progress of boys and girls. The pace of lessons is generally swift. However, in lessons that are otherwise satisfactory, teachers sometimes talk for too long and so pupils have too little time for active learning.

106. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. They are attentive and polite and work well together. They trust their teachers and believe that hard work will achieve success. The occasional disturbance or lack of effort is handled well by teachers. Pupils take good care of their text books and their large drafting books, though the lower-attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11 have difficulty in managing the loose sheets of paper in their folders.

107. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Difficulties in recruiting permanent, specialist teachers affected the teaching of English until last year, but have been overcome. The department is now very well managed and led by a new head of department and deputy. The GCSE results have improved significantly. Teachers share a clear view about teaching strategies and pupils' learning which benefits pupils of all levels of attainment. Boys are achieving better. The use of ICT has not developed since the last inspection, and is a weakness. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. English classrooms are spread across three different buildings, making the planning of work, sharing of materials and the support and monitoring of teaching difficult. The school library lacks the space and resources needed by the English department, although the library staff provide good support. The department has a strong team commitment, and is well placed to make further improvements.

108. The standards achieved in **literacy across the curriculum** are satisfactory. Pupils use their skills to write neatly and present their work with care. By Year 11, most pupils write appropriately for a variety of tasks and purposes. They make notes and are capable of developing their ideas at length. Many make good use of word processing for their homework assignments and of the Internet for research. Given encouragement, pupils read independently for information and interest, though pupils' use of the library for wider reading is restricted by its poor resources.

109. The school makes satisfactory provision to raise standards of literacy, and much has been done since the last inspection. In Year 7, pupils with particular weaknesses in literacy are given good extra help in a lunchtime club and in some lessons. Good work by the literacy co-ordinator has raised teachers' awareness of the importance of developing pupils' skills in reading and writing. Teachers emphasise the use of correct, subject-specific vocabulary to help pupils to recognise, understand and explain concepts and their work.

Some teachers give good help in how to improve the standard of reading and writing. For example, the time taken to plan, draft and edit written work in history, ICT, design and technology and English enables pupils to do well. Sometimes, pupils are given assistance in how to structure their writing based on a framework or grid at the planning stage, and this has a good impact on the organisation of their work. A detailed reading and spelling policy has been established. Where teachers follow it, for example in design and technology, pupils pay better attention to spelling accurately. Linking work across subjects benefits some pupils. For example, Year 11 pupils' use of work produced in English lessons for a desk top publishing exercise in ICT increases their creative efforts and ensures that high standards cross subject boundaries. Year 9 pupils studying 'Macbeth' in English also explore issues in their drama lessons, which gives them a greater insight into the play.

110. However, whilst every department makes some contribution to improving pupils' standards in literacy, there are areas of weakness. Opportunities are missed to reinforce the importance of literacy skills, and to be explicit and consistent about the standards of reading and writing that are expected. Sometimes, expectations are too low. For example, pupils who copy from the board or out of text books in science lessons are not learning to read with understanding, nor how to find information. In some mathematics lessons, teachers rely too much on worksheets, restricting pupils' opportunities for expressing and developing ideas for themselves. The short (half-hour) lessons in the library are not planned for properly, and the opportunity to develop pupils' literacy skills is wasted.

Drama

111. Evidence from the lessons observed showed that the standard of work attained is very high at the end of Year 9. The work in performance is a particular strength. Pupils show a very good knowledge of techniques, and an ability to adapt them. These techniques include freezing an image, splitting the stage into two sets of actions, soliloquy, thought tracking, hot-seating and mime. Pupils discuss and evaluate their work seriously and rationally. A Year 9 class exploring the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth began with exercises in pairs, to gauge their power relations, before agreeing who should be which character. Using extracts of the original text and their own modernised versions, they quickly made judgements about the motives of the characters they were improvising.

112. GCSE results in drama in 2000 were high as 95 per cent of the pupils attained grade A* to C, compared to 68 per cent in comprehensive schools nationally. The majority gained grade A or B. Results have risen steadily since the last inspection. Drama is equally popular with boys and girls, and they gain similar results.

113. Standards are very high at the end of Year 11, and often excellent in performance work. Pupils deliberately seek difficult challenges and they employ a wide range of dramatic devices with marked confidence. For example, pupils rehearsing a group performance to be assessed for GCSE explored emotional issues by creating strong dramatic tension. Their excellent evaluation of themselves and each other showed their ability to give and receive positive criticism, which raised the standards of the whole class.

114. Pupils' achievement is excellent during both key stages. On entry to the school in Year 7, pupils have very different experiences of drama, but soon involve themselves in good group work, acting an idea or a story. They learn the self-discipline of acting, the importance of being an audience and ways of arranging the performing space. A Year 7 class worked well together, displaying feelings as they improvised scenes in a derelict house. They also practised their literacy and language skills in their reading and imaginative writing on the topic. In Year 8, pupils take their skills further and deal with more abstract concepts. For example, pupils showed a high level of discipline, control and co-operation in building a whole-class sculpture of themselves, each in character, appearing in turn hungry, cold and frightened. Pupils in all year groups are keen to try new approaches for themselves and, encouraged by the teaching, gain the confidence to be experimental. The maturity with which they approach their work was seen in a Year 10 lesson, when pupils spent time reflecting on and evaluating their work to record in their drama diaries. The pupils showed a good understanding of the depth of comment to make, as a result of searching questions

from the teacher, following routines established from Year 7. The importance attached to using the correct vocabulary of drama and being precise with language when discussing ideas are two other reasons for the high standards and the excellent progress made each year.

115. Pupils in all year groups like drama. Their attitudes and behaviour are excellent. They know they can achieve their personal best by working hard. The drama studio is always busy after lessons, with pupils trying to improve their performances and seeking extra guidance from the teacher. They are keen to improve – particularly noted in GCSE classes – and respond well to feedback and suggestions. They become adaptable, tolerant and supportive of each other.

116. The teaching of drama is excellent. It is characterised by excellent knowledge of the subject, the highest expectations of pupils at all levels of attainment and very good classroom management. The lessons are well structured, the pace brisk and the pupils know exactly what is expected of them. They are given very good opportunities to develop personally and socially. Evaluative feedback is used very well to give praise and constructive criticism, enabling pupils to make fast progress. The teachers are hard working and committed, and this helps to create the positive ethos apparent in all lessons.

117. The drama studio accommodation is unsatisfactory. The space is too small for the increasing numbers taking GCSE drama. It has no changing area, and inadequate storage for props and equipment. There is no easy access to computers to use with the digital camera. Sound equipment is basic. As a result, pupils have too few opportunities to develop their technical skills to enhance their performance at GCSE. Adequate office space is not available to enable the increasing amount of administration to be carried out efficiently.

118. Strengths identified at the last inspection have been maintained in drama, and the GCSE results have improved significantly. The head of department leads with total commitment to the pupils and is focused on attaining the highest possible standards in class. The very good leadership and management are shown in the clear educational direction and common purpose within drama and, as a result, the department continues to make a very positive impact in the school.

MATHEMATICS

119. Results in the national tests in mathematics at the end of Year 9 have risen over the last three years. In 2000, they were above the national average but in line with the average for similar schools. Taken over the last three years, pupils performed similarly in mathematics and in English, and considerably better than in science. As nationally, there was little difference in the achievement of boys and girls.

120. The evidence from pupils' work and lessons observed showed that the overall standard at the end of Year 9 is broadly average. Current standards are not as high as test results because staffing difficulties have been affecting some pupils' learning. This is evident in the inconsistent quality of some pupils' work over time. In the better work, for example, Year 9 high-attaining pupils have used numerical methods competently to solve quadratic equations, and their work showed that they have developed sound skills in looking for patterns and generalising. Lower-attaining pupils have produced accurate answers in arithmetic exercises and in work on circles.

121. When pupils enter the school in Year 7, their standards are average overall. In relation to these prior levels of attainment, Key Stage 3 pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 who have been taught well have made good progress. For instance, some higher-attaining pupils manipulate directed numbers accurately and understand graphs of the form $y = mx + c$. Where the teaching has been interrupted or less effective, pupils' achievement has suffered. This was seen in some number, fraction and co-ordinate work that repeated previous learning instead of building on it.

122. GCSE results in mathematics have improved since the last inspection. In 2000, the overall results were similar to those for comprehensive schools. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A* to C rose to 50 per cent in 2000, slightly better than the national result of 46 per cent. The proportion gaining at least grade G was close to the national average, which was good given that the school entered almost all pupils for the examination. The proportion who gained A and A* grades was lower than nationally. Taking account of the differences nationally, pupils did less well in mathematics than in English, but better than in science. There

has been little difference in the performance of boys and girls, as nationally. When the pupils started Year 10 in 1998, standards were above average overall. In relation to this, the results in 2000 were below average compared with the national picture for pupils with similar levels of prior attainment.

123. Standards are broadly average at the end of Year 11. Lessons and written work show that pupils of different abilities achieve the expected standards. For example, high-attaining pupils are methodical in solving algebraic equations and applying trigonometry. They have built up good skills for investigating within mathematics, leading to some high quality coursework. Lower-attaining pupils calculate competently, as seen in a problem about carpet areas. Although standards generally matched those expected, higher-attaining pupils lacked some of the rigour needed to secure A* and A grades at GCSE. For example, they did not routinely check their answers, write inequalities precisely or ensure they had a clear understanding of irrational numbers. The pupils are hardworking and teachers have prepared them well for examinations. This accounts for the difference between the GCSE results in 2000 and the standards currently attained.

124. Pupils' work and the lessons observed showed that achievement is satisfactory overall at Key Stage 4. However, staffing difficulties are now affecting some pupils' learning. Lower-attaining pupils benefit from the setting, the small groups and the graduated course which matches their needs from Years 9 to 11. Throughout the school, pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in mathematics. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good overall and this contributes to their satisfactory learning. Pupils present their written work carefully. They respond well when work in lessons is suitably challenging. However, sometimes pupils are inattentive, particularly when the work is not appropriately matched to their needs. In a significant proportion of the lessons observed, some distracting behaviour interrupted other pupils' learning.

125. Overall, the quality of teaching is satisfactory. This judgement takes account of the evidence of completed work and examination results, as well as the lessons observed during the inspection. The teaching was satisfactory in most of the lessons seen, good or very good in a small proportion, and unsatisfactory in a small proportion. During the inspection, the suitably-qualified teachers displayed appropriate subject knowledge and teaching skills. They gave clear explanations, and questioned pupils very effectively. There were strengths in the teaching seen in all classes. For example, relations between staff and pupils were good, contributing to pupils' positive attitudes. The idea of the three-part lesson, with a mental mathematics starter, was well used in many lessons, and was best when followed by other well-resourced activities. The better lessons were well prepared, for example with material ready on the board. In one very good lesson on algebra, pupils' misunderstandings had been spotted in the previous lesson, and teaching focused sharply on skills and understanding, which rapidly improved. Marking of work is satisfactory overall, and the best provides pupils with helpful guidance.

126. However, even in lessons judged satisfactory overall, there were weaknesses in teaching. These mainly related to the subject expertise of staff. Some mental mathematics work did not contribute sufficiently to pupils' learning. The management of pupils' behaviour was inconsistent, leading to some unacceptable disruption. At times, the work was undemanding or the pace slow, for example where teachers talked for too long. What pupils were expected to learn was often not made clear to pupils, or time provided to check progress at the end.

127. Improvement in mathematics since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Results have improved, although the previously-reported strengths in learning, behaviour and progress not have been consistently maintained. The department has continued to be satisfactorily led and organised. Its documentation is comprehensive and includes clear policies, procedures and schemes of work. The curriculum is well organised. The department recognises the weakness in the use of ICT within mathematics, but has made a useful start to improving this by introducing the use of graphic calculators. The promotion of literacy within mathematics is satisfactory. Key words are displayed in classrooms, and a good standard is expected in written course-work. Teachers also promote pupils' speaking and listening skills, with good correction of pupils' speaking.

128. The good organisation contributes to the standards seen, for example through the systematic approach to coursework, assessment and computerised recording of marks. Good leadership is reflected in initiatives such as liaison with primary schools, a mathematics challenge and revision sessions. Monitoring

and evaluation are a weakness, especially in classroom observation and the use of value-added analysis of data. As noted at the last inspection, good wall displays enhance the environment, although the condition of the mathematics accommodation is in a poor state.

129. In discussions, groups of pupils consistently expressed concern about the effects of staff turnover in mathematics, as did some parents during the meeting held before the inspection. The inspection found that difficulties in recruiting and retaining qualified mathematics teachers are affecting the work of the department and the quality of teaching and learning for some classes. At the time of the inspection, nearly one quarter of the classes were shared between two teachers. There is some inefficiency in having an average class size of only 22 pupils, given the shortage of mathematics specialists. Because of the current staffing difficulties, mathematics is in a weak position to maintain or raise standards further.

130. The provision for **numeracy across the curriculum** is satisfactory overall. A whole-school numeracy initiative has identified some appropriate targets and there is good practice in some subjects. For example, science has a booklet for each pupil and a series of lessons to link the subject to developing pupils' skills in numeracy. In design and technology, a succinct policy guides teachers' planning for numeracy, and pupils use scale and measurement confidently. In ICT, pupils make good use of number in working on spreadsheets and databases. Within mathematics, National Numeracy Strategy material is being introduced from Year 7, although progress is hindered by the staffing difficulties.

SCIENCE

131. Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 were above the national average in 2000, but below those for similar schools. The results were the best for the last three years, although similar to the results for 1996 and 1997. The boys have consistently done better than the girls since 1997, although the results of both have improved steadily. By 2000, the boys' results were better than the average for boys nationally, and the girls' results were similar to those of girls nationally.

132. The standards attained by the pupils now in Year 9 are average overall. Boys are attaining higher standards than girls, reflecting differences in attainment in science when pupils join the school in Year 7. Standards are higher in the area of scientific knowledge than in the areas of understanding and the skills of planning, carrying out and recording scientific investigations. This is mainly because pupils are not given enough chance to plan their investigations, to draft and improve their reports and to present their findings in a variety of ways. Overall, pupils' achievement in relation to their earlier attainment is broadly satisfactory. For example, Year 7 pupils working on biological keys built on their previous learning of classification of animals and plants. By the end of the lesson, the higher-attainers had set up good keys of their own, together with questions or flow charts to explain their thinking. The other pupils found the right answers to the questions set by the teacher, but had some difficulty in applying the concept of a biological key to different example. By Year 8, pupils have a secure knowledge of compounds and their key features, and explain the differences between compounds and elements correctly. Pupils with special education generally achieve satisfactorily but higher-attaining pupils sometimes do not achieve as well as they could because the work does not challenge them sufficiently.

133. GCSE results have shown a considerable improvement since the last inspection. Overall, the results in 2000 were average compared to comprehensive schools. Boys' results were similar to those of boys nationally, as were girls' results compared to those of girls nationally. The proportions of pupils gaining grades A* to C and grade G or better were also close to the national figures. The school now enters almost all its pupils for double award GCSE science – 98 per cent of the year group, compared with the national average of 81 per cent. This suggests that the school's results were more favourable than the comparison to national figures shows.

134. The standards attained by pupils in the present Year 11 are also average overall. The highest-attaining pupils, on course for the higher GCSE grades, are producing substantial amounts of work that are well focused on examination requirements. Other Year 11 pupils are generally keeping up a satisfactory rate of work. The boys tend to attain higher standards than the girls, as in GCSE results. Year 11 have good records of the topics covered, through working notes and photocopied information, together with some

examples of extended work. Their diagrams and graphs are generally good. Pupils' achievement at Key Stage 4 is satisfactory. For example, Year 10 pupils showed they had gained a sound understanding of the factors affecting rates of reaction, and were developing understanding of why reactions happen. The school is successful in helping pupils with special educational needs to make satisfactory progress, as is indicated by their success in gaining a GCSE pass. Although pupils' scientific knowledge remains the stronger area of their work, their understanding and skills improve because teachers pay more attention to investigative aspects as part of the GCSE coursework.

135. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. In the lessons seen during the inspection, judged by how well pupils were helped to learn, the teaching varied from good to unsatisfactory. The available evidence showed that teaching is better at Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. Frequently-seen strengths in teaching included clear explanations of new topics, followed by plenty of questions to find out how well pupils had understood what they should have learned. Good relationships and well-planned use of resources led to busy lessons during which pupils made good progress. Most lessons were very orderly, and the majority of pupils showed that they want to learn. Work interested them and they responded by trying hard. For example, Year 11 pupils preparing for a test rose to the challenge provided by good questioning to consolidate their knowledge of carbon chemistry. They enjoyed learning, and were prepared to ask questions when they needed help. Pupils behaved very well, and presented their work carefully. In these lessons, pupils could see how new work built on what they had already learned and they were able to take on new tasks with confidence, for example when Year 8 pupils were writing a report on their investigation of thermal decomposition.

136. Weaknesses were observed in some teaching that was otherwise satisfactory, as well as in the unsatisfactory teaching. Some teachers did not tell the class what they were expected to learn during the lesson, reflecting weaknesses in lesson planning. Teachers' expectations of what the pupils could achieve were sometimes too low. This meant that the work was undemanding of higher-attaining pupils, for example when they had to wait for the rest of the class to catch up with them. In general, teachers are more successful in teaching factual information than in fostering independent enquiry and pupils' understanding. Teachers tended to assume that pupils had understood, instead of checking this through careful questioning before moving on to new work. They tended to ask more testing questions of boys than of girls. Some teaching failed to inspire pupils with wonder at the natural world and to stimulate their curiosity and thus add to their enjoyment in learning. Some of these weaknesses were also identified by the previous inspection.

137. The science department is aware of the need to help pupils learn to use scientific language accurately. For example, lists of key terms are displayed in laboratories, for pupils to refer to during lessons. However, as at the time of the last inspection, pupils in some classes are expected to do too much copying of information instead of making their own notes and drafting their own reports. This results in pupils' scientific understanding developing too slowly, especially at Key Stage 3. The provision for pupils' development of numeracy is better. For example, in Year 9, a course of lessons on such topics as graphs and percentages makes a useful contribution. Most pupils are confident when presenting their findings graphically and carry the necessary calculations without too much difficulty. Provision for the use of ICT in science is improving, but at present does not meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. Recent training of teachers in the use of ICT, an increased number of computers in laboratories, the purchase of software and allocation of further funding mean that the department is now well placed to make good progress in the use of ICT within science.

138. The department has been successful in raising standards and results at GCSE. In this respect, the improvement since the last inspection has been good. The scheme of work is better, but is not implemented consistently. Planning for the learning of the higher-attaining pupils has been improved, including more challenging homework tasks. Overall, however, the improvement is unsatisfactory because other weaknesses identified by the last inspection have not been resolved. Weaknesses in teaching have not been dealt with effectively. The use of assessment information for monitoring the work of the department is still unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, the leadership and management of the department are satisfactory overall, with a strength in the clear educational direction set by the head of department. Staffing difficulties have hindered the work of the department and its development. For example, a system for monitoring teaching

was set up, but is no longer followed because of staffing vacancies. The department is capable of continuing to improve, but only if weaknesses in teaching are removed and staffing issues are resolved.

ART AND DESIGN

139. The school's results of Key Stage 3 teacher assessments for 2000 were not available at the time of the inspection. However, sampling from the end of key stage assessments recorded in teachers' mark books showed that these assessments were broadly in line with those expected nationally. Standards of work seen during the inspection were in line with the standards expected nationally. The majority of Year 9 pupils make good use of a range of materials, such as pencil, paint and collage. Year 9 pupils showed inventive and imaginative use of materials to design a maze and a cube with reference to the style of contemporary artists. They have learned to draw geometric shapes with increasing accuracy and use tone effectively to create three-dimensional decoration relief. However, their skills in three-dimensional work are under-developed. This is having a detrimental effect on the standards attained by lower-attaining pupils. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall. Pupils with special needs are achieving well in Year 7 because they receive good support through teacher explanation to help them work independently. Pupils' recording skills are satisfactory overall. However, many average and low-attaining pupils are weak in drawing from observation and, as a result, the quality of their research and investigation studies is also weak.

140. GCSE results in 2000 were average overall compared to comprehensive schools. They were just above the average for grades A* to C, although the proportion of A*, A and B grades was lower than nationally. Results have been maintained at a similar level since the last inspection, except in 1999 when A* to C percentages fell considerably. This gave rise to a dispute with the examination board over the examination marking.

141. The evidence of the lessons observed and pupils' previously-completed work showed that Year 11 pupils' attainment overall is average and their achievement during the key stage is satisfactory. The majority of Year 10 pupils re-visit themes and work from direct observation and imagination with increasing confidence. They respond readily to new ideas, and experiment with a range of media including ICT and three-dimensional materials. Higher-attaining pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall. However, pupils have too few opportunities to extend their knowledge of artists' techniques and to see original paintings. This contributes to the comparative lack of higher GCSE grades. Displays of GCSE art work show a developing confidence in the use of colour, the extending of pupils' insight and increasing skills in communicating their visual ideas. For example, the large scale landscape paintings by Year 11 pupils showed an average standard of mixing and controlling paint and a rapidly developing awareness of composition. Pupils' complement their studies in lunch time and after-school art clubs, where they extend their research skills effectively. Many, particularly boys, are doing well as they are likely to gain a C grade at GCSE. Pupils are weaker in placing artists in their historical context and in their use of sketchbooks to plan and prepare for projects. Most pupils with special needs do well in art at GCSE because they are given the opportunity to discuss their work, and learn how to improve their techniques through teacher demonstration.

142. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory. They were good in half the lessons observed. Teachers' very good relationships with pupils promote confidence and self-esteem. Pupils enjoy the subject, and work with interest and enthusiasm when the work is demanding. For example, Year 9 pupils were challenged to date paintings by looking carefully at clues such as dress and interior design. Teachers have a good focus on examination syllabus requirements. They have been successful in raising attainment, around the Grade C/D boundaries at GCSE, for many lower-attaining pupils. They provide an appropriate balance between skills-based teaching and the opportunity for pupils to work independently. However, when pupils are not expected to use sketchbooks to record processes, there are some shortcomings in developing their skills. Teachers' planning is most effective in the lessons where reference is made to artists' techniques and purpose. For example, Year 9 pupils have learned how artists such as Richard Long and Andy Goldsworthy use natural materials in the environment and have then used these ideas to improve their

designs. Teachers explain and demonstrate well, and make good use of picture resources and their own sketchbooks to exemplify good practice. They often make too little use of questioning to extend higher-attaining pupils and to check what pupils know and remember. Where teaching was less effective, pupils were insufficiently engaged in sharing ideas with the rest of the class and evaluation sessions were used inconsistently to assess what pupils had learned. When planning, teachers make insufficient use of assessment information to help them identify how to raise pupils' attainment, particularly in the higher grades at GCSE. Homework is inconsistently linked to class-work and, as a result, pupils have little source material to develop their skills in lessons.

143. The management of the department and its improvement since the last inspection are satisfactory overall. Standards have been maintained, as have GCSE results. The department has a clear view of where improvements need to be made, for example in raising the attainment of the higher-attaining pupils and developing ICT in schemes of work at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 3, the new, national assessment levels have not been adopted. Monitoring, development and evaluation of teaching and learning lack rigor, partly because of the lack of meeting time. The lack of an art technician is having a negative impact on the quality of three-dimensional studies offered to pupils at Key Stage 3. Resources are generally adequate, except that sketchbooks are not supplied for all Key Stage 3 pupils. Protective clothing is generally not made available to pupils. Extra-curricular art clubs are well attended, but pupils have inadequate opportunities to see original works of art. This limits their overall knowledge and understanding of artists' methods and approaches.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

144. The results of teacher assessment at the end of Year 9 were below the national average in 2000. The evidence of pupils' work and the lessons observed showed that the overall standard of work attained by pupils in Year 9 is now broadly average. Standards are higher than the 2000 test results because the department has improved recently. Assessment procedures, which the last inspection report identified as a weakness, are now better, the teaching is more effective, and the boys' underachievement has been targeted. Pupils are strongest in research and making products. They are less successful in accurate drawing techniques and using their design specification as part of the evaluation process. They have too little knowledge of how well they have done and how to attain higher standards, which lowers the quality of their work.

145. At Key Stage 3, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. A good variety of carefully-planned tasks enables pupils to build their skills incrementally. They develop confidence in designing and making, and learn to use tools well. For example, in a textiles lesson Year 7 pupils gained good, detailed knowledge about specialist tools through testing the different uses of pinking shears, fabric shears and embroidery scissors. They learned that using the correct tool improves the end product. In resistant materials, pupils capitalised on the skills they had developed in their previous task, designing and making a biscuit cutter, to help them identify users' needs as they designed a balancing toy. In Year 9 food technology, a very well-planned visit from a nutrition expert and broadcaster helped pupils with their Internet café project. The demonstration enabled pupils to understand why product analysis had led a company to make a fusion between eastern and western cultures in developing a new snack food product range. This visit helped the pupils to focus on the requirements of their own task.

146. Combined GCSE results in design and technology have risen since the last inspection. Results for the last three years have been in line with the national average for comprehensive schools. A higher proportion of pupils was entered for GCSE than in schools nationally in 2000, indicating that the school did relatively well to gain average results overall. In addition, some pupils are entered for graphics in Year 10, allowing them to take a further technology GCSE in Year 11 after only one year's work. Most are successful in both examinations, many gaining grade C or better. However, the food technology results were below the national average in 2000 because some pupils were absent for prolonged periods. This led to them attaining lower standards in their coursework, which had an impact on the overall outcomes. Boys' results at A* to C grades were above the national average while girls' results were below average. This pattern was

reversed at A* to G grades. Overall, boys did better in design and technology than in their other subjects while girls did less well.

147. Standards for design and technology as a whole are in line with the national expectation at the end of Year 11, and pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall. Pupils make good use of the examination marking criteria given at the start of the GCSE course, and their work builds well on the skills and product analysis learned at Key Stage 3. In graphics, pupils learn to make wider use of computers to enhance their presentation and analysis but do not have opportunities to develop skills in control and modelling. Boys plan their work effectively, which helps them to meet deadlines for completing projects. A minority of girls finds meeting these targets too difficult, and the rush to complete their work lowers their final examination results. Prototype modelling, investigation and testing of materials and designs combine with improved research and lead to well-presented portfolios that give pupils pride in their achievement. However, the areas of sustainability ('green' issues), and the moral issues associated with the misuse and waste of finite resources, are included in design considerations too infrequently.

148. The purposeful nature of the design-and-make tasks and the value placed on all pupils' contributions to lessons ensure that pupils have equality of opportunity. This enables pupils with special educational needs to make good progress. For example, in food and textiles the learning support assistant, who is also a technology technician, helps lower-attaining pupils with specific technical vocabulary, extended writing and manipulative tasks. In resistant materials and graphics, a technician with good expertise gives effective in-class support to both lower and higher attainers.

149. Teaching and learning are now good overall. In the lessons observed, they were good in Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4. The most effective teaching was observed in a team-teaching lesson for an express group of thirty Year 10 graphics pupils who are taking two technology subjects in two years. Challenging resources invited hands-on investigation. The teachers' background knowledge was supported by a well-chosen video, which inspired interest and led to very creative group work in the analysis of the product. Pupils engaged in excited discussion once the criteria for the group work were set. This lesson exemplified best practice, industrially-focused action research. This approach is common in the department. For example, industrial experts in product development in food technology contribute a realistic commercial input to pupils' learning and analysis. Tasks such as taste testing in food technology give pupils good first-hand opportunities for research and learning. Another strength lies in teachers' use of displays, previous pupils' work and demonstrations to clarify the quality of work expected. This has helped to raise standards.

150. Teachers integrate the use of ICT well into their lessons. They are computer literate themselves, and ensure that pupils use computers as a tool for learning. In Years 10 and 11, pupils use ICT to improve the presentation and make their research accessible to a range of audiences. However, more advanced computer aided manufacturing and computer aided designing skills, including control movement, sound and light, and modelling 3D designs, are not taught. This means that the thinking skills of the higher attainers are insufficiently challenged.

151. The skills of literacy and numeracy are taught well. Pupils are expected to use technical vocabulary and definitions to improve their understanding, and make effective use of guidelines to extend their independent writing. Teachers give pupils good opportunities to work in pairs and groups, enriching their ability to share opinions, negotiate with each other, practise listening skills and raise their self-esteem. Pupils' attitudes to design and technology are very good, influenced by the role models provided by teaching and non-teaching staff. Pupils respect the tools and equipment they use, and give appropriate attention to safety and hygiene within the department. Immature behaviour is very rare, and is dealt with swiftly so that it does not affect the learning of others in the class.

152. Overall, the department's improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. The staff now work as a cohesive team under the enabling management of a good head of faculty. An increasing percentage of pupils, those identified as gifted, take graphics GCSE one year early and go on to take another technology course in Year 11. Although assessment is better, and pupils are now tracked across the elements of technology in Key Stage 3, some weaknesses remain. Insufficient attention is paid to pupils' self-assessment. Teachers of pupils in Year 7 also pay too little attention to establishing and building on the design and technology skills that pupils bring from their primary schools. Assessment data is not analysed to

establish the strengths and weaknesses of boys and girls in the subject. The facilities for teaching textiles and food technology are unsatisfactory as the accommodation has not been upgraded.

GEOGRAPHY

153. The results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were in line with the national average. The evidence of the pupils' work and the lessons observed showed that the standards at the end of Year 9 are also average. Pupils have a sound understanding of the work covered in the Key Stage 3 course. For example, they are able to describe and explain physical and human characteristics of places, as when considering living standards and environmental issues in Brazil. They have classified industries, identifying some changes affecting the location of industry, and have used a computer database to compare levels of development in various countries. They use specialist vocabulary appropriately. Many pupils also have a good understanding of river processes. Most identify major features on a world map correctly. A minority had difficulty in locating major features such as rivers on a world map. Low skills in literacy affect the standards of a few pupils, whose written work lacks detailed explanation.

154. When pupils enter the school in Year 7, the standards they have attained are average. In relation to those prior levels of attainment, Key Stage 3 pupils' achievement is satisfactory. At the start of Year 7, most pupils have a generally accurate knowledge of many aspects of geography, but their explanations are limited. They make sound progress in developing their knowledge of the types and function of settlements. The quality of presentation, clarity and detail of their diagrams and drawings improves. For example, a pyramid diagram showing settlement hierarchy had been well done by most pupils. At the start of Year 7, most lower-attaining pupils have a sound basic knowledge of the location of their homes in England and Europe, but their explanations are often confused and they have problems with work on grid references. While the work of many of these pupils remains relatively unextended, it improves satisfactorily, becoming better organised and less confused.

155. GCSE results have improved since the last inspection, and are now close to the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining A* to C grades in 2000 was lower than in the previous year, but was just above the figure for comprehensive schools nationally. All pupils who entered gained a grade G or better in 2000, as they have in all recent years.

156. Standards in work are average in Year 11, and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Most pupils have made appropriate reference to temperature statistics when describing the climate of the Amazonian rainforest, and have identified accurately some of the threats facing rainforests. They have successfully contrasted traditional and modern life in Japan and linked these to problems facing development there. They show some understanding of ways industrial development can pollute the environment. Higher attainers' written work is characterised by detailed, reasoned analysis, for example of the physical processes that create glacial landscapes. Their explanations of why such areas attract tourism are well-substantiated. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. Most improve the quality of their written work, in both key stages. The few who take GCSE geography generally do well, securing at least a G grade.

157. Overall, teaching is satisfactory. It was good in some lessons observed during the inspection. In the best lessons, teachers provided good, clear explanations that contributed well to pupils' development of knowledge and ensured that they were clear about tasks and their purposes. Good questioning provided opportunities for pupils to recall and practise their developing understanding and for teachers to obtain feedback on how well pupils were learning. Teachers had a good awareness of pupils' needs and provided for these well during individual work. Resources were used well, as in one lesson in which theoretical points about river processes were illustrated effectively. Teachers focused well on the definition and relevant, accurate use of key terms. Regular opportunities are provided to use ICT to enhance learning. For example, Year 8 pupils have used the Internet and a CD-ROM to undertake research on waterfalls. In Years 9 and 11, pupils have used databases and the Internet in their work on aspects of industrial development. However, no teaching was seen in which numeracy skills were strongly developed. Little work was seen that was planned to meet different levels of need or capability. One result of this is that challenge for the higher attainers was sometimes limited. On occasions, teachers failed to ensure that all pupils

paid full attention to explanations of the work to be done or to the video they were being shown. While marking is up-to-date and consistent, it rarely provides pupils with specific targets for improvement.

158. As a result of their satisfactory response to the teaching, pupils' learning is also satisfactory. In the lessons observed, pupils' progress was sound overall, and sometimes good. They often showed their interest by asking thoughtful questions. However, a few pupils had limited concentration and independence. Few pupils have a secure knowledge of their own current state of progress or of the specific steps that they need to take to improve, because teachers have not focused enough on providing the information they need for this.

159. Improvement since last inspection has been satisfactory. Progress has been made on all the points that were identified then. In addition to improving results at GCSE from well below average to average, the department has raised standards at Key Stage 3. A major factor in this is the improvement in the quality of teaching and learning in that key stage. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. However, two important issues are not being dealt with adequately. Teachers make too little use of assessment information, to help them prepare work that suits the range of pupils' needs in their classes. Assessment information is also not used to help pupils identify targets for improvement. The monitoring of teaching and learning is less systematic and effective than it should be.

HISTORY

160. The results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were above the national average. The evidence of the pupils' work and the lessons observed showed that the standard of work attained at the end of Year 9 is also above the national average. Pupils know the changes that happened in transport in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and how the cotton industry developed. Most understand the significance of various inventions in the Industrial Revolution. They understand how different aspects of society played a role in this, for example when considering the link between a rising population and developments in agriculture. Many are developing good skills in analysing sources and in classifying causes, such as the long and short-term reasons for the First World War. Some higher-attaining pupils have produced detailed projects, based on good enquiry, including material found on the Internet, in which they link developments in medicine in the nineteenth century, with the fall in the death rate.

161. When pupils enter the school in Year 7, the standards they have attained are average. In relation to those prior levels of attainment, Key Stage 3 pupils' achievement is good. At the start of Year 7, most are competent in spelling and grammar when producing lists and brief notes, but the extent of their independent writing is limited. Pupils quickly progress to more extended work. Higher-attaining pupils explaining the structure of government in ancient Rome showed that their skills in selecting and combining evidence from a range of sources had developed well. Lower-attaining pupils also learn to produce a good amount of written work. Their knowledge and understanding of, for example, the development of Rome and the roles of slaves and women also progresses well.

162. History is a popular subject at Key Stage 4, with a consistently high number of pupils choosing to take it each year. GCSE results were in line with the national average in 2000, both overall and in the proportions of pupils gaining grades A* to C and A* to G. They were significantly better than in the previous years and have shown a steady improvement since the last inspection. Girls did better than boys, as nationally.

163. Standards in work are in line with expectations at the end of Year 11. Pupils have a sound knowledge of the events that they have studied, and recall and deploy this appropriately. For example, they have accurately described and explained events in Hitler's rise to power, in well-structured work. Most understand the changes that took place in the economic boom in the USA in the 1920s, and the causes and consequence of the Wall Street Crash. They have selected sources that support a particular interpretation of these. A few show good understanding of relationships between economic and social factors. However, while many identify different viewpoints and policies, such as those of the Nazis and communists in Germany, they do not contrast them sufficiently. Some pupils copy relevant information from sources, but do not synthesize it.

164. In relation to their attainment on entry to Year 10, pupils' achievement is good overall during Key Stage 4, including for pupils with special educational needs. For example, pupils' early, source-based work on conditions in the trenches in the First World War work lacked detail, but the work of the same pupils later in the year showed good improvement in length, detail and clarity of description and explanation.

165. Overall, the quality of teaching is good. In the best lessons observed during the inspection, the work built well on pupils' previous learning because the activities had been planned well. Teachers' good questioning gave pupils opportunities to test their developing knowledge and understanding, and enabled teachers to see how well learning was taking place. There was an appropriate focus on the analysis of sources, with pupils being encouraged to refer widely and make choices of the most appropriate evidence. Opportunities were provided for pupils to make links between different periods that they had learned about. High expectations were expressed, for example by requiring pupils to be exact and accurate when referring to statistics. Extensive subject knowledge and insight enabled teachers to give good guidance on the most significant aspects on which to focus and to ensure knowledge and understanding are used with maximum effect in achieving well in the GCSE examination. Their exposition of events was interesting and engaging.

166. Where teaching was less effective in promoting progress, it was based upon weaker planning and the lesson activities were sequenced less well. Marking is good at Key Stage 4, with relevant and specific targets for improvement being set. However, while marking is consistent with the policy at Key Stage 3, the targets teachers set are too general and are not clear enough about what pupils need to do to improve their work in future. Work is often insufficiently adapted to meet individual needs. One result of this is that higher-attaining pupils are insufficiently challenged by some work.

167. The subject makes a good contribution to developing pupils' literacy skills. Redrafting takes place regularly, teachers provide opportunities to read aloud and there is good focus on ensuring key terms are understood. Examples of good practice included Year 11 pupils being directed towards relevant historical novels, available in the library, and a Year 10 lesson which included some good reference to poetry about immigration into the USA. Pupils have good opportunities to use ICT to support their learning of history.

168. As a result of the effective teaching and pupils' response, which was good in those lessons observed, the quality of learning was also good. Pupils made good progress in most lessons. Work was generally completed quickly, with pupils either concentrating well individually, or co-operating well in pairs and groups. They often showed their interest and furthered their own understanding by asking thoughtful questions. Learning was more passive in a small number of lessons. In Key Stage 3, pupils have a weak awareness of their own progress and of how to improve the quality of their work.

169. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. Progress has been made on most points requiring attention. GCSE results, which were slightly below the national average, are now average. The department is developing strategies to involve pupils in self-assessment of their work. The scheme of work now provides a balance of British, European and world topics. Rooms have been provided with facilities to provide blackout to enhance learning. However, the development of targets for pupils in improving their work has not been dealt with effectively. The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory overall. However, assessment procedures remain a weakness as they do not inform curricular planning sufficiently, to ensure that the work is adapted to meet the range of needs. Assessment information is also not well used to help pupils in identifying their own targets for improvement. Procedures for monitoring teaching and learning are also insufficiently developed.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

170. The results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were well above those reported nationally in 2000. Pupils' current work indicates that these standards are being maintained. This is because the structured programme for ICT lessons in Years 7,8 and 9 is well planned and being taught well.

171. Year 9 pupils are knowledgeable and skilful in word processing, desktop publishing, using spreadsheets and databases, elements of measurement and control, and in their understanding of the applications and effects of computers on society. They use computers confidently. They remember the

procedures they were taught earlier, and use this knowledge well in projects. For example, Year 9 pupils have produced their own curriculum vitae by applying a range of word processing and presentational skills very well. Their extended project, based on used cars, demonstrated good understanding about creating a database and sorting information effectively.

172. In relation to their prior attainment, Key Stage 3 pupils achieve very well in ICT lessons because they receive very good individual teaching. Year 7 work includes successful word processing of text related to their work for English, and well-developed posters which explore presentation skills. Year 8 develop this work further in their projects on supermarkets. They have produced good notes about the use of computers in supermarkets and the effects of this on customers. This work is then extended, through more detailed application of spreadsheets to explore the nutritional and energy values of breakfast foods. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, are able to follow the structured approach to project work and improve their knowledge, understanding and skills. Higher-attaining pupils work through tasks quickly and achieve very good standards by applying their knowledge and skills in more advanced work.

173. GCSE results have been consistently high for the last three years. The level of results has been maintained despite the number taking ICT increasing considerably and pupils being entered for the GCSE examinations a year early. In 2000, Year 11 pupils' results were well above the national average. Year 10 pupils' results were excellent, with 96 per cent of those entered gaining A* to C grades and 50 per cent gaining A* and A grades. Both boys and girls did better than nationally.

174. Current work in Years 10 and 11 indicates that standards are also well above the national expectation in the taught ICT courses. Pupils of all levels of ability, including those with special educational needs, achieve well because they have access to a well taught, structured course that enables them to build well on their work in previous years. They continue to extend their knowledge and skills in set projects, and demonstrate their capabilities through their individual interpretations of the work. Higher-attaining pupils apply their knowledge and skills very effectively in individualised work, and this enables them to achieve the highest grades. Pupils use good strategies for identifying and analysing problems. They word process notes well, and good examples were seen of drafting and redrafting written work. They identify the equipment and computer software that are most appropriate for their individual projects. These include applications of spreadsheets, databases and desktop publishing to enhance the content and presentation of work. Many pupils have written guidebooks about how to use the materials they have produced, and these and their evaluations of their work are of high quality.

175. Although most pupils have good access to a good programme for the development of ICT skills through lessons in this subject, the use of computers elsewhere in the curriculum is under-developed. Some good use of ICT is made in history, geography, and design and technology. Science and music are developing this aspect of their curricula. However, the National Curriculum requirement for all subjects to include ICT as part of their work is not met. This means that those pupils in Key Stage 4 who do not take an ICT course do not make the progress they should through learning ICT skills in other subjects.

176. The teaching of ICT is good. It was satisfactory or better in all the lessons observed during the inspection, and very good in some. Teachers' management of pupils and expectations of their behaviour are very good, and result in a very positive working atmosphere. Teachers demonstrate good technical knowledge, which enables them to deliver good class presentations and to provide technical support. Good levels of individual support are provided and this, together with the structured approach to project work, provides a very good framework for pupils' learning. It is particularly supportive of lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs. Marking and other assessment procedures provide regular guidance, which enables pupils to improve their work. In the most successful lessons, teachers had planned in some detail for the learning of individual pupils. An appropriate range of teaching methods was used. In the better lessons, timed tasks increased the pace of pupils' work. Homework was set, but in some cases was insufficiently challenging and so did not provide enough support for class work.

177. Overall, learning in both key stages is good. Pupils develop their computer skills, remember what they have previously been taught, and learn to use computer programmes with increasing independence. They worked at a good pace, and showed interest and good concentration throughout the lessons observed. Overall, their attitudes and behaviour are very good. They respond positively to the structured approach

being used. In the lessons observed, most pupils engaged enthusiastically in the tasks set and were keen to use computers. They showed respect for their work and the facilities.

178. The department's improvement since the last inspection is very good. Standards have risen, and pupils of all ability now realise their potential in the taught ICT courses as they provide good coverage of National Curriculum requirements for the majority of pupils. However, the use of ICT in other subjects is not co-ordinated effectively. Computer facilities have been improved significantly, but lack of access to these facilities is still affecting the use of computers by other departments. The lack of an ICT technician means that the co-ordinator has to spend much time maintaining the network. This is affecting the management of the subject, and limiting the development that needs to take place across the curriculum. Staffing is satisfactory at present because teachers whose major responsibility is in other departments make good contributions to the teaching of ICT. However, there is an urgent need to reinforce the specialist staffing of ICT if standards are to be maintained. The management of the subject is satisfactory overall, with a strength in the commitment to improvement.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

179. All pupils study French in Years 7 to 9. One third also study German in Years 8 and 9. In Years 10 and 11, pupils opt for GCSE courses in either French or German.

180. Results of teachers' assessments in French at the end of Year 9 in 2000 were slightly above those reported nationally. The results were an improvement on 1999 figures, reflecting the overall rise in standards in French. Girls performed significantly above the national average. Boys' results were in line with the average. German was not assessed as a National Curriculum subject because it was begun in Year 8 as a second foreign language by some pupils only.

181. The evidence of pupils' work and the lessons observed showed that in French the standard of work of pupils currently in Year 9 is in line with the national expectation overall. Pupils do best in speaking and writing. They use French competently for practical communication, often for their own purposes rather than simply in response to drills or exercises. They write well on a good range of topics such as their home town, preferences in entertainment and daily routines. Their reading skills are good and their listening skills are satisfactory. However, standards in German are currently below the national expectation as the pupils have not built a sufficiently firm foundation on the language and they lack confidence as learners.

182. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory at Key Stage 3, in both languages. In Years 7 and 8, much of their work focuses on using French and German for practical communication. Good examples of this were seen in Year 7 French, where pupils discussed leisure pursuits, and in Year 8 German, where they surveyed each others' opinions on school subjects. As with Year 9 pupils, pupils' skills are least well developed in listening, and they also need to work on the accuracy of their pronunciation in both languages.

183. GCSE results in French have improved steadily since the last inspection. In 2000, the results were above the national average for comprehensive schools, including in the proportion of pupils who achieved grades A* or A. The percentage of pupils entered for the examination was well above the national average, making the improvement in results even more marked. Pupils did better in French than in most of their other subjects. Girls outperformed boys, but by a significantly narrower margin than is the case nationally. No pupils took GCSE in German in 2000. Results in this language fluctuated considerably in previous years, varying from above average to well below average.

184. Pupils' attainment, as seen in work and lessons in the current Year 11, is average overall in French. Pupils have developed their writing skills particularly well, motivated by the production of GCSE coursework. The very good examples seen included a piece describing a past holiday abroad, personal and business letters, reports and descriptive writing. Pupils speak and read competently, and are working hard to improve their listening skills, with some success.

185. Pupils' attainment in German is well below average. The specialist German teacher has recently left the school, which has had a negative impact on the confidence of Year 11 pupils and on the standard of their work, though results of mock GCSE examinations suggest the potential for performance in line with

national averages. Pupils' written work showed that they attained a standard equivalent to the lower GCSE levels by the end of Year 10, but that they have made less progress during Year 11.

186. Overall, Key Stage 4 pupils' achievement is satisfactory. It is now good in French, and satisfactory in German. A higher-attaining Year 10 French class produced good extended conversation on aspects of school life. A lower-attaining class approached a challenging reading task with confidence built up by good listening and spoken preparation. Pupils in a Year 10 German class spoke well in pairs on the topic of school, progressing from present to past tense use with good application of rules of word order. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in both languages. They benefit from being grouped by ability and working with materials which are well targeted to meet their needs. They receive good support from their teachers. The indications are that in French, the above-average results of 2000 will be repeated in 2001 because of the good teaching and learning, and pupils' positive attitudes towards language study.

187. Overall, teaching and learning are good in French and satisfactory in German. They were very good in over a third of the modern languages lessons observed. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. The best features of teaching were the clear targeting of lessons to the needs of pupils across the ability range, sympathetic teaching of lower-attaining groups, the pace and variety of lessons, good presentation of language backed with copious practice to enable pupils to learn and retain new language, and the routine involvement of pupils in practical, communicative tasks. Underpinning all these was teachers' enthusiasm for the subject. Marking of pupils' work is generally thorough and helpful. The few weak elements of teaching are insufficient rigour in the teaching of French pronunciation, lack of support for classes whose confidence is low, and some inconsistency in matching expectations to pupils' capabilities. There is a clear link between the overall quality and consistency of teaching and the improved standards in languages.

188. Pupils' attitudes to language study are positive throughout the school, and particularly good in Years 7 to 9. Despite the current problems in staffing for German, pupils in these classes were as positive as those in French classes. Behaviour was very good throughout. Pupils of all levels of ability responded enthusiastically and willingly in lessons. Their progress and improving success in languages are achieved by good approaches to learning. They concentrate well, maintain their effort throughout lessons, and use time well. They work well in pairs or groups with minimal intervention from the teacher. They show a capacity to develop their language skills by applying them to realistic situations and speaking or writing on topics of personal interest.

189. The languages curriculum is satisfactory. Schemes of work give a good guide to the ground to be covered and prepare pupils well for examinations. What they lack is an overall framework setting out how pupils of different levels of prior attainment are expected to progress. This has resulted in teachers not always structuring their lessons to cater for the range of attainment within the class. This particularly affects the learning of the higher-attaining pupils. Good systems of assessment have been developed, based on National Curriculum levels and backed with portfolios of work to exemplify standards. The faculty has begun to use the outcomes of assessment to set GCSE targets.

190. The faculty is well managed. The teachers are a competent and cohesive team. The problem of staffing in German has been effectively dealt with in the short term, though further development of the subject will depend on the appointment of a second full-time specialist. Improvement since the last inspection has been good, notably in the key areas of improved standards of teaching and learning, and pupils using language for practical communication. German remains a relative weakness, and schemes of work need further development using the National Curriculum as a framework for planning for pupils' progress from year to year. Pupils still have too few opportunities for pupils to use ICT in language learning. The language classrooms are not located close enough to enable easy access to equipment and to create an environment conducive to team working and the sharing of good practice. The faculty has the capacity to improve further.

MUSIC

191. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were not carried out in 2000. The evidence of the pupils' work and the lessons observed during the inspection showed that at the end of Year 9 standards are below the national average. Pupils have not systematically developed a working knowledge of the elements of music prescribed in the National Curriculum over the key stage. Therefore they do not compose and perform confidently, and their knowledge of musical theory is limited. Pupils understand how chords are formed, and can play a simple accompaniment, for example to the theme from 'Titanic'. Their facility in improvising is below average, except in the case of a few higher-attaining pupils who already learn instruments. This restricted most pupils' attainment when they began to compose a pop song. The scheme of work, which the new head of music is compiling, is, however, providing an appropriate basis for pupils to develop the required skills and knowledge methodically in the future.

192. When pupils enter the school in Year 7, the standards they have attained in music are about average. In relation to this level of prior attainment, Key Stage 3 pupils' achievement has been unsatisfactory. However, their achievement this school year is good. Year 7 pupils have developed their understanding of pulse and rhythm by accurately combining vocal jazz rhythms. Tone and tuning were good in the lessons observed, and pupils achieved a good basic understanding harmony. Pupils of all levels of attainment participated fully and developed their understanding of musical theory well because of the practical nature of the activities. Year 8 pupils understand more complex rhythms and melodies. They have learned to perform them, for example by combining African poly-rhythms in which they skilfully used voices and tuned and untuned percussion instruments. This work suitably challenged all the pupils, and the more accomplished musicians gave a good lead to other pupils. Their knowledge of theory is now developing well. For example, pupils understand scales, and consolidate their knowledge by evaluating their learning at the end of lessons.

193. Numbers taking GCSE in music are comparatively small and so comparisons with national statistics are not reliable. No pupils gained A* grades in the past three years, but most pupils attained A to C grades. In 2000, eight of the 14 candidates gained the higher levels. No pupil has achieved below grade F. As nationally, girls gain higher grades on average than boys.

194. Standards are below the national expectation for those following the music option in Year 11. Few have flair in composing and performing, and generally pupils' knowledge of musical theory and their facility for analysing music they hear are very limited. Their use of technical and descriptive language when analysing the music they hear, for example when comparing baroque and classical examples, is poor. The range in the pupils' facility for composing is very wide. A few compose fluently, using their well developed instrumental skills to good effect, and examples were seen of pupils confidently using a computer for composing and arranging their music. Other pupils, with little musical background to draw on, were unable to use notation and relied on the letter names of notes for recording their ideas. These pupils produced a very small volume of work. However, pupils' achievement in relation to their previous attainment is good overall. In Year 10, where there is a higher proportion of accomplished musicians, pupils' achievement is excellent. Their standard in improvising and performing in 12-bar blues style is well above average, and their knowledge of theory and notation is very good.

195. Pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to others. They are fully involved in all practical activities and make worthwhile contributions to group work. They benefit from the carefully-targeted individual help which is a strong feature in lessons.

196. Teaching and pupils' learning are now good in Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4. The teacher is a versatile musician, who has excellent skills in communication and understands pupils' needs well. Expectations of behaviour are high. As a result, pupils work purposefully and responsibly. They collaborate efficiently with each other in group work. Worksheets and information sheets of a very high quality significantly benefit pupils' progress. Pupils are generally keen to attain high standards, particularly so in Year 10. In a lesson where the pupils made excellent progress, the natural motivation and efficiency of the pupils enabled them to develop their composing and performing very effectively. They were assisted by a high standard of help from the teacher, who evaluated work in progress supportively and gave constructive individual advice. Tight deadlines were set, so that pupils maintained a good pace of work. Lessons began with an effective recall of previous work and ended with consolidation of what had just been

achieved. The standard of questioning was high. The teacher challenged and extended pupils of all levels of attainment appropriately. Lesson planning is usually very good. There is a tendency, however, for some activities to be too extended in Key Stage 3. Although the pupils remain willing, their stamina is over-taxed, which reduces their progress.

197. The improvement in the music department since the last inspection is unsatisfactory. Standards are lower than reported then, and the pupils have not achieved as well as they should. This situation has been related to staffing issues and the lack of provision for the school's senior managers to monitor the work of the department systematically and support its development. However, the recently-appointed head of department manages the subject well. Consequently, good improvements have been made during this school year, and are starting to raise standards. Day-to-day organisation is very efficient, despite the heavy teaching commitment of this one-person department. Schemes of work contain a good balance of activities, conform well with statutory requirements and provide good opportunities for pupils' social and cultural development. These opportunities are supplemented by a good range of instrumental teaching by visiting teachers, extra-curricular ensembles and an annual concert tour abroad. The music curriculum is limited by the accommodation for teaching and storage, and the lack of tuned percussion and ICT. For example, the lack of a suitable keyboard in the hall is inhibiting the department's plans for extending opportunities for practical music-making at assemblies and at other events. The overall improvement since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory, but there have been significant improvements this year and there are very good plans for further development in provision for music.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

198. In 2000, teacher assessments of pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 were similar to the national average. The evidence of the lessons observed during the inspection showed that standards in Year 9 are also average, in all areas of the curriculum. The majority of pupils have sound basic skills in physical education. For example, boys have developed good body line and extension in trampolining, and showed that they have very good skills in evaluation. In basketball, Year 9 girls have sound control and passing skills. Many pupils are able to apply the techniques, skills and competition rules to several aspects of the curriculum, including basketball, trampolining, hockey and gymnastics.

199. GCSE results at grades A* to C were below the national average in 2000, although for the previous three years they had been significantly above the national average. Overall, the standard attained by pupils now in Year 11 is in line with national expectations. For example, Year 11 pupils in a GCSE practical lesson were analysing their performance successfully, and showed that they had developed sound racquet skills and tactical awareness. Other Year 11 pupils refined their volleyball skills successfully, and applied them in playing a game.

200. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall at both key stages. In most Key Stage 3 lessons, pupils demonstrated increasing control and levels of accuracy in a range of skills. For example, in a Year 7 lesson on orienteering, pupils developed good map reading skills and the ability to work together very well as a team. Girls in a Year 7 dance lesson developed a simple sequence of movements and evaluated their own performance and that of others in the lesson. In both dance and gymnastics, insufficient emphasis is placed on developing quality in movement, and this results in pupils making too little progress in this aspect of the activities. However, an example of very good progress was observed in a Year 8 trampoline lesson, where relatively inexperienced pupils developed a good sequence of movements while successfully evaluating each other's performance to improve quality. Pupils of all ages are encouraged to develop some understanding of the techniques and rules as well as skills. In a Year 11 GCSE practical lesson, pupils' analysis of their performance led to an improvement in skill level and tactical awareness for the whole group. Although in many lessons the progress of the higher attainers is satisfactory, in some lessons the activities were insufficiently demanding for these pupils.

201. Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive at both key stages. Most are enthusiastic, well behaved, and co-operative, demonstrating a real enjoyment of the subject. They are attentive and able to sustain concentration. Relationships are usually good.

202. Teaching and learning were good in most of the lessons observed at both key stages, and satisfactory or better in all the lessons. Where the teaching was most effective, thorough planning incorporated varied teaching strategies and well-sequenced activities which involved both individual and collaborative learning. The teacher's secure knowledge of the subject was conveyed to pupils through perceptive observation of performance, appropriate intervention and good teacher-directed question-and-answer sessions. Discipline and class management were very good in most lessons. Pupils' and teachers' assessment of performance regularly enhanced teaching and learning. However, these assessments are not recorded systematically, and insufficient use is made of individual targets to help pupils improve. The scrutiny of written work showed that the breadth and depth of theory work for GCSE are unsatisfactory. Teachers' marking of this work does not provide pupils with the information they need to improve in future. Existing assessment information on individual pupils is not used effectively, to ensure that all pupils entered for GCSE are challenged to fulfil their potential. Overall, teaching of physical education is good at Key Stage 3 and satisfactory at Key Stage 4.

203. The leadership and management of the department are satisfactory, as is the progress in dealing with the issues raised in the last inspection report. The department handbook identifies policies and procedures clearly. Assessment procedures are now relevant to the needs of the pupils, but need further development. Schemes of work are also still being improved, but those that have been completed are useful working documents. Opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and to undertake different roles such as coach or official have improved. The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. Health and fitness are covered well. Additionally, in both key stages teachers consistently stress the benefits of regular exercise, and pupils are taught how to prepare for and recover from specific activities. Display is now very good. The staff are good role models. They are committed, and give generously of their time. They provide a good range of extra-curricular activities, and fixtures with other schools provide good opportunities for pupils to extend and develop their skills and interests. Teams compete successfully with other schools in a range of sports, and some pupils compete at regional and national levels. The head of department has identified appropriate targets for development, and day-to-day organisation and communication are very good.

204. However, some weaknesses were identified by this inspection. The department development plan lacks the detail needed to ensure that the targets are met, and is not used effectively for longer term, strategic planning. Teaching and learning are not monitored, for example through lesson observation, to evaluate the department's effectiveness. The facilities for physical education are very good, except that the hard play area is becoming unsafe. At Key Stage 4, the range of activities provides a sound preparation for post-16 leisure activities, but insufficient time is allocated for physical education and so the requirements of the National Curriculum are not fully covered. Schemes of work do not yet incorporate Curriculum 2000 requirements, and do not provide enough specific guidance on developing the potential of the higher-attaining pupils.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

205. The evidence of pupils' work and the lessons observed showed that standards of work attained at the end of Year 9 are well below the standards expected by the locally agreed syllabus. Provision was poor at the time of the previous inspection because of difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified staff. Following the inspection, the provision for religious education improved but the school has been unable to recruit specialist teachers again this year. In addition, the allocation of time for religious education is satisfactory in Year 7, but poor in Years 8 and 9 as only 30 minutes per week is allocated to the subject. These are the reasons for the low standards at Key Stage 3.

206. By the end of Year 9, pupils have thought about religious belief and the nature of God. They are familiar with Christian festivals. They understand symbolism in religion, and have compared the Resurrection in Christianity with reincarnation in Hinduism. Their written work is too brief and often perfunctory, because of time constraints and non-specialist teaching. Too much time has been spent on undemanding illustrating of their written work. Their contributions to class discussions are mostly lightweight, and there is too little evidence of pupils learning from religious education how to empathise with others or to understand the value, for believers, of a personal creed.

207. When pupils enter the school in Year 7, their standards in religious education are average. Their achievement is poor because they have had too little time to cover the topics in sufficient depth. In Year 7, pupils acquire a good range of information about major religions, and their distribution throughout the world. They learn a good range of information about the development of Christianity, church buildings and religious festivals, such as Christmas, Divali and Hanukkah. They consider mysteries and events which cannot be explained, such as the Marie Celeste and the Bermuda Triangle, and draw from them an understanding of the nature of faith and belief. However, standards of personal writing are well below expectations. In Year 8, pupils have opportunities to relate religious ideas to their own lives, for example when writing about 'a time I was tempted'. However, constraints of time prevent substantial coverage of topics. In the written work submitted for scrutiny, topics were seldom continued into a second lesson. This has inhibited the depth of pupils' study and so their achievement is poor. In Year 9, pupils study ultimate questions about belief and death. In the lessons observed, pupils showed an understanding of why a celebrity could be lonely and commit suicide. They discussed the subject sensitively. Pupils also showed a good understanding of what the Resurrection means for Christians.

208. A few pupils took a short GCSE examination in 1999 and 2000. Results were good, with seven of the eight candidates over the two years gaining A* to C grades. With such small numbers, comparison with national averages is unreliable. No pupils are now preparing for public examinations in religious education. In Years 10 and 11, religious education forms an occasional component in the personal and social education programme, and standards are well below what is envisaged in the locally agreed syllabus. As at Key Stage 3, the evidence of the lessons observed and pupils' written work showed that achievement is poor.

209. Pupils' attainment in the two lessons observed during the inspection was well below the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. Year 10 pupils watched video excerpts on the wonder of creation, and subsequently wrote briefly about their belief in the existence of a supreme power and their thoughts on life after death. Year 11 pupils, for whom this was the first lesson since the religious education module in Year 10, watched a video on UFOs and in open-minded discussion linked the topic to what can and cannot be explained with reference to religion.

210. The teaching of religious education is mostly by non-specialist teachers, with a small amount by an unqualified teacher who has a qualification in theology. While some of the lessons observed were satisfactory, and one was very good, teaching and learning are overall unsatisfactory in both key stages, mainly because of the teachers' lack of subject knowledge. In the very good lesson, the teacher elicited thoughtful views about the validity of the Resurrection from a class of pupils of wide-ranging attainment. The teacher contained their behaviour and focused their thinking, and so they made significant gains in their understanding of difficult religious ideas. In a few lessons, pupils of different levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs, were satisfactorily challenged, but most lessons were undemanding as the teachers' expectations were too low. Too little guidance was given on what pupils were to learn from watching videos, which were a resource in two lessons observed. In Key Stage 3, too much time was spent on illustrating work. A common failing was a lack of challenge in written work, which limited the achievement of all and especially of the potentially higher-attaining pupils. The pace of pupils' learning was slow. Teachers' questioning was sometimes poor as it did not extend pupils' understanding. Teaching methods were sometimes inappropriate, such as when pupils were invited to write their thoughts about life after death and to hand them in for evaluation by the teacher. Marking was mainly perfunctory with too little correction of the spelling of key words. Where work was marked, pupils had not carried out instructions in the teacher's comments, for example to complete work. Overall, teaching fails to motivate pupils to learn effectively, to attain high standards and to increase their skills, knowledge and understanding sufficiently.

211. Nevertheless, pupils' attitudes to the subject are generally good. They take seriously the ideas presented to them and make a satisfactory effort to comply with instructions. Their pace of work, however, was usually too slow when they were working independently.

212. The temporary improvement after the last inspection has not been maintained, largely because of staffing problems. The subject is poorly managed and monitored. The current scheme of work for Key Stage 3 has been borrowed from another institution. It is substantial and meets statutory requirements, but

there is insufficient time to implement it adequately. The school does not have an established scheme of work for Key Stage 4, but the temporary, part-time teacher is preparing a series of lessons for the religious education module within PSE. This will meet statutory requirements. Resources are poor. Religious education is a major area for development.

SOCIOLOGY

213. The school provides a GCSE sociology course. It is popular, with 43 pupils taking the examination in 2000. Results were close to the national average and a little better than the average for all their other subjects. This is better than the national situation, where they perform less well in sociology. The evidence indicated that standards are broadly average in Year 11, and that pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Teaching and learning in the lessons observed were good. Activities were well planned. Relaxed, but effective, management of pupils provided a working context that boosted their productivity and confidence. Pupils were given strong support in understanding sociological theory by, for example, being provided with opportunities to relate this to their own experiences at home and school. This was further enhanced by good use of such resources as video and cartoon strips. Full use was made of opportunities to support the development of literacy skills, by focusing well on specialist vocabulary. In a Year 10 lesson on education, the role of language in achievement was appropriately emphasised. This provided a rich context for pupils to reflect upon their own personal development. In both years, questioning was effective in developing pupils' knowledge and understanding, but the questions were insufficiently open-ended and probing. This meant that the pupils were not challenged to extend their critical thinking skills and to be less dependent on the teacher.