

INSPECTION REPORT

Royton and Crompton School
Oldham

LEA area : Oldham

Unique Reference Number: 105734

Headteacher : Mr Des Herlihy

Reporting inspector : Mark Woodward
11049

Dates of inspection : 11 - 15 October 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 707983

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school :	Comprehensive
Type of control :	County
Age range of pupils :	11 to 16 years
Gender of pupils :	Mixed
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Appropriate authority :	Oldham
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Date of previous inspection :	October 1995

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		Teaching
		Leadership and management
Sharon Scull, Lay Inspector		Attitudes, behaviour and personal development
		Attendance
		Support, guidance and pupils' welfare
		Partnership with parents and community
		Accommodation
Roy Pitcher	Religious education	Special educational needs
Margaret Beardsley	English	KS4 (drama, library studies)
Alan Brewerton	Science	Equal opportunities
		Curriculum
Ian Cleland	History	KS4 (geology)
	Geography	
Norman Godfrey	Art	KS4 (family, health, business, travel, office studies)
Jeffery Hardman	Information technology	
	Design and technology	
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MAIN FINDINGS

What the school does well

The proportion of pupils gaining GCSE A*-G grades is high.
Pupils make very good progress at GCSE in information and communication technology. They make good progress in drawing and painting, food and textiles. At Key Stage 3 they make good progress in physical education and in the taught information technology lessons, and at Key Stage 4 in mathematics, geography and drama.
Extra-curricular provision is good, particularly in physical education, where standards are also high.
The quality of teaching and learning is improving following the measures that the school has taken.
Relationships between pupils and teachers are good.
Levels of attendance have improved in response to the good procedures that the school has developed.
The leadership given by the headteacher and senior management team is successful in improving the school.
Financial planning is good.
Financial control is very good and the administration of the school is efficient.
There is an effective programme for raising pupils' awareness of environmental issues.
The provision for personal and social education is good.

Where the school has weaknesses

The proportion of pupils gaining 5A*-C grades is well below national averages.
Standards of attainment in resistant materials, and in modern foreign languages at Key Stage 4 are unsatisfactory.
Work is not always sufficiently challenging for the full range of ability, particularly the more able.
Departments implement whole-school strategies unevenly.
The curriculum for pupils on the special educational needs register, and other pupils who would benefit from support, is not organised efficiently.
The accommodation in a number of subjects is unsatisfactory; for example, music, drama, science, design and technology, and for departments housed in the ROSLA building.
There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual awareness.
At lunchtime the pupils spend too long queuing for food and have inadequate access to toilets.

Royton and Crompton is a school that has shown significant improvements in recent years. Its strengths considerably outweigh its weaknesses.

How the school has improved since the last inspection

Since the last inspection, standards of attainment have risen, particularly at GCSE; almost all pupils now leave with GCSE qualifications. Over the past four years, the total points score of pupils at GCSE has risen at a faster rate than the national average. Most progress has been made in raising the examination results of middle and lower attaining pupils. The key issues from the last inspection have largely been addressed: standards have risen generally; significant improvements have occurred in geography, art, food, and textiles; attendance has risen sharply; there are no significant health and safety issues, and the religious education curriculum now meets statutory requirements. Standards in resistant materials have not risen and the requirements for a daily act of collective worship are still not met. The high quality of leadership offered by the headteacher and senior management team has provided the impetus behind the improvements achieved by the staff and pupils of the school.

Standards in subjects

The following table shows standards achieved by 14 and 16 year olds in national tests and GCSE examinations in 1998:

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

The above table relates to results in 1998 as comparative national figures for 1999 are not yet available. The grades do not fully reflect the attainment levels of the pupils. Since the last inspection standards of attainment have been steadily improving, particularly the proportion of pupils gaining A*-G grades at GCSE. Pupils make satisfactory progress overall and parents generally feel that their children achieve good standards.

Results in the 1999 GCSE examinations were higher than those achieved in 1998 by all the key measures. They were also higher than the results achieved by pupils prior to the last inspection. Of particular note are the high proportions of pupils gaining 5A*-G and 1A*-G grades. The proportion of pupils gaining 5A*-C grades in the 1998 GCSE examinations was well below the national average. It was also well below the national average for similar schools, but when the same pupils' results are compared with their own performances in the 1996 National Curriculum tests, they can be seen to have achieved appropriately for their abilities. The proportion of pupils gaining 5A*-G results was above the national average, above the average for similar schools, and well above average compared with the pupils' results in the 1996 National Curriculum tests. The average total points score over the four years prior to and including 1998 shows a trend rising at a faster rate than the national average.

The results of the 1999 National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3, in English and science, were substantially lower than the results in 1998. Observation of pupils' work suggests that these results were unrepresentative in English, while in science pupils had not consolidated their understanding of key concepts sufficiently well. Between 1996 and 1998 the National Curriculum test results in English and mathematics rose but in science they rose and then fell back. Overall, compared with all schools, they were well below the national average in English and below the national average in mathematics and science.

Quality of teaching

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 7-9	Good	English, science, geography, food, textiles, art, information technology, physical education.	Resistant materials.
Years 10-11	Good	Information technology, English, mathematics, science, geography, history, food, textiles, art, GNVQ.	Resistant materials and modern foreign languages.
English	Good		
Mathematics	Good		

In the 176 lessons seen during the inspection, teaching was at least satisfactory in 96 per cent of them, good or better in 57 per cent and very good or excellent in 15 per cent.

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

Other aspects of the school

Aspect	Comment
Behaviour	The school is an orderly community, the behaviour of the pupils being generally good both in classrooms and around the building.
Attendance	The school has done well to improve attendance levels significantly since the last inspection. They are now in line with national averages.
Ethos*	The ethos of the school is good. There is a commitment to high standards of achievement and behaviour, and relationships are good.
Leadership and management	The headteacher has a clear vision for the school and he is well supported by an effective senior management team. The chair of governors is an asset to the school.
Curriculum	The curriculum is generally satisfactory and will be improved further when plans for GNVQs are implemented.
Pupils with special educational needs	Since the previous inspection the school's provision for pupils with special educational needs has improved significantly. However, the curriculum is not organised as efficiently as it might be.
Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development	Social provision is good, and that for moral and cultural development is satisfactory. There is, however, insufficient provision to promote pupils' spiritual awareness.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	Staffing arrangements are good and there are adequate resources. The accommodation, however, is unsatisfactory in a number of curricular areas.
Value for money	The school provides satisfactory value for money.

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

The parents' views of the school

What most parents like about the school	What some parents are not happy about
<p>The opportunities given to the pupils outside the normal curriculum</p> <p>The standard of work achieved by the pupils</p> <p>They feel well-informed about their children's progress</p> <p>Staff are approachable</p> <p>The headteacher has had an impact in raising standards of attainment and behaviour</p>	<p>The timing of parents' evenings and reports</p> <p>Homework: the amount set and the level of difficulty</p>

The school has reorganised the timing of parents' evenings and reports in response to parental and staff concerns. Homework was of an appropriate quality during the inspection week but there was evidence of irregular setting when pupils' planners were examined.

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

The school, governing body and staff should:

Continue to raise standards of attainment, particularly in relation to the proportion of pupils gaining five or more higher grades at GCSE and standards in resistant materials and modern foreign languages at Key Stage 4 by:

matching work more effectively to the individual capabilities of all pupils, particularly the more able;
improving teaching by spreading good practices within and between departments;
ensuring that all departments make full use of the good progress monitoring procedures;
making greater use of the target language in the teaching of modern foreign languages.
(Paragraphs 4-23, 33-46, 114-236)

Improving the performance management system by:

creating short-term action plans following all line management meetings;
integrating short-term action plans with long-term development planning;
ensuring that all staff are fully trained in the interpretation of progress monitoring procedures;
devolving responsibility for departmental quality control to heads of departments.
(Paragraphs 56, 57,68,82-94,137,147,162,170,179, 213, 221)

Improve the co-ordination of the provision for pupils with special educational needs by:

ensuring that all pupils have full access to the National Curriculum;
reducing the amount of time spent supporting pupils in one-to-one withdrawal sessions;
extending the advisory role of the special educational needs co-ordinator;
extending the impact of the department by giving support to pupils with a broader range of learning difficulties;
linking classroom assistants more closely with individual departments.
(Paragraphs 22, 23, 34, 35, 50, 58, 69, 78, 87, 95-112, 185)

Improve the accommodation arrangements for music, drama, science, design and technology, and for the departments housed in the ROSLA building.
(Paragraphs 98-102, 125, 147, 162, 198)

Improve pupils' spiritual awareness by:

identifying opportunities for reflection and discussion in schemes of work;
taking opportunities for reflection that occur spontaneously during lessons;
improving the spiritual dimensions of assemblies.
(Paragraphs 40, 51, 60, 61, 152, 154, 196)

Improve lunchtime arrangements by:

reducing the time spent by pupils queuing for lunch;
ensuring adequate access to toilets;
supporting the work of prefects more effectively.
(Paragraphs 26, 28, 76)

Minor weaknesses which should nevertheless be included in the governing body's action plan:

The inspection team felt that the school might also consider:
reviewing timetabling arrangements as this year, too many modern foreign languages GCSE lessons take place at the end of the day, when the pupils tend to concentrate less well.
(Paragraphs 49, 209)

INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the school

The characteristics of the school are similar to those found at the time of the last inspection. The socio-economic circumstances of the pupils are less favourable than in the average school. Around 20 per cent of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is a little above the national average. Around 6 per cent of the pupils have English as an additional language, which is higher than the national average. There are 1,163 pupils on the roll, boys slightly outnumbering girls. More pupils apply to join the school in Year 7 than can be admitted.

Pupils arrive at the school with low levels of attainment in relation to national standards. Boys' attainment is lower than that of the girls, particularly in literacy. The pattern of attainment on entry has been similar over the past four years. Around 8 per cent of the pupils have are identified as having special educational needs which is below the national average, as is the proportion of pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs.

The school's mission statement says that it aims to "provide a first class education for all our pupils within a secure and supportive environment". The policies and practices that are being developed and implemented are moving the school effectively at an appropriate pace towards this objective. The school's focus on teaching and learning is having a very positive impact on the progress of the pupils. Whole-school targets have been set for GCSE performance and attendance in line with government policy.

Key Indicators

Attainment at Key Stage 3¹

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	123	114	237

National Curriculum Test Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	54 (54)	75 (74)	55 (65)
	Girls	47 (72)	49 (59)	33 (50)
	Total	101 (126)	124 (126)	88 (115)
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	43 (54)	53 (57)	37 (50)
	National	(65)	(60)	(56)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	10 (27)	29 (28)	11 (18)
	National	(35)	(36)	(27)

Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	58 (52)	74 (76)	88 (85)
	Girls	63 (58)	58 (59)	71 (66)
	Total	121 (110)	132 (135)	159 (151)
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	51 (47)	56 (58)	67 (65)
	National	(62)	(64)	(62)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	19 (18)	29 (31)	28 (24)
	National	(31)	(37)	(31)

Attainment at Key Stage 4²

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	118	104	222

GCSE Results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A* to G	1 or more grades A* to G
Number of pupils achieving standard specified	Boys	27 (18)	109 (92)	114 (99)
	Girls	37 (40)	102 (118)	103 (119)
	Total	64 (58)	211 (210)	217 (218)
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	29 (26)	95 (93)	98 (96)
	National	(44)	(90)	(95)

¹

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

²

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

Attendance

Percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year :			%
	Authorised Absence	School	7.7
		National comparative data	
	Unauthorised Absence	School	1.7
National comparative data			

Exclusions

Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school age) during the previous year :			Number
	Fixed period		31
	Permanent		5

Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is :			%
	Very good or better		15
	Satisfactory or better		96
	Less than satisfactory		4

PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

Attainment and progress

Since the last inspection standards of attainment have been steadily improving, particularly in relation to the proportion of pupils gaining A*-G grades at GCSE. Pupils make satisfactory progress overall and parents generally feel that their children achieve good standards.

Results in the 1999 GCSE examinations were higher than those achieved in 1998 by all the key measures. They were also higher than the results achieved by pupils prior to the last inspection. Of particular note are the high proportion of pupils gaining 5A*-G and 1A*-G grades. There were variations in the performance of different departments; for example, results in mathematics, textiles and drawing and painting were high whilst they were low in resistant materials, physical education and business studies.

A high proportion of pupils in history, geology, art and drama gained A or A* grades in 1999. In previous years a number of musicians succeeded at these levels.

The proportion of pupils gaining 5A*-C grades in the 1998 GCSE examinations was well below the national average. It was also well below the national average for similar schools but when the same pupils' results are compared with their own performances in the 1996 National Curriculum tests, they can be seen to have achieved appropriately for their abilities. The proportion of pupils gaining 5A*-G results was above the national average, above the average for similar schools and well above average compared with the pupils' results in the 1996 National Curriculum tests. The average total points score over the four years prior to and including 1998, shows a trend rising at a faster rate than the national average. Overall, the results suggest that the school is improving its performance, particularly for pupils of middle and lower ability.

Over recent years, girls have consistently out-performed boys at GCSE particularly by the 5A*-C measure. This is partly explained by the lower literacy skills demonstrated by boys on entry to the school, which has an impact on their performance in many subjects. Boys perform better than girls in the National Curriculum tests in mathematics and science. Pupils from Asian heritage backgrounds perform as well as white pupils.

By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is average in relation to national standards in mathematics, information and communication technology, geography, art, music, religious education and physical education. It is low in relation to national standards in English, science, design and technology (with the exception of textiles), modern foreign languages and history.

The results of the 1999 National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3, in English and science, were substantially lower than the results in 1998. Observation of pupils' work suggests that these results were unrepresentative in English, while in science, pupils had not consolidated their understanding of key concepts sufficiently well.

Between 1996 and 1998 the National Curriculum test results in English and mathematics rose, but in science they rose and then fell back. Overall, compared with all schools, they were well below the national average in English and below the national average in mathematics and science. Girls performed better than boys in English and boys better than girls in mathematics and science relative to their respective national averages. When compared with the results of pupils in similar schools in 1998, the pupils' performances were below average in all three subjects.

By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is average in relation to national standards in design and technology, information and communication technology, modern foreign languages, art, music, religious education and physical education. It is low in relation to national standards in English, mathematics, science, history, and geography.

Standards in reading are average at the end of both key stages. Pupils read a range of demanding texts in English lessons, and their research skills are developing well through the library and communications skills course in Year 7. During the inspection, there was very little demonstration of the skill of reading aloud in English lessons but across the curriculum there were widespread opportunities, and reading was fluent. In all subjects, pupils cope with the reading requirements satisfactorily.

Writing skills are just below average by the end of Key Stage 3. Pupils express themselves clearly, in reasonably grammatically correct English. Their work is generally punctuated appropriately, and the spelling of middle and higher attainers is satisfactory, but the work of lower attainers often displays many spelling errors and some common confusions.

Handwriting is generally neat and legible. The range of writing is satisfactory, and literary essays show a sound understanding of the conventions used in this kind of writing. By the end of Key Stage 4, standards are average. In mathematics, for instance, investigations are well written up, and there are some good examples of well-written coursework in physical education.

Speaking and listening skills are satisfactory. Pupils listen well to the teachers and to one another. They express themselves clearly and confidently in conversation or in small group situations. Pupils use technical language with some degree of confidence in some subjects; for instance, in physical education, pupils in Year 8 use the appropriate term, 'quadriceps', when speaking of particular muscle groups.

Pupils attain a basic level of numeracy and their progress in other subjects is not impeded by any lack of numeracy skills. However, there is little evidence of pupils checking their numerical calculations by considering the reasonableness of the answers. Pupils are competent at reading and interpreting the graphs and tables met within history. They are able to use the scales, graphs and tables encountered in geography. In physical education, in Year 10, pupils successfully use a formula to calculate their fitness quotient; this involves using pulse-rate data. In science, the reading of scales and taking of measurements is practised widely.

By the end of Key Stage 3, the level of attainment in information technology is average in relation to national standards, pupils having made good progress; for example, pupils in a Year 9 group have individually developed slide-shows as a system aid for primary children to learn their alphabet. By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is low in relation to national standards amongst those pupils not taking the GCSE course; for example, in English, Year 11 pupils are making a newspaper but the skills in use reflect a lower than expected level of attainment. The attainment of the pupils following the GCSE course is average in relation to national standards. They are able to use the full suite of programs autonomously and, with the use of the Network Administration software, they have become diagnostic problem-solvers. They are designing databases and web sites and can use scanners and digital cameras.

The progress of pupils at Key Stage 3 is good in information technology, food, textiles and physical education. It is satisfactory in English, mathematics, science, modern languages, history, geography, art, music and religious education, and unsatisfactory in resistant materials.

The progress of pupils at Key Stage 4 is very good in textiles and good in mathematics, geography and the GNVQ units. It is satisfactory in English, science, food, history, art, music and physical education, and unsatisfactory in information technology (except for those taking the GCSE option, where it is very good), modern languages, resistant materials and religious education (except for those taking the GCSE option where it is satisfactory).

The very good progress of pupils in GCSE textiles and information technology is directly linked to the quality of teaching. In both areas, teachers are highly skilled, enthusiastic and committed. They use resources effectively and encourage pupils to take control of their own learning. The unsatisfactory progress made in resistant materials and in the short course of religious education at Key Stage 4 is because work is not matched appropriately to the abilities of the pupils. In modern languages, it is because the pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to work in the target languages; while in information technology, it is because teachers in the departments across the school do not cover the Programmes of Study effectively.

Examination of the cognitive abilities test results taken by the same pupils in Years 7 and 9 reveals that the current Year 11 pupils made significant gains in attainment. The progress of the current Year 10 pupils was less marked. Pupils in both years made most progress in developing their non-verbal reasoning skills and least in developing their verbal reasoning skills.

Pupils at Key Stage 3 who have special educational needs and who receive support make satisfactory progress, both when in withdrawal language lessons and when they benefit from special in-class support provided by the class assistants. Their progress is also enhanced by their smaller class sizes. A small but significant group of pupils, many of whom are not on the special educational needs register, do not receive sufficient support to enable them to maximise their progress in, for example, English. At Key Stage 4, pupils continue to make satisfactory progress as they study GCSE and Certificate of Achievement qualifications. Virtually every pupil leaves school with some certification and is sufficiently literate to enter the working world with confidence.

The progress of pupils with English as an additional language was not found to be significantly different from that of other pupils in the school.

Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

Pupils' attitudes to learning throughout the school are usually good and they have improved since the time of the last inspection. In most lessons, pupils show interest in their work and they listen attentively to their teachers. Pupils enjoy their work in English and they are keen to take part in discussion sessions. In science and art lessons, pupils concentrate well in practical activities and they take a pride in the presentation of their work. However, in several classes, a small number of boys lack interest in their work and they are not motivated to achieve. A small minority of older pupils shows only limited enthusiasm and interest in learning a foreign language. When given the opportunities, pupils enjoy researching work independently and several use library facilities at lunchtimes. Many pupils are keen to improve their work and they voluntarily attend after-school homework clubs and extra revision sessions. A number of parents reported that boys were often reluctant to attend these sessions because of peer pressure.

The attitudes of pupils with special educational needs are generally good, especially when supported by class support assistants. They rapidly gain in confidence, which is partly the result of excellent transition plans that help teachers to be prepared to meet their needs. These pupils enthusiastically express their pleasure at being in the school with its wide range of opportunities.

Behaviour in classrooms and around the school is generally good, as it was at the time of the last inspection. Pupils usually respond promptly to teachers' instructions and they move about the buildings, often in confined spaces, in an orderly manner. Pupils are polite and they are extremely patient when queuing at lunchtimes. The majority of pupils adhere to the school's rules and discipline code and they are keen to earn recognition for their achievements through the rewards system. Pupils show respect for property, but they do not always dispose of litter in the bins provided. A small minority of pupils behave inappropriately and the number of exclusions from the school is similar to the national average.

The quality of relationships within the school is good and pupils of all backgrounds mix together well. In lessons, pupils usually work together co-operatively, and in religious education lessons they show respect for different opinions and beliefs. Pupils usually support one another well and they are confident to approach teachers or their peers with concerns. A small number of older pupils are trained bullying counsellors and they provide a very effective service. In physical education lessons pupils encourage one another and they are quick to congratulate one another's efforts and achievements.

Pupils' personal development is satisfactory. Representatives from all year groups attend meetings of the School Council, and pupils in Year 11 act as prefects, assisting at break and lunch times. Prefects are not always supported in their work well enough by members of staff. Several older pupils take part in a literacy project, supporting and encouraging younger pupils. A good range of extra-curricular activities contributes effectively to pupils' personal development. Several pupils attend sports, music and environmental clubs and there is good support for charity fund-raising.

Attendance

Attendance rates are satisfactory and have improved significantly since the time of the last inspection. The level of authorised absence has fallen steadily over previous years and it is now similar to the national average.

There is still a high rate of unauthorised absence and this is mainly confined to pupils in Year 11. A small number of pupils in other year groups also have poor attendance records and they absent themselves from school without permission. They quickly fall behind with their studies and this has an adverse effect on their attainment and progress. The school works closely with an educational social worker to encourage regular attendance but parental support is not always forthcoming.

A significant number of pupils are regularly late for morning registration. Although there are some problems with the late arrival of public transport, which the school is constantly monitoring, this does not account for the large majority of pupils who arrive after registration has begun. On occasions, pupils are not punctual to lessons during the day and this results in curricular time being lost.

Registers are completed quickly and efficiently at the beginning of morning and afternoon sessions and attendance is also checked within each lesson during the day. A small number of pupils do not report their late arrival at the office and they are not shown on the main register as being present.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

Teaching

Overall, the quality of teaching is good at both key stages. In the 176 lessons observed, teaching was satisfactory or better in 96 per cent, good or better in 57 per cent and very good or excellent in 15 per cent. The very good or excellent teaching was spread across a number of subjects, most notably in science, food, textiles, information technology at Key Stage 4, history, geography, art, and in some of the GNVQ units. The unsatisfactory teaching was mainly seen in resistant materials, modern foreign languages and some elements of music lessons.

All of the teaching of the two specialist teachers of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory or better. They show the distinctive skills expected of them in the small withdrawal groups. These skills, however, could be beneficially applied to a wider range of pupils who may be experiencing short or long-term problems. The subject departments are generally diligent in their response to pupils with special educational needs but the structure of the Individual Education Plans has an insufficiently tight focus. Some teachers, such as in English, are particularly effective when teaching pupils with special educational needs.

The impact of the class support assistants on pupils' learning is good. This was particularly evident in design and technology, information technology, mathematics, English and physical education. They use the Individual Education Plans drawn up by the special needs co-ordinator and the departments well. They are well prepared, have effective teaching relationships with the pupils and feed back the outcome of the lessons to the teacher concerned. Class support assistants often work across several subjects, which can be inefficient and limits their growing understanding of the requirements within individual subjects.

The quality of teaching at Key Stage 3 is good in English, science, food, textiles, information technology, geography, art and physical education. It is satisfactory in mathematics, modern languages, resistant materials, history, music and religious education.

The quality of teaching at Key Stage 4 is very good in information technology and good in English, mathematics, science, food, textiles, history, geography, art and in the teaching of GNVQ units. It is satisfactory in music, religious education and physical education, and unsatisfactory in resistant materials and modern languages.

Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of their subjects. In no departments was this found to be unsatisfactory. Particular strengths are in information and communication technology and in art. In information and communication technology, the knowledge of the head of department has resulted in the creation of good schemes of work which enable the pupils to make good progress. In art, pupils' understanding and awareness is enhanced by references to artists and civilisations in all lessons, which means that they make connections between their work and the influences and inspirations of others.

Expectations of the pupils are generally high. They are very high in information and communication technology at Key Stage 4 and high in many other subjects, such as mathematics at Key Stage 4, where some pupils are 'fast-tracked' through GCSE in Year 10. Expectations are unsatisfactory in resistant materials, modern languages at Key Stage 4 and music. In modern languages, teachers make insufficient use of the target languages, too often explaining in English and not expecting pupils to respond in the target language with extended passages of speech. The result of this is that pupils lack the confidence and capability to speak, even though they succeed in gaining GCSE grades.

The planning of teachers is satisfactory overall, but this masks variations between subjects and in aspects of planning within subjects. The outline planning of schemes of work is good, with an appropriate match of units of work to the requirements of the National Curriculum, GCSE courses and GNVQ. Departmental documents are often very well organised, as in music. There is, however, a weakness in the planning of work to meet the needs and capabilities of all the pupils, particularly the most able. This was a point raised by parents, both at the pre-inspection meeting and through the questionnaires. They suggested that work is pitched at a middle level (some said particularly in Year 7) in order to help pupils with weaker skills to catch up. This was not found to be the case in all subjects but there is an issue here in a number of areas. In history, for example, the progress of more able pupils at Key Stage 3 is affected by a lack of sufficiently sharp focus on meeting their learning needs. This is also the case in resistant materials, music, modern foreign languages and GCSE physical education. Departments across the school do not identify opportunities for reflection within their lesson planning and schemes of work.

The methods and organisation adopted by teachers are satisfactory. They are very good in information and communication technology at Key Stage 4, where the access to help, directly and through the network facilities, both from teachers and from the excellent technician, is a significant factor in improving pupils' performance. This access is also available to pupils

working on computers in the library and so issues relating to software are quickly and effectively solved. This represents organisation of a very high order. In modern languages, the use of English is too great and music lessons are sometimes too tightly structured to enable pupils to explore their musicality most effectively.

Teachers manage the pupils well in almost all subjects. Relationships are good, classroom order being developed on this positive framework rather than a punitive one. The majority of teachers use school procedures well to deal with the relatively few incidences of unsatisfactory behaviour. In the very unusual circumstances of an individual teacher not having good relationships with the pupils, or where procedures are not used effectively, lessons are unsuccessful and pupils' progress is affected.

Time and resources are used well. In English, for example, a range of well-timed teaching strategies is used effectively in lessons to reinforce learning. In geography, pupils' progress is enhanced by the use of local issues such as the development of the M60, to bring the subject to life. While foreign language assistants are used very well in modern languages, the time spent using the target language in lessons is unsatisfactory. Many teachers, across the curriculum, are generous in the additional time they give to pupils in order to prepare them for GCSE examinations.

The quality and use of day-to-day assessment is satisfactory. In some subjects, such as English, it is good. Work is marked regularly and effectively, helpful comments being written to suggest ways in which pupils can improve their work. Pupils, particularly those in Year 11, indicated that teachers gave them good advice on how to improve their work. In some subjects, such as resistant materials, this is not established practice.

A significant proportion of parents is concerned about the quantity of homework that pupils are set. Parents say that pupils are frequently asked to complete classwork as their homework task. Pupils who work quickly at school often do not have homework as a result. This was not evident during the inspection week where the quality of homework set was satisfactory; however, an examination of the pupils' planners revealed irregular homework setting. Homework is not used effectively as part of the GCSE physical education course. It is set irregularly and infrequently marked.

Parents expressed the view that teachers work hard, particularly in coping with the small minority of challenging pupils. A number praised the revision classes that teachers run after school and on Saturday mornings.

The curriculum and assessment

Curriculum

The school is making good progress in developing the structure of the school's curriculum and the subjects within it. This development has been closely linked with a determination to improve pupils' attainment and to address the issues raised in the previous report. Appropriate policy documents are in place.

The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is appropriately broad and balanced overall. It covers all the requirements of the National Curriculum. The time allocation to humanities subjects is barely adequate but this does not affect attainment. The school has made major improvements in the provision of religious education since the last inspection. In addition to National Curriculum subjects, all pupils are offered formal courses in information and communication technology, drama and personal and social education, and there is an additional library period for pupils in Year 7. These courses enhance the educational experiences of the pupils. The arrangement of pupils into two broad ability bands, each following a different modern foreign language, Spanish or French, adversely affects the opportunity for pupils to study more than one foreign language. While curricular continuity and progression are generally satisfactory across both key stages, the current arrangements in design and technology are unsatisfactory because common skills are not identified. This results in there being several progression models, rather than one that is unified. The National Curriculum for music is covered in insufficient depth, relies too heavily on keyboard skills, and there is an undue emphasis on repetitive theory which is learned in isolation. Last year, the school piloted a new programme called 'New Start', aimed at improving the attendance and attainment of disaffected pupils in Year 9. The project is linked with a local College of Further Education and the Youth and Community Service.

The curriculum at Key Stage 4 is also appropriately broad and balanced. It includes all the nationally required subjects and, in addition, a wide range of options. All pupils participate in the short GCSE course for religious education, which is included as part of the personal, social and religious education course. This is an improvement on the previous report, which indicated that religious education, at Key Stage 4, was offered insufficient curriculum time to fulfil legal requirements. The improvement in access to information and communication technology also represents an improvement on the previous report. The curriculum in Key Stage 3 restricts some opportunities for choice within the area of modern foreign languages. Only in exceptional circumstances do pupils choose to study both Spanish and French to GCSE. In addition, the length of lessons and the positioning of some lessons on the foreign languages teaching timetable adversely affects progress and should be

reviewed. While the school currently only offers some units of work from vocational courses as an aid for lower attainers studying for some GCSE subjects, there are plans to introduce courses leading to Part 1 of the General National Vocational Qualification in the near future. This will enhance the opportunities for all pupils to take the courses that are most suitable for their interests and capabilities. Planning for the improvement of the curriculum for a small group of disaffected pupils in Year 10 is taking place. The 'Live Project' aims to improve both attendance and attainment by providing some courses equated to National Vocational Qualifications in partnership with local colleges.

Statutory requirements are met within the curriculum in both key stages and all pupils have access to the full curriculum. All pupils with special educational needs follow the National Curriculum at Key Stage 3 and the public examination syllabuses at Key Stage 4. No formal disapplications have been made. There are, however, several pupils whose individual support programmes take them out of some lessons. This means that they do not receive their full curriculum entitlement and impedes their opportunity to make progress in those areas. The structure of these withdrawal sessions needs to be reviewed. At sixty minutes, they are also too long. Pupils with physical disabilities are well catered for and have access to all lessons.

The setting of appropriate homework, which either consolidates or extends pupils' knowledge and understanding in nearly all subjects, including personal and social education, represents a considerable improvement upon the previous report. Schemes of work do not identify sufficient opportunities for teachers to encourage pupils to reflect on the work they are doing in order to stimulate their personal development.

The programme for personal social and religious education followed by all pupils in Key Stage 4, and that of personal and social education in Key Stage 3, have improved since the last inspection and are now good. The 'Learning for Life' programme, followed by all pupils for one lesson per week, includes a record of achievement for all pupils and is being used to raise achievement. In addition to the normal personal and social education work, which includes sex education, education about drugs abuse and study skills, 'Learning for Life' includes a well-established environmental education programme which encompasses several cross-curricular links. It has been recognised as an example of good practice by the Department for Education and Employment and has been reported on in several local and national publications. Careers education, also included, is a strength. All pupils receive careers information from the careers advisor. This is linked to a period of work experience, which is well supported by local industry. Pupils' response to the programme, whilst being mixed, is generally supportive.

The school has a well-developed programme for extra-curricular activities, which include revision clubs, visits overseas, musical activities, art club, residential visits and field trips, and an over-subscribed information and communication technology club. The wide range of sporting activities caters for all rather than just for those who are skilled performers or team members. Parents are grateful for the wide range of opportunities available to the pupils beyond the normal curriculum.

Assessment

Arrangements for assessing pupils' attainment are, on balance, satisfactory within Key Stage 3 and good within Key Stage 4. However, there is some variation both in the quality of assessment and the effective use to which the information is put. The assessment procedures are good in English, mathematics, geography, art, religious education and modern foreign languages. They are also good in Key Stage 3 information technology. Assessment procedures are satisfactory in history, and music and physical education at Key Stage 4. They are unsatisfactory in science, music, design and technology, and in information and communication technology at Key Stage 4.

In English, examples of work at various GCSE grades are made available to pupils in order that they have a target to aim for. Marking in English reveals how individual targets are used to motivate the pupils. This is also the case in mathematics, where pupils are given the National Curriculum level of the piece of work they are on. They also make self-assessments. However, formal assessments made during Key Stage 3 are not yet given in terms of National Curriculum levels. Target-setting is employed in science but assessments are not given in terms of national standards. Modern foreign languages measure attainment in terms of national standards and employ folders of bench-marked work to ensure that these judgements are consistent. In history, the use of bench-marked work is underdeveloped, as is the setting of pupil targets. Within Key Stage 3 physical education, assessment is not fully understood or managed by the department. Individual subject assessment practices are monitored, but not formally enough.

The school has good procedures for monitoring pupils' progress. These involve the analysis of the national tests, commercial standardised tests, examination results and other assessment information. Analysis of these for pupils over time gives the school the means to evaluate their progress and thus to set realistic yet challenging targets. With the present assessment systems it is not yet possible to compare, to any meaningful extent, the attainment of individuals in different subjects, or, for example, how lower attaining boys are progressing through Year 8. These improvements are currently being made.

The quality of the use made of assessment information to inform curricular planning differs between subjects and key stages. It is satisfactory overall at both key stages. Particular strengths can be seen in art and religious education. In art, for example, pupils' work is assessed continually during lessons, which enables pupils to improve it prior to the final assessment. This has a clear impact on the progress that pupils make. It is unsatisfactory in history, and in design and technology, physical education and music at Key Stage 3. In design and technology, the National Curriculum level descriptors are not sufficiently used, with the result that progression and continuity are impeded.

Appropriate assessment procedures are skilfully used to gauge literacy levels, but with relatively few pupils. More pupils could benefit from diagnostic assessment procedures in both literacy and numeracy. For pupils with special educational needs, Individual Education Plans are not used to inform teaching strategies in a number of subjects. The number of suitable subject specific targets is also spread unevenly over subjects. The arrangements for the assessment, recording and reporting of pupils with statements meets statutory requirements.

The school's assessment group has evolved a good assessment policy based on sound educational research. The group, in which all subject areas are represented, fully understands that good assessment practices are essential to the raising of levels of attainment. The implementation of these policies is already having an impact. Assessment practices have improved both in actual practice and in uniformity over the school since the last inspection.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Procedures for spiritual development remain unsatisfactory, as reported at the last inspection. The school is still failing to meet statutory requirements in respect of a daily act of worship for all pupils. Each year group has three assemblies each week - one as a year group and two combined with another year group. In half of the assemblies observed, there was little or no spiritual content. Those pupils who remain in form groups at this time have no provision for spiritual experience. Following the last inspection, a programme of activities was introduced for these form periods, based on the 'thought for the day' concept, but this was unsuccessfully implemented and was discontinued. The Key Stage 4 curriculum, which was not meeting statutory requirements at the time of the last inspection, now complies with the locally agreed syllabus.

There are also too few opportunities taken to develop pupils' spiritual awareness through the curriculum. The exceptions to this are in religious education, where provision is good, and art, where spiritual experience is based on references to other civilisations and cultures.

Provision for moral education is satisfactory. There is a strong influence through Key Stage 4 religious education lessons, and throughout the curriculum there is evidence of respect being encouraged for other people and their views. A structure of positive discipline is in the final stages of preparation and some faculties are already implementing it. This is already having an impact on pupils' behaviour. The school has taken account of the feelings of the local community by keeping pupils on site at lunchtime and by strengthening rules concerning uniform. Both measures have been successful, in improving the behaviour of the pupils. There is, however, now a new problem in that the kitchens cannot adequately cope with the numbers of pupils wanting to take lunch.

Provision for social education is good. Social responsibility is a teaching theme in religious education and pupils generally interact well in learning situations in the classroom. Pupils are encouraged to take social responsibility around school. Prefects are conscientious and observe their duties well and the counsellors, trained to support victims of bullying, provide a valuable and effective service. Pupils visit and support senior citizens at home. The school council meets regularly, but pupils would benefit from exercising more control of the discussion.

The school undertakes regular fund-raising on behalf of charity and has won a national award for its environmental work in clearing a site and tree-planting. There are 'Young Engineers' and 'Mini-enterprise' groups active in the school and pupils benefit from visiting the alternative technology centre at Bangor University. Residential and other visits, such as the regular ski-trip abroad, promote social development effectively.

Pupils are given satisfactory opportunities to experience a range of cultural activity. There are theatre trips, a range of musical activity, which involves the community and supports fund-raising for charity, and a number of visits abroad, providing curriculum enrichment in the curricula for modern foreign languages and geography. The school is highly successful in competitive sport and also makes provision for a wider range of pupils, who may not represent the school, but who have the opportunity to derive pleasure from team games. There is a good range of clubs, and teachers show their commitment to the pupils through a range of GCSE revision classes.

Opportunities for pupils to experience aspects of other cultures are available: these include world music, African and Asian

dance, far eastern culture, world faiths and discussions as issues arise in the curriculum. Ethnic minority pupils are very well-integrated into school life.

Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

The school has good procedures for promoting pupils' welfare and these have been maintained and developed since the last inspection. The pastoral system is well structured and form tutors work closely with year heads to monitor pupils' personal development. Whenever possible staff remain attached to the same groups of pupils throughout their time at the school, and this promotes a continuity of care.

Arrangements for monitoring pupils' academic progress are good. Heads of year maintain records of pupils' progress, and individual effort grades and test scores are regularly reviewed. Pupils are encouraged to set personal targets, which are recorded in their journals and referred to in form periods and 'learning for life' lessons. The majority of these sessions are used effectively to develop pupils' learning skills and to motivate them to achieve high standards. Staff liaise closely and any pupil whose progress is causing concern is identified quickly and supported appropriately. All pupils in Year 11 now have the opportunity to be involved in a mentoring scheme.

Support for pupils with special educational needs is inconsistent. In some lessons pupils are assisted by specialist staff and detailed Individual Education Programmes are prepared. However, not all pupils who require additional support are identified and their needs are not always met appropriately. Pupils for whom English is an additional language are supported satisfactorily.

There are close links with local primary schools, and pupils' transfer arrangements are well managed. Pupils visit the school on several occasions before entry and there is a good exchange of information between staff. A number of pupils attend a summer literacy school and the project continues during the autumn term. This enables the Year 7 pupils to work with older pupils and helps them to settle into their new school.

Pupils in Year 9 receive detailed guidance to enable them to make a well-informed choice about course options. Work experience and careers education are high priorities within the school. All pupils have access to a thorough programme of careers advice and there are good links with local sixth-form colleges and training establishments. A well-planned programme of personal and social education is taught effectively throughout the school. Topics covered are well-linked to studies in science and religious education and the very successful programme has been acknowledged nationally in government publications.

The procedures for monitoring and promoting discipline and good behaviour are very effective. A positive discipline policy is being introduced and all staff have undergone recent training in the new strategies. Emphasis is placed upon rewarding and publicly acknowledging pupils' good behaviour and achievements. There is a clear system of sanctions, and pupils are fully aware of the expected standards of behaviour. Staff are alert to pupils' concerns and any incidents of bullying are handled sensitively and quickly. Parents feel that the bullying policy is effective.

Arrangements for monitoring and promoting pupils' attendance are good and these have improved considerably since the time of the last inspection. Absence is checked daily, and parents are contacted at an early stage if staff are concerned about a pupil's absence. The school employs an educational social worker to support families and she makes several home visits. The importance of regular and punctual attendance is emphasised to parents and the school has worked hard and successfully to improve pupils' attendance.

Overall, there are good systems in place to promote pupils' welfare, health and safety and the school has resolved those issues raised by the last inspection report. Child protection procedures are good and there are appropriate links with specialist agencies to provide additional support for pupils. The school nurse visits to conduct medical checks and she also assists with the health education programme. The school provides a breakfast service before school so that all pupils can make a good start to the day.

The health and safety officer makes regular reports to the governors' premises committee and there are clear guidelines and procedures in written policies. Several staff have first aid qualifications and there are clear instructions for evacuating the buildings. Some electrical equipment has not been checked recently but the school responded quickly to concerns raised during the inspection. Science laboratories are too small for the large number of pupils using the rooms and this poses a potential health and safety risk.

Having improved behaviour at lunchtimes by limiting pupils' access to the community, there are now some other problems.

Pupils have to queue at the canteens for unacceptable lengths of time and on occasions there is insufficient food for the numbers of children. Prefects perform their supervision duties well, but they are not given enough support from members of staff. A card system operates for pupils to enter the buildings to attend lunchtime clubs, but several report that they have been unable to gain access. Pupils also experience difficulty in using toilets, as several blocks are locked.

Partnership with parents and the community

The majority of parents show their positive support for the school and a small number are involved in fund-raising activities. Parents are encouraged to sign their child's journal each week, and this provides a good line of communication between home and school. Several parents expressed concerns about homework, and inspection findings confirm that this is not set consistently in accordance with an agreed timetable.

The school has recently reviewed the timing of parents' evenings and these are now held after the issue of interim progress reports. The majority of parents attend these evenings and parents of pupils with special educational needs are invited to the annual reviews of their children's statement.

Information for parents is good, as it was at the time of the last inspection. The prospectus is well presented and the annual governors' report to parents is detailed and informative. Regular newsletters are issued and information for new parents is very good. A video has recently been produced which provides an interesting and informative view of the school. Parents can purchase very professionally produced Yearbooks, which give a photographic record of the school's activities and achievements. The quality of pupils' end-of-year reports is satisfactory overall, and includes useful advice on improvement. However, in some subjects there is insufficient information about the strengths and weaknesses in pupils' attainments and the progress made.

Community links are good and these are used well to enhance the curriculum and pupils' personal development. The school has established links with several local companies and businesses who support the school's work experience programme and mini-enterprise scheme. Pupils gain good business experience running the school's own 'Mid Bank' with support from a well-known national bank. The school's mini-bus was provided by a local company and many pupil visits, linked to curricular studies, are made to local museums, galleries and places of interest.

There are good links with local primary schools, and since the last inspection a number of curricular initiatives have been established. Pupils with special educational needs are very well prepared to make the transition from the primary schools. Primary school pupils take part in science days and mathematics weeks and they have been involved in plans to develop wildlife areas within the grounds. Pupils take part in many sporting and musical activities within the area and there are good links with a local residential home and special school. The school has a well-established environmental programme and pupils have developed a fitness trail and woodland paths that are used by the local community. This has led to the school being featured in national publications about these successful projects.

THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the school are good. Examination results have risen since the last inspection, the ethos of the school is positive, and many improvements are taking place in response to the philosophy and structures that the management team has put in place.

The leadership of the school is good. This is considerably due to the clarity of thinking and commitment to the school shown by the headteacher. A number of parents suggested that the arrival of the headteacher was a significant factor in driving the school's improvement. Governors, teachers and pupils concur with this judgement. The critical factors here include the headteacher's ability to set an appropriate agenda for improvement, to create structures that enable the agenda to be followed and to build a team approach to problem-solving and policy implementation. Good relationships have been formed within the school and staff generally recognise that the policies that have been agreed are appropriate in taking the school forward.

The governing body is very well-led. The chair of governors is very supportive of the good work being done by the school's management. She has had sufficient faith in the school to send her children to it and commits regular time to ensuring that the governing body's work is appropriately focused. Increasingly, the governing body is developing a constructive role in helping the management of the school to pursue its aims. At the present time there are no direct links with departments but this is an issue that is currently, and appropriately, being discussed. The governing body has made good appointments to the

senior management team.

There is a senior management team of six which includes two deputy headteachers. All of them make positive contributions to the school's development. The team has a good balance of skills and they are supportive of one another and of the direction set by the headteacher.

The leadership of subjects is also generally good. It is very good in information and communication technology, for which the head of department has developed good schemes of work and successful methods of working that enable the pupils to make good progress. Aspects of the leadership of physical education are unsatisfactory. Curricular planning lacks an overall strategy, development planning does not focus on pupils' underachievement at GCSE, and insufficient attention is paid to staff development.

The special needs co-ordinator ensures that the needs of pupils on the special needs register are met effectively, with special emphasis being placed on pupils who have very low literacy skills. There are, however, more pupils who need support, and also in a wider range of teaching provisions. It is necessary to review some of his work to ensure that his responsibilities as the special needs co-ordinator are fully met. This relates to advising and organising the support for pupils from middle sets and developing diagnostic testing and assessment procedures wherever necessary. This would mean that the use of the special needs register would be more dynamic and responsive to pupils' changing needs. It would also highlight his advisory role to subject departments in respect of developing work, which specifically meets the needs of pupils with special educational needs. The departmental development plan lacks reference to the needs of a sufficiently wide range of pupils.

The support and monitoring of teaching and curriculum development are good. The school is committed to improvement through an appropriate focus on developing teachers' skills. As a result, the 'Effective Teaching and Learning' policy was developed with the support of the staff, and this is now having an impact where it is successfully implemented. This work is enhanced by the parallel work done in gathering information about the attainment and progress of the pupils. Good systems are in place, which are currently being improved further. The challenge for senior management is to ensure that all heads of department make full use of this information and use it to take on the role of supporting and monitoring the teaching in their areas more effectively. The management structures are in place to achieve this. All heads of department have regular meetings with the senior staff who are their line managers; however, action plans are not sufficiently tightly defined following these meetings.

The school's mission is to "provide a first-class education for all our pupils within a secure and supportive environment." The school is moving towards this position effectively. The environment is secure and supportive. A good contribution to this is made by the personal and social education programme, which includes a well-taught 'learning for life' component. Particularly in this area, but also in other aspects of the school's provision, the aims of the school are well met. In addition, the policies and practices are in place to improve further the attainment and progress of the pupils in their academic and vocational studies.

Development planning is satisfactory. Positive outcomes can be seen from the recent developments that have been made by the school. The development plan itself is thoughtfully constructed to contain a clear focus together with sufficient detail to enable implementation to occur. It is a one-year plan with on-going elements and contains a good summary of key aims at the start. It is closely linked to the action plan, which was created following the previous inspection. Its strength is its core focus on raising attainment. It is less effective at the level of detail; for example, success criteria, particularly in departmental plans, are too vague. One of the targets was to manage the inspection efficiently. This was achieved very successfully.

The ethos of the school and of departments is good. There is a strong focus on improving the school by raising the achievement and aspirations of the pupils. Good leadership is provided in this area by the senior management team. Relationships in the school are good, which according to a number of staff, was not the case a few years ago. Teachers show a good deal of commitment to the pupils; for example, through the range of extra-curricular activities they organise and through the revision classes provided for GCSE.

Statutory requirements are met, except with regard to the provision of a daily act of collective worship.

Since the last inspection the school has made good progress. Standards of attainment have risen, particularly at GCSE, where almost all pupils now leave with GCSE qualifications. Over the past four years, the total points score of pupils at GCSE has risen at a faster rate than the national average. The key issues from the last inspection have largely been addressed: standards have risen generally, significant improvements have occurred in geography, art, food, and textiles; attendance has risen sharply; there are no significant health and safety issues and the religious education curriculum meets statutory requirements. Standards in resistant materials have not risen and the requirements for a daily act of collective worship are still not met. There has been a good response to the issues raised by Her Majesty's Inspectorate who visited the school in 1997. Teaching

and learning have improved, as have the attitudes of the pupils and the monitoring of examination results.

The school is in a strong position to continue its improvement.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

Staffing

The number, qualifications and experience of the teaching staff are generally well-matched to the demands of the curriculum, although some non-specialist teaching of religious education is necessary in Key Stage 4. There are more men than women in the most senior positions in the school, but below this level there is a more even balance of male and female teachers holding posts of responsibility. Staff roles and responsibilities are generally clear. Numbers and qualifications of administrative and technical support staff, including support for pupils who have special educational needs, are satisfactory. The exception is art, where there is insufficient technical support. The information and communication technology technician offers a very high quality service to the school.

Provision for staff development is good and spending on it has increased threefold this year compared with the previous year. It is closely linked to school and departmental planning and has the flexibility to respond to personal development needs. Induction procedures are good. The school has responded well to the needs of the relatively large number of newly-qualified teachers employed this year by investing in training for their mentors and by developing a good induction programme of its own to complement the Local Education Authority scheme. Consequently, newly-qualified teachers feel secure and well supported. Well-developed appraisal procedures are currently not functioning because of trades union action.

Staffing issues raised at the time of the previous report have been successfully dealt with, other than the decline in instrumental tuition, which continues to have an impact on standards in music.

Accommodation

The accommodation is unsatisfactory and does not enable the curriculum to be taught effectively in all areas. This is despite the substantial programme undertaken to refurbish internal partition walls and window frames, which has improved the overall fabric of the building. A rolling programme of repair and maintenance has also been established. Generally, the buildings are clean, but some areas are in need of decoration.

The astroturf sports pitch is a very good resource and compensates for some field areas being unusable due to poor drainage. There are adequate hard surface games areas and indoor facilities for physical education. As at the time of the last inspection, facilities for music are still unsatisfactory, with no dedicated practice room for instrumental tuition and insufficient areas for group work. Drama lessons take place in unsuitable dining halls, which are noisy and do not create the desired atmosphere. The drama studio will not accommodate a full class and the lighting is inaccessible to pupils because of height.

Two science laboratories are too small to accommodate safely the number of pupils in classes. Rooms used for food technology are too small for practical activities, and graphical products is taught in an inappropriate room with no working surfaces and insufficient space for the size of groups. The ROSLA building is in poor condition and stairways are very narrow. Rooms used for religious education lessons are too small to accommodate worktables and a computer. Two rooms used by modern foreign languages are distant from the main teaching areas and this affects communication within the department and the quality of provision.

There are good examples of display being used to enhance the environment and celebrate pupils' work, but this is inconsistent across the school. Within the modern languages department there is a varied range of pupils' work and subject information displayed and pupils' artwork is on show within the main building. However, in common areas, large areas of wall are left blank and some display cases are empty.

In partnership with the Groundwork Trust, attractive wildlife areas have been developed within the grounds and the erection of a security fence has reduced vandalism. Litter, however, is still a problem on the site. The school has improved the condition of toilet areas and has a continuing refurbishment programme.

Resources for learning

Although the school's spending on resources is below average, there are adequate resources in most subject areas. The access to computers for all pupils is satisfactory. However, there are significant shortfalls in resources in some subjects.

Mathematics textbooks for use in Key Stage 3 are in poor condition and need to be replaced. In design and technology, there is no provision for computer-aided learning and equipment and furniture are outmoded. In music there are not enough computers, no software for composing and the provision for tuned and untuned percussion is inadequate.

Since the last inspection, detailed consideration has been given to the library stock and action has been taken to ensure that the library becomes a support for learning for pupils in all subjects at both key stages. Old stock, and titles which no longer reflect present-day values in society, have been discarded and a well-planned programme of re-stocking is in progress. Although the number of fiction books is currently low, the school plans to fulfil its requirements within the next three years. Each subject in turn has a library budget, which will provide background reading and information for independent research and, again, the school plans to achieve this within three years. The library's computers and CD-ROMs are well used.

There is an extensive programme of visits undertaken both in the immediate area and further afield. Pupils visit local amenities, such as the Museum of Medicine and the Yorkshire Mining Museum. In science pupils visit the Alternative Energy exhibition; in art, pupils visit local galleries; and in English and drama there are theatres visits which include performances by The Royal Shakespeare Company. Field trips provide opportunities to study the geography, geology and economy of the locality. In religious education, pupils visit the Hindu temple. Year 9 pupils have an annual residential visit to Patterdale. Pupils of all ages will have the opportunity to visit Krakow next year as part of the millennium programme of activities. A generous benefactor has provided the school with a minibus, which is invaluable in supporting a wide range of visits and activities away from school. The school manages its resources budget effectively and gives appropriate consideration to subjects such as science and art where consumable items are an essential feature of the department's expense. Plans have been laid for the review of methods of provision of central resources in the coming year.

Since the previous inspection, resources in the library have undergone revision and improvement and its use as a learning resource centre has become much more effective. Resources in art are now adequate and there are now sufficient books in modern foreign languages.

The efficiency of the school

The school's financial planning is good. There is a well-defined process, which works through the senior management team together with the bursar in order to make proposals to the finance committee of the governors. This results annually in spending plan options, modelled on the indicative budget and confirmed when the actual budget share is received. The school has already reached the optimum number of pupils and cannot expect income to grow through increased numbers. Careful financial planning is therefore seen as an imperative. The delegation of premises funding, under the Fair Funding initiative, has allowed the school to address its own priorities within the building.

The new bursar has installed appropriate new software for budget management. She analyses monthly information from the Local Education Authority and reports regularly to the senior management team and termly to the finance committee of the governors. These procedures are good.

Since the last inspection, when there was a surplus of £120,000, the budget has operated in balance. Much of the surplus was spent on refurbishment of the design and technology area and the provision of an additional science laboratory. Current funding models are based on a planned small underspend designed to establish a contingency fund at the appropriate level of £40,000. The school also has a low level of expenditure on teaching staff, sustained by the large number of inexperienced teachers, and is aware of the need to absorb a significant level of incremental costs in the coming years.

Faculty financial planning is always satisfactory and good in science, art, design and technology, religious education, and modern foreign languages, where it relates to development plan priorities. Financial control and monitoring procedures are very good. Each faculty has a formula-driven allocation for learning resources, which is accessed by orders processed by the bursar, who provides monitoring information as necessary. There are also specific development funds for curriculum and for information technology, which are allocated to projects meeting criteria within the School Development Plan. The bursar also monitors expenditure on the Standards Fund and school fund. The most recent audit report raised only one minor concern, which has been resolved.

Faculty planning is good for making effective use of teaching and support staff, learning resources and accommodation. In science, this is achieved despite a low funding level. The timetable device, which produces a shared teaching period in history in Years 7 to 9, may lead to inefficient use of resources.

Classroom support assistants are provided, largely by the Local Education Authority delegated funding for statemented pupils, and are employed effectively in providing classroom support for individuals in small lower sets. School special needs

staff work largely with individuals withdrawn from lessons, which is less efficient than using them in lessons to support lower-attaining pupils.

Taking into account the expenditure per pupil, levels of attainment and the quality of educational provision, the school provides satisfactory value for money.

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

English

Attainment in English at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 is low in relation to national standards. The results of the GCSE examinations in 1998 were well below the national averages in both English Language and English Literature. The most recent results show an improvement in both subjects, with a marked improvement in the number of pupils gaining the highest grades in Literature. Nearly all pupils studying English Language this year were awarded either a GCSE grade, or a Certificate of Achievement. These results continue a trend of steady improvement since the last inspection, and although attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is still lower than that found nationally, inspection evidence shows that it is below only by a small margin.

The results of the National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3, in 1998, were below the national average overall, and below those in schools with pupils of similar backgrounds. However, the results have improved year upon year, and the improvement since the last inspection has been good. Although the results of the most recent tests fell, inspection evidence shows that this was uncharacteristic, and the underlying trend is still upwards.

Speaking and listening skills are satisfactory. Pupils listen well to the teachers and to one another. They express themselves clearly and confidently in conversation or in small groups. Some higher attaining pupils are quite articulate and argue and discuss issues cogently and at length. For instance, when pupils in Year 9 were debating the issues of fox-hunting, they listened to arguments then put forward counter-arguments; however, the poor vocabulary of some pupils hindered their fluency to some extent. In other areas of the curriculum, oral skills are good and opportunities for developing oral skills are encouraged through appropriate teaching strategies.

Standards in reading are average at the end of both key stages. Pupils read a range of demanding texts in English lessons, and their research skills are developing well through the library and communications skills course in Year 7. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' knowledge of literary terms and their understanding of how authors use these devices are satisfactory. During the inspection, there was very little demonstration of the skill of reading aloud in English lessons but across the curriculum there were widespread opportunities, and reading was fluent. In all subjects, pupils cope with the reading requirements satisfactorily.

Writing skills are just below average by the end of Key Stage 3. Pupils express themselves clearly, in reasonably grammatically correct English. Their work is generally punctuated appropriately, and the spelling of middle and higher attainers is satisfactory, but the work of lower attainers often displays many spelling errors, and some common confusions. Handwriting is generally neat and legible. The range of writing is satisfactory, and literary essays show a sound understanding of the conventions used in this kind of writing. By the end of Key Stage 4, standards are average. Many pupils reach satisfactory standards of fluency and maturity, with the writing of the highest attainers being of excellent quality, whether writing beautifully evocative description, or cogently arguing a point of view in response to a piece of literature. Extended writing, such as short stories, is interesting, sustained and well planned, and pupils use their drafting skills well. The work of lower attaining pupils shows a satisfactory degree of accuracy, with work properly organised into paragraphs, and neatly written. In other subjects, writing is satisfactory.

At Key Stages 3 and 4, pupils make satisfactory progress. Pupils enter the school with lower than average test results at Key Stage 2, with a substantial number of pupils reading below their chronological ages. By the end of Key Stage 3, tests results are still below average, but reading has improved. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in lessons; however, the reading of younger pupils in the school would improve more quickly with a structured, individualised reading programme.

The progress of pupils during Key Stage 4 is satisfactory. GCSE results are broadly in line with the results the same pupils gained in the National Curriculum tests they took at the end of Year 9. Progress in most Key Stage 4 lesson is good because of the good teaching. A possible reason why progress over time is not better, given the good teaching and the good progress in lessons, is the underlying attitudes of some of the pupils. Most of the higher attaining pupils display a positive attitude towards their studies. However, some pupils are diffident and disinclined to work and, although they are in the minority, there are enough of them to have an impact upon examination results. An example of this diffidence is shown by the poor uptake of the department's offer of extra workshops to help pupils prepare for the GCSE last summer.

Behaviour in the classroom is good. Pupils listen to the teacher, and generally enjoy the subject. They work together very well in small group or pair discussions, and relationships within the classroom are good.

The quality of teaching is good at both key stages. Teachers' knowledge of their subject is secure and they prepare their pupils well for examinations. The lessons are well planned, with clear objectives, which they share with the pupils. Teachers use a range of teaching strategies, and pupils are given opportunities to sharpen their thinking by discussion in pairs or groups, and good questioning techniques encourage pupils to extend their answers, or to be more precise in their language. Teachers know their pupils well and their needs, and they support pupils with special educational needs appropriately, building up their confidence and self-esteem. Work is marked regularly and very effectively. Marking contains useful comments to pupils on how they can improve their work. A weakness in teaching is that in some lessons there is a lack of drive towards keeping pupils sharply focused and alert.

The curriculum is planned effectively. The library and communications skills course in Year 7 and a weekly lesson of drama for all pupils in Key Stage 3, provide a wide and relevant curriculum. In each year, pupils follow common units of work, which ensures that the requirements of the National Curriculum are fully met and that skills are built upon systematically. These units are being developed to include work for different levels of attainment. The Certificate of Achievement course is available for a few pupils for whom the GCSE is not suitable. Pupils with special educational needs are supported well in the department through its setting structure, and the allocation of a well-qualified teacher to those classes. However, there is not always sufficient extra help available in other classrooms where there are pupils with special educational needs who have not been identified on the special educational needs register. Assessment procedures are good. Assessments are analysed and action taken, for example, in trying to improve on the performance of boys, or by targeting pupils who appear to be underachieving.

The head of department provides positive leadership and direction for the subject. There is a strong ethos of teamwork and a commitment to improving standards. The department has made good progress since the last inspection. Standards have improved at both key stages, with the greater improvement being at Key Stage 3. There has been some improvement in the attainment of boys, and this year they attained the same results as the girls in the national tests. The difference between boys and girls at Key Stage 4 is no different from that found nationally. Teaching has improved; there were no unsatisfactory lessons or progress; there was an appropriate degree of challenge in all lessons and there was very little time wasted.

Drama

Drama is a popular subject with a good number of pupils opting to take it to GCSE level. The proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades is similar to that found nationally. Drama is well taught and pupils enjoy the subject, working well in lessons; however, the standards attained at both key stages are limited because of the unsatisfactory accommodation. Pupils at Key Stage 3 use dining halls, which are open to view on both sides, giving no privacy either when pupils are changing or when they are performing. It is difficult to generate a quiet, intimate atmosphere where pupils can respond sensitively to each other; this limits the scope of what can be taught. The drama studio, which is used for GCSE pupils, is also unsuitable for practical drama because of its lack of blackout and soundproofing. It is used for stagecraft lessons, an important part of the drama syllabus; however, the lights cannot be used by pupils studying lighting effects because they are too high for pupils to use safely, and there is no specific area with lighting and mirrors suitable for experimenting with make-up.

Mathematics

In the 1998 GCSE examinations, the proportion of pupils achieving A*-C grades is below the national average for all schools, but above the national average for those schools with pupils from a similar background. The 1999 GCSE examination results show a marked increase in the proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades. The results in the 1998 National Curriculum tests, at the end of Key Stage 3, are below the national average for all schools. They are also below average when compared with similar schools. The difference in performances of girls compared with boys, at the end of both key stages, is in line with the national trend.

On entry to the school, pupils' level of attainment is low, and overall, at the end of Key Stage 3 it is low in relation to national standards. By the end of the key stage, most pupils can recall number facts with a reasonable degree of accuracy. In the lowest attaining Year 9 sets, pupils are able to state the appropriate units of measurement of some common objects and to convert between different metric units of measurement with some success. Pupils of average ability make scale drawings confidently and measure lengths and angles accurately. They are also able to solve problems based on whole number and fractional scale factors of enlargement. Pupils in a higher attaining Year 9 set can construct cumulative frequency tables and graphs, make comparisons between different graphs and attempt to explain these differences.

At the end of Key Stage 4 attainment is close to national standards. The highest attaining pupils (who have already obtained a good GCSE pass in mathematics the previous year) are able to write down confidently the algebraic equations describing

straight lines that pass through certain points. Pupils in a middle-attaining Year 11 set successfully use trigonometry or Pythagoras' rule to calculate lengths in simple figures, and some can explain the advantages of using trigonometry compared with an accurate scale drawing of the situation. Pupils in the lowest attaining groups are able to use informal probability language and to perform simple calculations for the probability of events occurring.

The latest sets of examination results do not accurately reflect the standards of attainment at Key Stage 4 observed during the inspection or the evidence of the 1999 examination results. These both point to attainment that is close to the national standards. Much work has been done over the last two years, within the mathematics department, to improve standards of attainment with a particular focus on Key Stage 4. This is now bearing fruit: for example, in the Year 10 group which took GCSE a year early, the vast majority of the pupils gained an above-average grade. Attainment is also improving in Key Stage 3, and, as a result of this work, should soon begin to have an effect on pupils' national test performances.

Pupils make satisfactory progress over Key Stage 3 and good progress over Key Stage 4. There is no appreciable difference in progress between boys and girls. Pupils with special educational needs, of all levels of attainment, experience the same degree of progress as their peers. This is a result of setting across whole years in Key Stage 4 (which ensures that pupils experience work of a realistically suitable challenge) and the efforts of support teachers. A blind pupil, whose attainment was below average at Key Stage 3, submitted coursework in Braille and was able to gain a good GCSE pass at the end of Key Stage 4.

Pupils attain a basic level of numeracy and their progress in other subjects is not impeded by any lack of numeracy skills. However, there is little evidence of pupils checking their numerical calculations by considering the reasonableness of the answers. Pupils are competent at reading and interpreting the graphs and tables they meet in history. They are able to use the scales, graphs and tables encountered in geography. In physical education Year 10 pupils successfully use a formula to calculate their fitness quotient, which involves using pulse rate data. In science, the reading of scales and taking of measurements are practised widely.

Pupils have a positive attitude to the subject itself and to their own progress within it. Over fifty pupils regularly attend weekly after-school mathematics workshops, which involve all the faculty staff. Most pupils take a pride in the presentation of their work. Many will persevere with an exercise until it is completed; for example, a very low attaining Year 11 group all attempted to complete a set of questions on probability, which for them was a challenging area of mathematics. None of them gave up and all experienced some degree of success. When given the opportunity, pupils work constructively together. A Year 7 group completed a data-gathering exercise involving the measurement of height, hand-span and other body measurements. Although this involved a great deal of movement and discussion as well as the use of equipment, it was completed in a very efficient and mature way. Pupils have limited opportunities for personal study, such as mini-projects involving greater use of the library or perhaps the internet. Relationships with teachers and between pupils are good, with absolutely no tensions between boys and girls or between different racial groups.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4. The enthusiasm of teachers is a noticeable feature of many lessons and good classroom order is achieved through positive methods. For example, a very low attaining Year 10 group made good progress in identifying and marking fractions of a whole because of the teacher's encouragement and praise. The lessons are well planned and always begin with the lesson aims being stated. These are briefly reviewed at the close of the lesson. Several pupils, in both key stages, say they find this useful, as it makes clear what is expected. Pupils in Key Stage 3 also have a file giving the learning objectives of each module of work together with their National Curriculum levels. Pupils tick these when they are sure they know a particular topic. There is also space for their own and their teachers' comments. Pupils find this a useful aid to revision and self-assessment.

Homework is set regularly to all groups regardless of their attainment. It may range, for the lowest ability Year 7 set, from the task of learning a particular multiplication table (to be tested next lesson), to answering some questions taken from past GCSE papers for higher attainers in Year 11. Homework is marked, generally with constructive comments, rather than mere ticks and crosses.

Teachers know their subject well and are very much aware of the common pitfalls that pupils can fall into. They usually make a point of confronting pupils with these in the course of discussion. Teachers are supported by a well-planned scheme of work that has in it many useful ideas for extension and investigative work. The scheme of work is continually updated in the light of classroom experiences. Assessment of pupils is used with good effect to monitor pupils' progress. The faculty uses a series of standard letters to inform parents or guardians of any positive achievement or any worrying changes in progress. Teachers are aware of the pupils with special educational needs in their groups. Those with vision problems are asked to sit at the front and those with reading problems who are given extra attention when reading is involved.

The faculty scheme of work has numerous activities designed for pupils of different attainment; the purpose of these activities is to practise and hone basic number skills and their recall and application. It is intended that these build on pupils' primary

school experiences of the National Numeracy Project. Quick mental mathematics tests are often used to round off lessons. Teachers try, whenever possible, to relate mathematics to 'real' life; for example, pupils working on scale drawings are asked where scale drawings might be useful and a group studying trigonometry asked to consider what uses it might have.

The faculty is well managed and united in its desire to raise attainment. The teachers have respect for one another's professionalism. Test and examination results are carefully analysed and the reasons for any emerging trends, including differences in attainment or progress between sets, are sought. Teaching is monitored informally and, to a lesser extent, formally. Faculty meetings are held regularly and involve educational as well as administration matters. The faculty work-room, which is used by all members, encourages a great deal of useful informal contact.

There are sufficient text books to avoid pupils having to share in Key Stage 4. These books are in relatively good condition, and include new sets of texts for the lowest attaining pupils. However, in Key Stage 3 the situation is less favourable; many of the books are well past their useful life and look shabby. The cause of this is simply length of use rather than mis-use by pupils. Provision for mathematics in the school learning resource centre is poor and limited to just 30 – 40 books, with little emphasis on the historical or cultural aspects of mathematics.

Since the last inspection in 1995, the quality of teaching has improved. This has raised attainment, particularly in Key Stage 4. The new schemes of work have contributed to challenging the more able pupils. Another contributory factor is the setting across a whole year in Key Stage 4, rather than within two equal ability bands as was the case previously. (A similar setting arrangement in Year 9 could have a similar positive effect.) The faculty's assessment and monitoring procedures also help to raise attainment.

Science

The attainment of pupils is low in relation to national standards at the end of both key stages. The proportion of pupils obtaining grades A*-C at GCSE in science was well below the national average in 1998. However, the proportion of pupils gaining A*-G results was close to the national average. The results in 1999 were similar to those achieved in the previous year. The attainment of boys at GCSE is higher than that of girls. Results in Key Stage 3 assessments in 1998 were below the national average for the proportion of pupils attaining Level 5 or above, and were also below the national average for those attaining Level 6 and above. These results reflected the relatively low attainment of pupils when they entered the school in 1995. The results were also below average when compared with other similar schools. The attainment of boys was significantly higher than that of girls and the performance of pupils from ethnic minorities was below that of other pupils, at Level 5 or over but above other pupils at Level 6 or over. When comparing the raw test results from year to year there was a small improvement between 1996 and 1998 but they fell back in 1999.

Currently, at Key Stages 3 and 4, attainment is below the national average for all attainment targets, even though teacher assessment indicates that pupils' attainment is in line with the national average. This discrepancy results from teachers over-estimating the attainment of pupils. The reasons for it were: a lack of thorough consolidation of one topic before progressing to the next; by the provision of material pitched at an inappropriately high level; and by the lack of standardisation of assessment practices across the department. Currently, in Year 9, higher attaining pupils have difficulty in explaining the meaning of 'warm-blooded' yet were studying the, more advanced, relationship between body size and heat loss; lower attaining pupils cannot explain the difference between the terms 'reversible' and 'non-reversible' in relation to a physical change but had completed higher level work on the differences between chemical and physical changes. High attaining pupils, currently at Key Stage 4, have difficulty in explaining the 'mole concept', which is beyond the requirements of the National Curriculum, and low attaining pupils have difficulty in explaining the structural differences between animal and plant cells, even though they had completed work on the subject. While attainment is consistent across each attainment target, there is little evidence of planning and evaluation elements in investigative work, which was otherwise well-integrated into the normal scheme of laboratory work.

In Key Stage 3, pupils make satisfactory progress in each attainment target, irrespective of gender or background. In nearly all lessons progress was at least satisfactory and in some it was good. Progress was best in lessons where all pupils were challenged, where teachers had high expectations and where pupils were excited by the work they were doing. This was an improvement on the previous report, which indicated that the progress of lower attaining pupils was unsatisfactory. Progress throughout Key Stage 4 is satisfactory in all attainment targets. In nearly all lessons, progress was satisfactory and in some it was good. There was evidence of challenge and pupils were making progress which parallels their level of attainment. This is an improvement on the situation described in the previous report. In those lessons where progress was less than satisfactory there was insufficient challenge and little structured development. There was no evidence that progress depended upon background or gender except that there is a preponderance of boys in the higher attaining sets. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.

Across both key stages, attitudes and behaviour are good or very good, although a few pupils require firm management at times. High attainers, in particular, show high levels of concentration, are eager to carry out tasks, work hard and often continue with tasks without further direction. Low attainers, however, work better in a well-structured environment. Where classroom management is good there are good relationships with the teacher and good relationships between pupils who are prepared to co-operate and help one another. Pupils show respect for one another, speak openly and with confidence and most clearly enjoy being in lessons. Most pupils take pride in their work and are careful with their presentation. Boys get along well with girls and there is no disharmony between different races.

The quality of teaching is good at both key stages. In the rare incidence of less than satisfactory teaching, poor planning and classroom management exemplified it. Teachers demonstrate high levels of knowledge and understanding, which is used effectively to adjust lesson pace and to maintain the interests of children. In the best lessons challenging and adroit questioning is used to aid progress and understanding. For example, in a Year 10 lesson, pupils succeeded, as a result of good questioning by the teacher, in explaining and interpreting graphs of distance compared with time and in understanding that acceleration is a change of speed in a given time. Lesson preparation is good. However, even though lesson objectives are explained to children, they are not always understood. Marking in Key Stages 3 and 4 is usually consistent with the marking policy and good diagnostic comments are usually made, but comments do not always indicate what pupils might do to develop their understanding. Homework in all years is used to extend or consolidate classwork.

The curriculum meets the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum. All pupils have the opportunity to experience a wide variety of science topics. The curriculum generally provides equal access and opportunity for all pupils. The use of computer technology to support teaching and to enhance progress has improved since the last inspection, but is yet not fully developed. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on the use of information and computer technology as an investigative tool. In both key stages, planning for continuity and progression is satisfactory. Procedures for assessment are well established. Their effective use, to follow progression and to improve attainment, however, has yet to be fully established. End of topic tests, in particular, need to be reviewed in order to ensure that they more accurately reflect the level of attainment of pupils. Assessment provides for the identification of pupils who underachieve in Year 11, but this should now be extended to both key stages in order that additional help and support can be provided for all underachieving pupils at the earliest opportunity. The results of assessment are used to match pupils to ability groups within two equal ability bands. Consideration should be given to the placement of pupils in ability groups within a single ability band so that the wide range of attainment within each group can be reduced. Assessment, as an aid to planning the curriculum, has yet to be used to its full effect.

There are good displays of the work of individual children in classrooms and around the science department. Pupils relate positively to one another and are willing to help their peers make progress. Opportunities for pupils to develop their own learning skills are provided through homework, but there is little evidence of such opportunities being provided within lessons. The department provides help and support to pupils who are identified as underachieving or who ask for additional help, and teachers give freely of their time in the science club and in the department's revision day.

Leadership in the department is good. The departmental development plan is in place and reflects the school's development plan. It is financially costed, meaningful and manageable. Regular scrutiny of work, departmental meetings and the monitoring of teachers through direct observation are all used to monitor the effectiveness of the department. All statutory requirements are met. While accommodation, in terms of the number of available laboratories, is adequate, the smallest laboratories are inadequate. These present a safety hazard when used for practical work, except when used with small groups of pupils. Other health and safety issues, identified in the previous report, have now been remedied. However, care should be taken to ensure that hazardous chemicals are properly secured at all times. The provision of books and scientific equipment is satisfactory. However, consideration should be given to replacing out of date computer hardware.

OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES

Art

At the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is average in relation to national standards. The average percentage of GCSE grades A*-C across all three disciplines in 1997 was 32 per cent, in 1998 was 50 per cent, 49 per cent in 1999. The best results being achieved in painting and drawing, 68 per cent in 1999. There has been a gradual improvement over the last two years and these results compare favourably when measured against other subjects within the school. A significant number of pupils in Key Stage 4 exhibit a clear understanding regarding their work and possess the capability to produce good results in a variety of media and techniques.

At the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is average in relation to national standards. Pupils are given the opportunity to

experience a variety of creative experiences and the majority show an interest in the work. The majority of pupils are capable of using a variety of materials, involving drawing and painting, ceramics, some printing and graphics. Pupils are more than willing to discuss their work and a significant proportion show pride in their achievements.

In Key Stage 3, the progress made by the pupils is satisfactory. It is evident from the work produced over the three years of Key Stage 3 that pupils of all abilities are making gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding. Progress is evident from the manner in which pupils handle paint and colour-mixing together with skills in pencil drawing, particularly drawing from observation. Some interesting work has been produced by abstract compositions using influences from significant artists and civilisations. In Key Stage 4 progress is also satisfactory. Progress can be measured from the work produced, which shows average to good levels of knowledge and skills that improve from Year 10 to Year 11. A number of pupils are producing interesting work using a variety of drawing and painting materials, particularly in the use of colour. At Key Stage 4, the pupils taking the Graphics option at GCSE level increase their expertise on computer applications. Pupils can scan images of their own drawings and paintings and other collected images into the computer, then modify, crop, change or enhance the images into original formats. Many are also capable of intricate graphic designs merging text and images. The majority of pupils in both key stages show interest and there is evidence that in all year groups there exists a number of pupils who have the potential and the ability to make significant progress. These pupils would benefit from being introduced to greater challenges in order to demonstrate their true potential. The majority of the pupils react well to the challenges offered to them through a variety of creative experiences. The scheme of work is well planned allowing for all abilities the opportunity to succeed. Pupils with special educational needs are making satisfactory progress as a result of sensitive teaching, individual self-assessment and learning opportunities which are conducive to meeting their needs.

The attitude of the pupils is varied but for the majority it is never less than satisfactory and more often good. The majority show a good level of interest. A minority find sustained concentration, problem-solving, extrapolation and an understanding of aesthetics difficult. These problems are more common with low achieving boys in Key Stage 3. Relationships between pupils and towards the teachers are good. Pupils are more than willing to share materials and ideas and are willing to assist in the distribution and collection of equipment in lessons.

The quality of teaching is good at both key stages. The best lessons are challenging and well planned in order to provide all pupils with opportunities to progress and to attain levels of achievement commensurate with their abilities and aspirations. Pupils with special educational needs are well served through sensitive teaching. Classroom management is effective. The relationships between the teachers and the pupils are good, providing a pleasant atmosphere in the lessons. Regular references are made to the work of significant artists and civilisations in order to raise creative and visual appreciation and awareness. Assessment is effective and is used to support future development. Assessment includes a certain amount of pupil self-assessment and, therefore, when questioned the pupils were well aware of teachers' expectations and their own strengths and weaknesses. Work is marked regularly.

The department is well managed, giving good value for money. However, the amount of funding available to the department is limited and is in danger of affecting the future development of creative opportunities for the pupils. The quality of the work of the pupils on display in the art department and in public areas in school is good, promoting high standards and interest in the subject and celebrating achievement. The subject fully meets the requirements of the National Curriculum.

The department is housed in three rooms, each one of which is dedicated to either two-dimensional studies, ceramics or graphics. Each room is reasonably well equipped. Furniture and fittings are satisfactory, but the general condition of the fabric of the building in general is less than satisfactory. The access corridors and staircases are depressing and in need of decoration. Some technical assistance would be beneficial in supporting the work of the teaching staff. The school would benefit from the purchase of some good quality display screens and display cabinets, which could be used to display art exhibits, thereby enhancing the appearance of public areas within the school and celebrating the considerable achievements of pupils.

The department has made very good progress since the last inspection. The previous report stated that the majority of pupils in Key Stage 3 were achieving below national expectations. This is no longer the case. The knowledge and understanding of pupils regarding the work of significant artists and civilisations were thought to be a cause for concern. This point has also been addressed. A significant amount of lessons now include the work of artists and civilisations. GCSE results were well below national averages. For those pupils choosing the painting and drawing option for GCSE, the proportion gaining grades *A-C is now above national average and improvements have been made in the past three years to the proportion gaining *A-C grades in the graphics and ceramics options.

Design and technology

At the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is low in relation to national standards. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A* - C in the 1999 GCSE examinations was varied among the individual disciplines. The results in 1998 were well above the national average in textiles, and current results follow the same trend. In food technology, results have been steadily improving but at present they are still low in relation to national standards. In graphical products, standards in 1998 were in line with those of all maintained secondary schools. The standard for this year is well below that achievement. There has been a steady decline in the standards of resistant material technology over the past three years and the results for this year have fallen again from a result well below national averages in 1998. A strength within the whole department is that the number of pupils achieving A*-G grades is in line with national averages. Girls out-perform boys; 28 per cent achieved a grade A*-C in 1999 against only 16 per cent of boys. Examples of products on display in textiles demonstrate a high level of individual skill. Similarly, project work on display in food technology provides an excellent role model for pupils.

At the end of Key Stage 3, the attainment of pupils is average in relation to national standards. A Year 9 class, consisting of only girls, used the full range of tools and processes in preparing a meal of their own choice. They were able to explain how to mix a sauce, sweat onions and cook pasta. A Year 9 group consisting of all boys worked in teams of two or three. They gathered information independently, some from external sources, and were able to demonstrate their understanding of the task through a question and answer session with their teacher. The attainment of pupils in both of these groups is in line with national standards, but the tasks did not enable any of them to demonstrate higher levels of capability.

The progress of pupils varies among the three disciplines. In Key Stage 3, it is good in textiles and food; for example, pupils in a Year 8 class of girls, made good progress in understanding templates and preparing them for tracing on to fabric. In discussion they related to seam allowance and recognised the need for double stitching on edges which might fray. Progress in resistant materials is unsatisfactory. Pupils files are disorganised and the quantity and quality of work are low.

During Key Stage 4, pupils make very good progress in textiles, satisfactory progress in food and unsatisfactory progress in resistant materials. The work of Year 11 pupils in textiles shows their very good progress in developing ideas and skills. In resistant materials, the pupils make unsatisfactory progress because work is not planned effectively and the teaching is unsatisfactory. In one Year 10 resistant material lesson, pupils made unsatisfactory progress due to the poor behaviour of a small but significant number of boys. They continually caused and involved themselves in activities which could have resulted in injury to themselves or other members of the class.

At both key stages, the majority of pupils demonstrate positive attitudes with regard to the subject. They enjoy the practical activities and respond to the challenges of designing and the making. There is some unacceptable behaviour by a significant minority of boys who not only affect their own progress but that of others in their group.

At Key Stage 3, the quality of teaching is good in textiles and food and satisfactory in resistant materials. At Key Stage 4, the quality of teaching is good in textiles and food and unsatisfactory in resistant materials. In those lessons in which teaching is good, very good learning objectives are clearly stated and the key points are carefully taught to the pupils either through practical activities, discussion groups or teacher demonstration. Activities are varied, expectations are high and time is used to maximum effect. When teaching is unsatisfactory, or aspects of a lesson contain unsatisfactory elements, it is due either to tasks which lack challenge and rigour, unsatisfactory classroom management, unsatisfactory planning to meet the needs of the pupils or low expectations. The lack of planned extended work in the Key Stage 3 Programmes of Study is affecting pupils' opportunities to achieve at higher levels. There is insufficient monitoring of teachers' day-to-day planning records, which adversely affects the capability of the department to improve its performance.

Many of the rooms are too small for the practical activities that take place. There is a particular problem in graphics where the room is not suitable for Key Stage 4 work.

The previous inspection identified standards as poor and well below regional and national levels. While standards are still low in relation to national averages in some areas, there is clear evidence of improvement; for example, within food technology, due to the quality of teaching, planning for lessons and the teachers' high expectations of pupils. The introduction of textile technology has enabled pupils to achieve high standards in this discipline. However, those courses involving resistant materials are well below national standards and currently in decline. The school has introduced a range of strategies for further improvement; for example, single-sex classes, day-to-day planning and the monitoring of teaching. These strategies must be focused directly on the problems and monitored more effectively if standards in this area of the subject are to improve.

The quality of teaching at the last inspection was broadly satisfactory, with only a tiny proportion of good teaching. During this inspection, within the areas of food and textiles, specialised teaching was never less than good, with examples of very good teaching.

History

GCSE results have been below national averages in recent years, although there is a rising trend. Of particular note in 1999 was the high proportion of pupils gaining A* and A grades.

Attainment is low in relation to national standards at the end of both key stages. It has improved since the time of the last inspection. Overall, the performance of girls is better than that of boys. In both key stages, the attainment of pupils, including those with special education needs, is consistent with their ability, although at Key Stage 3 the most able pupils show some underachievement. By the end of Key Stage 3 most pupils can use and understand time-scale, have a sound understanding of sources and their use, appreciate cause and effect and the different interpretation of events. They can display information appropriately and apply their skills to investigative projects. More able pupils can question the reliability of evidence and sources. By the end of the Key Stage 4, most pupils can structure a range of information, appreciate different perceptions of events, interpret the meaning of a range of sources, discuss cause and consequence and deploy these skills through investigative projects.

Most pupils make satisfactory progress during both key stages, including those with special education needs. However, the progress of boys in both key stages, and that of the most able pupils at Key Stage 3, requires more rigorous monitoring to ensure that teaching is focused more sharply on their learning needs. There is clear evidence that all pupils make sound progress in the presentation of their work. Their growing confidence in the application of skills is shown in the investigative quality of life projects at the end of every year in Key Stage 3. This can also be seen in Year 7 with the cause and consequence analysis of the Battle of Hastings; in Year 8, when through well-planned role play they gain an understanding of the events leading to the French Revolution; and in Year 9, when, for example, the relative merits of the work of A J P Taylor and Alan Bullock are discussed in relation to their views of Hitler's influence upon the start of World War II. At Key Stage 4, good use is made of peer analysis to understand the criteria required for good quality work. Video is used to develop the skills necessary to draw together a number of separate elements on the work of Pasteur, Lister and Koch into a coherent argument on medical improvements.

Pupils' attitudes are very positive and reflect an appreciation that teaching staff are clearly committed to their care and to the raising of standards. Behaviour is consistently good. Pupils are generally motivated to succeed and respond with interest. They set to work quickly, work well together and can maintain their concentration over a reasonable time span. The departments use of paired and group work enables pupils to take increasing responsibility for their own learning, which can then be demonstrated through regular investigative project work. Pupils respect the school's resources and the property of fellow pupils while taking a pride in their own work, which is usually well presented.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4. The subject benefits from specialist staff whose commitment brings an additional variety and range to the work and which supports the skills approach used. Teaching strengths in both key stages reflect purposeful planning and review, with clear learning objectives shared with pupils. There is a consistent focus upon skills development and a variety of strategies are used which develop pupils understanding. This is complemented by effective questioning and good support for individual pupils. This has a positive impact on pupils' motivation and the raising of standards. A small number of lessons are over-reliant upon text books and restrict the range of learning experiences. Other less effective practice observed was: teacher-centred sessions lasting too long, a lack of clear learning objectives and an inadequate review of pupils' work. In these lessons, insufficient attention is paid to the learning needs of pupils, particularly the most able.

Departmental leadership provides a positive ethos for the subject, which is shared by all staff. The department has a strong commitment to raising standards. The education visits programme and out-of-school support for revision help to raise standards. The clear targets for the departmental improvement plan lack sufficiently specific criteria for effective monitoring and evaluation. The plan's information and communication technology strategy has so far had little impact on learning. Departmental effectiveness is reduced because its approach to the monitoring of classroom practice and the dissemination of good practice is not sufficiently systematic.

Since the last inspection, the department has worked steadily to raise standards and address the issues raised. It has made satisfactory progress.

Geography

GCSE results in geography have risen substantially since the last inspection. In 1998 the proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades was in line with the national average. It was lower in 1999. In geology, 42 per cent gained A*-C grades. (No national figures are available yet for comparison).

Pupil attainment has improved since the time of the last inspection, at the end of both key stages. At the end of Key Stage 3 it is low in relation to national standards and at the end of Key Stage 4, it is average in relation to national standards. Overall, girls' performance is better than boys. In both key stages the attainment of pupils, including those with special needs, is consistent with their ability. By the end of Key Stage 3 most pupils have acquired a sound foundation in subject skills and knowledge. They can record and display information in a variety of forms, recognise how people can improve and damage the environment, develop questions for geographical study and handle investigative tasks appropriately. By the end of Key Stage 4, most pupils can plan an investigation to test an hypothesis through fieldwork in which they display a range of skills and geographical techniques, using flow diagrams, graphs, tables and maps.

Geology is offered as an optional subject at Key Stage 4. Pupil take up varies over time and groups have run in three of the last five years. Attainment is generally average in relation to national standards and pupils make progress appropriate to their ability. Teaching is generally good and pupils respond with interest and enthusiasm.

Pupils make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3 and good progress in Key Stage 4. All pupils progress appropriately, including those with special education needs, although the progress of boys and the most able pupils is not as high as that of girls and lower attaining pupils. Pupils' progress is clearly seen in the presentation of work and in their growing confidence in the application of skills to case study and investigative project work. In Year 7, pupils were observed applying these skills to gain an understanding of the impact of the proposed M60 extension; in Year 8, analysing photographic evidence to understand the complexities of developing countries; and in Year 9, working in pairs to understand the human impact of earthquakes. Lower ability pupils also progress appropriately using this approach and gain, for example, an understanding through role-play of the complex relationship between rich and poor countries in the production of chocolate. At Key Stage 4, pupils can apply these skills to more complex situations, sometimes through local fieldwork, as in the Beal Valley project, or to case studies studying, for example, the impact of human activity on the environment of Mono Lake in California. Pupils can identify with these issues, which stimulate their interest, and make a steady improvement across both key stages, not only in the subject skills but in the confidence with which they are used.

Pupils' positive attitudes and relationships are a feature of the department. Teachers have good relationships with the pupils and are committed to raising standards. Pupils show interest in their work and are motivated to succeed. Behaviour is usually very good and there is little need for overt teacher control because of the pupils generally positive attitudes. Pupils maintain their concentration well. The use of paired and group work enables pupils to take increasing responsibility for their own learning.

The quality of teaching is good at both key stages. Some very good teaching was also observed. Teaching strengths in both key stages include the understanding and communication of clear learning objectives. Teachers also use a variety of teaching approaches, which enable the pupils successfully to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills. Time is used effectively, there is good individual support and a lively use of questions to interact with pupils. The small amount of less effective practice is reflected by too much teacher control.

The department is well led, has a clear sense of direction and a strong subject ethos, which is shared by all staff. It uses a range of strategies to enrich pupils' learning experiences through field visits and extra-curricular support for learning.

The monitoring of pupils' progress is satisfactory and departmental meetings address the issue of raising standards. Departmental effectiveness is reduced because the various elements of its raising standards strategy are not applied sufficiently systematically. Currently, the department's improvement plan lacks the framework for this, and targets lack the specific criteria against which to monitor and evaluate improvement.

Since the last inspection, the department has made significant progress in raising standards of attainment and addressing the issues raised at the time.

Information technology

Only a small minority of pupils in Years 10 and 11 has had the opportunity to follow a course of examination in office applications at the end of Key Stage 4. In the examination for 1999, 48 students followed the programme of study of which 20.8 per cent achieved A*-C grades and 97.9 per cent achieved grades A*-G. In the previous year 33 pupils were examined in keyboarding skills and 54.5 per cent achieved passes at A*-C.

Currently, four classes of pupils, two in Year 10 and two in Year 11 are studying for a GCSE in information technology and currently the attainment of these pupils is average in relation to national standards. The remainder of pupils in Key Stage 4 gain their entitlement through the curriculum and their attainment is low in relation to national standards.

By the end of Key Stage 3, the level of attainment in information technology is average in relation to national standards. Pupils have opportunities to develop their information technology skills through well-planned Programmes of Study.

During the inspection, there was evidence of the use of information and communication technology in a number of subjects. In English Year 11, pupils are making a newspaper using such features as headers and columns. However, the skills in use are of a lower level than might be expected. In art, pupils make very good use of text mixed with images. These are generated through drawing packages, clip art, scanned pictures and digital camera images. In mathematics, pupils are able to develop an understanding of spreadsheets; however, the amount of time allocated to the delivery of this strand of learning is limited to approximately two lessons, which means that the learning is not effectively consolidated through regular usage.

By the end of Year 9, pupils have made good progress through the key stage. For example, pupils in a Year 9 group have individually developed slide shows to help primary school children to learn their alphabet. In the Key Stage 3 core information technology lessons, pupils in Year 7 develop their word processing skills. While still at a low level in relation to national standards, as a result of limited previous experience, they make good progress. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress with the support of learning assistants. For example, a pupil in Year 7 was able to read the screen text and follow instruction, correct errors to text and sub-divide words.

By the end of Key Stage 4, those pupils following a course of study towards GCSE make very good progress. They are able to use the full suite of programs autonomously and with the use of the network administration software they have become diagnostic problem-solvers. Within the Year 11 class they are designing databases and web sites, and they use scanners and digital cameras effectively. The pupils who do not take the GCSE course make unsatisfactory progress because they do not have sufficient opportunities to develop their skills through the rest of the curriculum.

Pupils clearly enjoy their information and communication technology lessons. Response is always good and pupils remain focused on their work. All pupils seen using the equipment did so with respect. They recognise the value of equipment and treat it accordingly. The lunchtime club is oversubscribed and Key Stage 3 pupils can be seen interacting with CD-knowledge, interactive storybooks or continuing with their lesson.

At Key Stage 3, information technology is currently taught by a variety of teachers who are not specialists, but as a result of good communication, training and an effective Programme of Study, the teaching of information technology is good. Pupils respond well to the teaching, and on the occasion when the teacher used the Network Administrator to demonstrate a program to the pupils, the good progress was achieved more efficiently.

Teaching at Key Stage 4 is very good. Pupils are well taught, well administrated and efficiently and effectively managed. As a result of this they make very good progress in lessons, becoming increasingly autonomous and independent problem-solvers. The use of the Network Administrator program contributes to these successful outcomes and the excellent role played throughout the department by the information technology technician, has a very positive effect upon standards.

Points raised at the last inspection still require consideration. The progression and underachievement of some pupils at Key Stage 4 were issues at the last inspection, and this is still the case for those pupils who are not following a specific course of study in information and communication technology. While there is a system in place by which they receive their entitlement, it is not sufficiently rigorous to provide the progression towards national standards by the end of the key stage.

The last report also stated that a few more able pupils could achieve higher standards if given the opportunity to work on projects which require higher levels of skill. While pupils at Key Stage 3 make good progress and their attainment is in line with national standards, there are those who are capable of attainment higher than the national standard. However, because of the current course structure, they are not provided with work that is appropriately challenging.

Music

Attainment in music, at the end of both key stages, is broadly average in relation to national standards. Recent GCSE results are in line with national averages, although groups have been relatively small. In Key Stage 3 younger pupils experiment, select and organise sound into short pieces, which effectively communicate atmosphere. Pupils in Year 8 created the atmosphere of "A Haunted House" very successfully. Most pupils maintain individual parts and are good listeners, both as members of a performing group and as audience. Although pupils understand uncomplicated staff notation, they have difficulty in co-ordinating this with their keyboard playing and their fluency is limited. Attainment in undemanding theory tasks is unsatisfactory for pupils of all levels of ability. Singing is good. Pupils sing clearly and in the correct register. Higher attaining pupils in Key Stage 4 compose imaginative, well-structured pieces and perform with a good sense of style, both as

soloists and in ensembles. Pupils of average attainment lack confidence in their ability to compose and do not develop ideas easily. They perform accurately but with little interpretation. Most pupils in this key stage can describe some of the important features of music of different historical periods. Their knowledge of technical terms is not well-developed and their understanding of concepts, such as octaves or accidentals, is poor.

Within Key Stage 3, progress is broadly satisfactory but is inconsistent. Progress is good when pupils are given tasks appropriate to their ages and abilities. Younger pupils of average attainment are making good progress in developing fingering technique for keyboard work. Older pupils and a small number of higher attaining pupils in all years make barely satisfactory progress because they are not developing their performing technique appropriately, or extending their reading skills sufficiently. Pupils of lower attainment have difficulty in completing all aspects of the same task and make unsatisfactory progress. Pupils of higher and average attainment make sound progress in listening and ensemble skills. Progress in theoretical knowledge is unsatisfactory, both in class and over time, because it is not properly consolidated and applied. Progress in Key Stage 4 is generally satisfactory, although there is both good and unsatisfactory progress in certain areas. Pupils of average attainment make good progress in listening and in identifying characteristic features of music of different times, and satisfactory progress over time from a low base of experience in developing keyboard fluency. Higher attaining pupils make unsatisfactory progress in whole-class performing tasks, and the progress of all pupils in consolidating and applying some new knowledge is unsatisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs generally make satisfactory progress.

Pupils settle to work readily and concentrate well in practical and written tasks but closely directed activities restrict opportunities in practical work for them to make decisions or to work imaginatively. They behave well and develop good relationships with one another and with teachers. When given the opportunity, pupils listen well to one another's work and comment positively and supportively. Pupils involved in extra-curricular activities attend rehearsals regularly and are committed and enthusiastic.

Overall, the quality of teaching in both key stages is satisfactory. Teachers have a high level of professional commitment to their pupils, lessons are well organised and resources are readily accessible. Class control is good, relationships are relaxed and in the most successful lessons tasks are well matched to the ages and abilities of pupils. Pupils learning an arrangement of a popular song were able to rehearse their performances and to compare them with other pupils' performances. In less successful lessons, musical objectives are not clearly identified and tasks set do not match individual pupils' abilities. Some written work contains a very low level of challenge. The close control of activities in many lessons restricts opportunities for pupils to develop confidence in their own ideas.

The curriculum is broader than it was during the previous inspection, with more opportunities for pupils to develop composition through exploring sound, but the lack of a sufficiently varied range of classroom instruments and the reliance on keyboards continues to restrict standards of attainment in this component. There is no development of music technology. Homework is given regularly, and the department is currently engaged in developing a relevant and manageable system of assessment. The departmental handbook is excellent.

The department has been very successful in attracting pupils to the GCSE music course. There are currently 28 pupils in Year 11, and 23 pupils in Year 10. In both year groups the pupils have a very wide range of musical interest and capability, fully reflecting the department's commitment to offering musical opportunities to all the pupils.

The accommodation is still unsatisfactory, in spite of the recent refurbishment of one room, and standards of attainment in composition at both key stages are adversely affected. There are no suitable spaces in which pupils working in small groups can hear and refine their work appropriately. The second teaching room is too resonant and like the nearby store room is inadequate and in a neglected state.

Although only a small amount of instrumental teaching takes place in the school, the department organises several extra-curricular musical activities, which are supported by a growing number of pupils. The quality of sound produced by the band in particular is good. The choir sings contemporary songs with accuracy and a good sense of performance. All extra-curricular groups are directed well by the music staff and visiting teachers. Concerts take place twice every year and instrumental groups perform in the community from time to time.

Modern foreign language

French and Spanish are taught as equal first modern foreign languages and one language is studied by all pupils throughout Key Stages 3 and 4. No pupil is currently studying a second language.

Attainment in modern foreign languages is average in relation to national standards at the end of Key Stage 3, and low in relation to national standards at the end of Key Stage 4.

GCSE results at A*-C in Spanish were lower in 1999 compared with the results in 1998, which were just below the national average, however, this was the first year in which a full cohort of pupils took the examination. GCSE A*-C results in French remain at about the same level as in 1998, which was well below the national average. A*-G results are above national average levels in both languages. Teacher assessed levels at the end of Key Stage 3 are in line with national averages and have shown a steady increase over the last three years.

Attainment, observed at Key Stage 4, is consistent with the GCSE results achieved. As observed at the last inspection, pupils have good skills in listening. However, particularly in French, they fail to respond spontaneously, relying heavily on reading prepared answers, which adversely affect fluency and accent. Many instinctive reactions to the target language are in English and exercises confirming understanding closely resemble translation. As at the last inspection, there continues to be little evidence of independent reading, and much writing is not sufficiently challenging, relying too heavily on copying. There is some good drafting and re-drafting of written work among the most able pupils.

Attainment, observed at Key Stage 3, continues to display a number of characteristics noted at the time of the last inspection: good listening standards and satisfactory attainment in speaking, reading and writing. However, in most cases, speaking is good only in specific tasks and is not evident in sufficient aspects of genuine communication. Many pupils rely on English for confirming understanding and for simple questions and requests to the teacher, which could be put in French or Spanish. There is still a lack of independent reading.

Progress is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and unsatisfactory at Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 3, there is confirmation of previous learning as an introduction to most lessons, often in the form of checking homework. Pupils extend this knowledge and acquire new skills in all lessons. Progress is consistent regardless of gender or ethnic origin, but pupils with special educational needs do not always make satisfactory progress. Those in the smallest lower sets receive individual support, but the lack of appropriate planning, to include reading and writing materials matched to individual needs, does not address the needs of the range of pupils in larger middle-ability sets.

Progress at Key Stage 4 is unsatisfactory. Over-use of English by teacher and pupils is restricting the use of spoken language in too many lessons. Inappropriate levels of challenge are contributing to poor behaviour, particularly among boys, to the effect that many pupils make very little progress. Progress is found in those lessons where teachers work predominantly in French or Spanish and ensure brisk progression through the four skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing.

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and unsatisfactory at Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 3, there is a significant level of good response. Pupils display commitment and concentration in all lessons, although real enthusiasm for language learning is less evident. They use spoken French or Spanish well in responding to tasks set by the teacher but less often for genuine communication. However, pupils have not sufficiently developed the concentration skills to practise language in pairs and groups. At Key Stage 4, there is poor concentration and a lack of commitment among many pupils. In the worst cases, behaviour of a number of pupils, particularly boys, restricts learning opportunities for better-motivated pupils. The use of the spoken foreign language for genuine communication is underdeveloped and there is often a lack of confidence in speaking skills.

Teaching is satisfactory at Key Stage 3. The planning of work is broadly satisfactory, but reading and writing materials are not always well-matched to the abilities of individual pupils. There is good planning of a sequence of activity to involve all four language skills, although opportunities for pupils to practise as pairs and groups are rare. This is unsatisfactory. Teachers make substantial use of French or Spanish but do not sufficiently insist on its use by pupils, especially in general spoken communication. Homework is planned and regularly set to consolidate classroom learning. Excellent use is made of foreign language assistants as language role-models to support teachers in the classroom. There is occasional evidence of encouraging pupils by referring to targets. Teaching at Key Stage 4 is unsatisfactory. The teaching relies heavily on the use of English and does not emphasise the use of language for communication. There are few opportunities to practise speaking in the language. Teachers' expectations and planning are variable, often not being appropriate to the range of ability of the pupils.

Assessment meets statutory requirements at Key Stage 3 and the needs of examining boards at Key Stage 4. Assessment contributes to curricular planning and a programme of target-setting for pupils, which, although not always observed in use, acts as a good vehicle for raising standards. Marking complies with the faculty policy but does not always indicate areas of improvement to pupils. Most of this year's GCSE lessons take place at the end of the day, which is a disadvantage.

The faculty runs a lunch-time languages club and has a group of staff and pupils working on the design of web pages for the

internet. Visits abroad have not been operated for three years, but a trip to Spain is planned in the near future.

Learning resources for modern foreign languages are good, with varied and appropriate course materials and reading stock. There is no dedicated facility for information technology, but the faculty plans to make computers available as a priority. Use is made of the school's information technology rooms and pupils have produced work using word-processing and clip-art packages. Staffing is appropriately qualified to deliver the curriculum and has a range of experience. There are both French and Spanish foreign language assistants, who enhance the progress of the pupils significantly. There is a good support programme in school for the two newly-qualified teachers and staff development opportunities are available in areas which meet the targets in the faculty development plan.

Accommodation is satisfactory in condition and in the number of rooms; however, the distance between the two groups of rooms does not further the team ethic of the faculty. Rooms are well equipped and decorated, and all feature good displays.

The faculty is managed satisfactorily. There is an excellent handbook and good planning. There are regular informal meetings and half-termly programmed formal meetings. Members of the faculty represent the department on whole-school working groups. Monitoring of teacher performance is taking place in keeping with an agreed supportive model. It should now be the responsibility of the head of faculty and senior management to put in place and monitor consistent faculty procedures on methodology and on planning to address the needs of pupils of all abilities.

Physical education

In the statutory teachers' assessments, at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999, the majority of pupils reached the expected standards. In 1998, the GCSE examination results were below the national average for comprehensive schools' with 27 per cent of pupils achieving A*-C grades. In 1999, the proportion of pupils achieving an A*-C grade fell to 15 per cent. This decline is because smaller numbers of girls, who, in the past, have consistently achieved a greater proportion of higher grades than boys, are being entered for the subject. The proportion of pupils achieving at least an A*-G grade has been broadly the same each year since 1996, when it was below average. The exception was 1998, when all pupils entered for the examination gained a grade, and this is above the national average. Pupils' achievement in most other subjects has been better than in physical education during the same period.

By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' attainment is average in relation to national standards. Most girls know the rules of netball, use correct footwork and can devise and practise ways of beating an opponent, which higher attainers use successfully in small-sided games. Boys produce sequences of movement, individually and in pairs on the floor and apparatus, which are often imaginative. They have a good appreciation of what is required for quality but this is less evident in performance. In all activities, pupils evaluate strengths and weaknesses of performance. They know how to prepare for strenuous physical activity and some girls confidently suggest and lead appropriate safe stretching exercises.

By the end of Key Stage 4, most pupils achieve standards which are average for their age. In optional GCSE classes, progress in practical work is satisfactory. Pupils' progress in GCSE theory is less secure than in practical work because of the lack of good quality text books and because worksheets and "handouts" are not well matched to pupils' levels of attainment. In some groups, progress is also restricted because written work is infrequently marked and pupils are not shown how to improve. A good range of extra-curricular activities gives pupils in both key stages further opportunities to improve.

Pupils of all abilities make generally good progress in Key Stage 3 because they have positive attitudes to the subject and most of the teaching is good. In work seen during the inspection, girls made good progress in hockey and netball, where they were set progressively demanding tasks which were well-matched to their levels of attainment. In a Year 9 netball lesson, girls' dodging and passing technique improved because they had a clear idea of what is required to improve and engage in enjoyable competition which motivates them to succeed. Progress in boys' gymnastics is satisfactory, although some elements of basic gymnastic movement are not taught early enough in the key stage. Pupils who have special educational needs make good progress because their teachers adapt the work accordingly and because there is good liaison between their teachers and support assistants.

Most pupils, including those who have special educational needs, make satisfactory progress in compulsory physical education in Key Stage 4. Progress is better where pupils are able to build on well-established skills and learn more advanced techniques. For example, boys in Year 10 are able to develop successfully their ability to attack and defend goal mouth crosses. In new activities, such as lacrosse and boys' hockey, basic skills are quickly learned but limited time restricts opportunities to progress to develop more advanced skills and tactics.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are good in both key stages. Most commit themselves to practices with enjoyment and

enthusiasm and continue to do so even when weather conditions are poor. Substantial numbers of pupils choose to take part in extra-curricular sporting activities and there are very few non-participants in lessons. Behaviour is, for the most part, good. A minority of pupils, usually boys, lack concentration and are easily distracted from their lessons but respond well when admonished by their teachers. Relationships between pupils and teachers are good and are based on mutual respect. Pupils work well together on planning gymnastic sequences or practising games and sometimes spontaneously applaud good performance. Pupils who have special educational needs receive good support from fellow pupils. In mixed activities in Key Stage 4, boys and girls seldom integrate well with each other. Pupils in optional examination classes are keen to share information and ideas and are not discouraged from answering questions even when they make mistakes. Although most pupils come to lessons safely prepared in school kit, a minority are slaves to the current fashion for unsecured shoe laces. A significant number of pupils, particularly boys, routinely begin to prepare for physical activity by “warming-up” even when not directly supervised by their teachers. Pupils are happy to volunteer to set out and store equipment, which they handle safely and sensibly.

The quality of the teaching is good at Key Stage 3 and satisfactory at Key Stage 4. Good features include secure subject knowledge in games, the provision of suitable opportunities for pupils to plan and evaluate their work as well as perform, and activities matched to the needs of all pupils. Teachers assess accurately individual and group performance in lessons and help pupils to improve by direct intervention or by helping them to evaluate performance for themselves. Teaching was best when pupils were given clear, challenging but attainable learning objectives based on previous learning and matched to their ability levels. A netball lesson in Year 8 built on previous learning and challenging, competitive and enjoyable activities were set, taking into account the range of ability in the class. Pupils responded well to the teacher’s high expectations, had the opportunity to reflect on their performance and were able to understand what was needed to improve. A strong group identity was being created that celebrated achievement. Relationships with pupils are good humoured and relaxed with, nevertheless, an underlying discipline that helps establish an effective working environment. Teaching, overall, in Key Stage 4 is satisfactory but there are features that could be improved. For example, not enough guidance is given to pupils on how to improve their written work in GCSE theory groups and some exercise books are not marked regularly. Worksheets for GCSE are not adapted to meet the needs of pupils of different attainment. Some lessons in both key stages do not start promptly.

The curriculum in Key Stage 3 is dominated by games and, for boys, lacks the breadth required by the National Curriculum. The school is aware of this and intends to introduce an additional unit of work in orienteering into the physical education curriculum. Assessment and recording systems are in place but the criteria for assessment are not clear and, consequently, the teachers’ assessments of pupils’ attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 are unreliable. Assessment information is not being used to inform curricular planning. There are not enough text books and good quality resources available for GCSE theory lessons. Good use is made of the excellent Astroturf area, which is shared with the local authority. A substantial number of pupils regularly take part in a good range of extra-curricular activities offered by an enthusiastic and committed staff and considerable success is achieved by individuals and teams at local and area levels.

Most of the issues raised at the time of the previous inspection have been resolved. However, examination results remain too low, insufficient progress has been made in devising appropriate assessment procedures and further work is required to ensure that schemes of work provide a satisfactory basis for progress in all areas of the National Curriculum.

Religious education

At Key Stage 4, all pupils study a short GCSE course and one option group is studying the full GCSE course in both Years 10 and 11. In both groups, the proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades is below national averages, but it is almost equal with national averages in terms of A*-G grades. Progress at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory, but at Key Stage 4 it is unsatisfactory except for those pupils studying for the full GCSE examination.

On entry, pupils’ knowledge is barely that which is expected by pupils pursuing the Oldham Agreed Syllabus, but with regular specialist teaching the progress is at least satisfactory and occasionally good. This is especially so with pupils who have good learning skills. By the end of Key Stage 3 the pupils have a sensitivity and knowledge of the importance of artefacts and symbolism and the core information and ideas about the six major world faiths in their locality. This includes detailed studies in Year 9 of how the principles of Buddhist teaching can be applied to everyday life. The overall outcome of this progress is a secure basic knowledge which may enable pupils to appreciate the life styles and motivation of adherents of the six major faiths.

At Key Stage 4, there has not been a full GCSE class every year but there is one in the present Year 10. Their progress after four weeks is satisfactory. In previous years pupils have developed a detailed knowledge of Christianity and Islam. Progress seen in coursework indicates some particularly good progress in the study of Islam by those pupils who have good literacy skills. Their overall results cluster around grades C-E. Every pupil in the year now follows the short GCSE course, which is linked with the personal, social and health education course. Although studies of moral and religious issues only achieved a

low pass rate at grades A*-C in its first year, standards observed currently indicate that improvement is occurring. Orally, the pupils are able to explain the religious and social issues which motivate people. This recent introduction is a major development and improvement since the last inspection. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is generally appropriate and they respond well at Key Stage 3 and satisfactorily at Key Stage 4. Their progress is satisfactory. The attitudes of pupils at both key stages are good. They work well in small discussion groups and are able to arrive at reasoned individual and group responses. Although these are occasionally quite impressive, too often other groups do not listen carefully and so do not develop fully the desired inter-group activities. Where the pupils have good study skills they work particularly well. For example, Year 7 pupils examined, in groups, the artefacts from six faiths and gleaned considerable introductory knowledge. The inter-group work, however, was less effective because some pupils have not learned to listen to and appreciate the findings of other groups. The pupils at Key Stage 3 were always willing to pursue studies, even if they felt it was a repetition of work done in Key Stage 2. This was particularly noted in Year 8, when the study of Moses was begun within the theme of freedom and qualities of leadership. The pupils do sustain their studies at both key stages. For example, in Year 10, a class worked excellently with their teacher to interpret pictures about moral issues, record their conclusions and then go on to relate the principles discussed to a poem. Previously they had studied the principles of absolutism and relativism when making moral judgements and this knowledge was applied to the new situation. Although some pupils are restive on occasions, the behaviour generally is good enough to enable high quality ideas to be developed. For example, pupils in Year 9 thoughtfully produced a range of appropriate judgements and applications of the second Noble Truth in Buddhism (i.e. craving) and one pupil conjured an image which was in the spirit of philosophy generally and Buddhism in particular. The classes show respect for the range of religious cultures they study. It was only in one lesson that this appeared to be minimal. The classes are such that they could gradually be given more opportunities to show initiatives and take responsibilities for their studies.

The teaching at both key stages is satisfactory. In each year the dynamism of the teachers could be seen. The two specialist religious education teachers planned and evaluated their work together in a highly professional manner. This is having an excellent effect on the development of courses. This team-planning procedure has been fruitfully adopted at Key Stage 4, where four non-specialist religious education teachers are involved in the short GCSE course. There is a comprehensive scheme of work for both key stages. They have not yet, however, developed a portfolio of the pupils' best work to establish higher standards amongst pupils. A satisfactory range of methods is being used. Most involve group work, but this is not significantly developed to meet different ability groups. The pacing of lessons is usually very sharp and this can minimise the opportunities for reflective thought. The resources are just adequate to meet current needs but if standards are to rise, study materials will be needed in both the school and departmental libraries so that pupils can develop the knowledge taught in both greater depth and breadth. The head of department is now introducing an assessment procedure, which appears both to sharpen target-setting and to enable pupils to gauge their progress more accurately. The pupils' work is marked diligently and the homework is usually purposeful. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is enhanced by their having small classes.

The head of department is providing enthusiastic and highly competent leadership in both the development of the subject and in the support he seeks to give his colleagues. These professional qualities are recognised and result in willing, consistent, co-operative teamwork. His specialist knowledge of both religious studies and the wider developments of the subject are important factors, along with departmental teamwork, which have enabled the subject to make good progress since the previous inspection. Now all the curricular requirements have been met, the general attitude of the staff is good and there is a useful attainable development plan which points the way to further progress.

GNVQ

At Key Stage 4, single GNVQ units are offered within three GCSE subjects and one non-accredited subject.

GNVQ Business Studies, Unit 3 at Foundation Level, is studied as part of GCSE Business Studies; GNVQ Health and Social Care, Unit 5 at Foundation Level, is studied as part of Family Studies (a non accredited course); and GNVQ Travel and Tourism, Unit 3 at Foundation Level, is studied as part of GCSE Leisure and Tourism.

A good number of staff have achieved appropriate assessor accreditation (nine have achieved TDLB D32 and D33, and one has achieved D34).

All GNVQ units are being used to support the delivery of various GCSE Programmes of Study. They are not being used as part of a curricular strategy to provide pupils with an opportunity to achieve a full GNVQ subject accreditation. The senior management team appropriately are in the process of planning a strategy to offer opportunities for pupils to be able to study for GNVQ Part 1 accreditation within Key Stage 4. This is particularly appropriate because of the quality of teaching being offered in this area.

Attainment is satisfactory and comparable to national standards for GNVQ foundation level outcomes at pass level. A small number of pupils are producing work which is comparable to merit level accreditation. Progress is good overall. This is

primarily as a result of lessons that enable pupils of all abilities to succeed.

At present, pupils are given the opportunity within the current GNVQ framework to achieve a single GNVQ foundation level unit at pass level. A significant proportion achieve a pass. Grading criteria and the recording and use of Key Skills are not being implemented.

The attitude of the pupils is invariably good. A significant number of pupils are producing results which reflect reasonably good information-handling skills and attention to detail. Final draft work is often well presented. Pupils are willing to contribute during class discussions and question and answer sessions managed by their teachers.

The quality of GNVQ teaching is good. It is often very good. Lessons are well planned using a variety of teaching strategies which maintain interest and promote sustained concentration. The relationships between the teachers and their pupils are very good. This is because teachers command respect through the quality of their teaching.

PART C: INSPECTION DATA

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The team consisted of 12 inspectors who spent a combined total of 50 days, over a 5-day period, in the school. During the inspection, all teachers were observed in the classroom, the great majority on two or more occasions. Lessons were observed across the curriculum, including some personal and social education and learning for life sessions. Form groups were seen during registration with their tutors, as were a number of school assemblies. Extra-curricular activities were observed - for example, in physical education and music. Information about other extra-curricular events was gathered from other sources, such as displays and interviews. Interviews were conducted with governors, the headteacher, other staff with senior and middle management responsibilities, subject co-ordinators, staff involved with the special educational needs department and support staff. Some representatives from partner organisations gave good support to the school by agreeing to be interviewed or by supplying written information to inspectors. The work that pupils had completed was studied carefully. Pupils were interviewed informally throughout the week, while there was a more formal interview for some pupils in each year group. Prior to the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, teaching staff, governors and parents. Eighty-six replies were received from the questionnaire sent to parents. A number of parents made detailed written comments on the questionnaires, which were helpful to the inspection team. The school provided a good deal of documentary material which formed the basis of the pre-inspection analysis.

DATA AND INDICATORS

Pupil data

	Number of pupils on roll (full-time equivalent)	Number of pupils with statements of SEN	Number of pupils on school's register of SEN	Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals
Y7 – Y11	1163	5	98	232

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers (Y7 – Y11)

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent)	70.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.57

Education support staff (Y7 – Y11)

Total number of education support staff	12
Total aggregate hours worked each week	348.6

Secondary schools

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:	72.1
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Average teaching group size:	KS2	
	KS3	25
	KS4	21

Financial data

Financial year:	1998/9
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	£
Total Income	2,801,909
Total Expenditure	2,773,766
Expenditure per pupil	2385.01
Balance brought forward from previous year	28,613
Balance carried forward to next year	56,756

PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out:

951

Number of questionnaires returned:

86

Responses (percentage of answers in each category):

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel the school encourages parents to play an active part in the life of the school	13	68	16	3	0
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	32	54	5	9	0
The school handles complaints from parents well	10	67	20	3	0
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	17	57	21	5	0
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	26	59	11	4	0
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	22	66	10	1	1
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	31	62	5	2	0
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	21	45	19	10	5
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	7	66	18	7	1
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	9	53	29	7	2
My child(ren) like(s) school	26	56	10	7	1

Other issues raised by a number of parents are included in the main body of the report.