

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **Barnwell School**

Stevenage

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique Reference Number: 117518

Inspection Number: 186040

Headteacher: Mr. Richard Westergreen-Thorne

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Reporting inspector: Mr. Martin Beale

19385

Dates of inspection: 4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> October 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 708147

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
Type of control:	County
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Barnwell Stevenage Herts SG2 9SW
Telephone number:	01438 222500
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Appropriate authority:	Hertfordshire
Name of chair of governors:	Mr. T. Friis
Date of previous inspection:	18 <sup>th</sup> – 22 <sup>nd</sup> September 1995

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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Frank Ruggiero	Mathematics	
Chris Elliott	Science	The curriculum and assessment
Alan Goodier	Equal opportunities	
Ken McKenzie	Design and technology	
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Reginald Grogan	History	
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## **MAIN FINDINGS**

### **What the school does well**

- The good teaching in the Sixth Form enables pupils to make good progress.
- The provision for pupils' social and moral education, particularly through personal and social education and the support and guidance given, has a positive impact on pupils' behaviour and relationships throughout the school.
- There is good provision in the two bases for pupils with special educational needs.
- The school has strong links with the community and local business and uses these well to enhance its careers education programme.

### **Where the school has weaknesses**

- I. Standards of attainment are below national expectations at both key stages but are particularly low in art and history.
- II. Management at all levels has not tackled some weaknesses including those in teaching, which is unsatisfactory at Key Stage 4.
- III. The provision for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream classes is unsatisfactory.

There are several weaknesses in the school and these outweigh the school's strengths in their effect on many pupils. The governors' action plan will set out how the weaknesses identified during the inspection are to be tackled. The action plan will be sent to all parents or guardians of pupils at the school.

### **How the school has improved since the last inspection**

The school has successfully tackled some of the key issues, although insufficient progress has been made in dealing with some of the important weaknesses reported at the time of the last inspection. There has been insufficient attention paid to the key issues concerned with raising standards, ensuring that full account is taken of the learning needs of all pupils and introducing more variety in teaching. Although standards have improved, they have done so at GCSE at a slower rate than seen nationally. Improvements have been made in the arrangements for the teaching of modern languages. The provision for personal and social education is now good. The organisation and management of special needs provision has improved but weaknesses remain in the effectiveness with which subject teachers provide for these pupils, as insufficient training has been provided. There is now a more rigorous approach to monitoring and recording pupil attendance with the result that absence has decreased, although some inconsistencies between classes remain. Religious education is now taught for sufficient time at both key stages but not sufficiently in the Sixth Form and the school does not fulfil the requirement for a daily act of collective worship.

The school has a good understanding of what needs to be improved and has some plans to achieve its aims. The Governing Body and senior management of the school have the structures in place to ensure that standards rise. A five-year plan informs annual planning effectively, but is not sufficiently focused on improving standards and the quality of teaching. The school will be satisfactorily placed to make improvements only if plans are now converted more rigorously into action.

• **Standards in subjects**

The following table shows standards achieved by 14, 16 and 18 year olds in national tests, GCSE and A/AS-level examinations in 1998:

<b>Performance in:</b>	<b>Compared with all schools</b>	<b>Compared with similar schools</b>	<b>Key</b>
			<i>well above average</i> A
			<i>above average</i> B
Key Stage 3	E	E	<i>average</i> C
GCSE Examinations	D	E	<i>below average</i> D
A/AS – levels	E	n/a	<i>well below average</i> E

The 1998 Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) results were well below the national average and well below those in similar schools. Results were well below the national average in English and mathematics and below average in science. Standards were well below similar schools in all three subjects. Girls have consistently achieved better results than boys, and to a greater extent than nationally. There was an improvement in all three subjects in 1999.

GCSE results in 1998 were an improvement on those of 1997, but have been rising at a slower rate than nationally. The proportion of pupils achieving at least 5 grades A\*-C in 1999 fell, although the average points score rose because the proportion of pupils achieving at least 5 A\*-G grades increased substantially. As at Key Stage 3, girls have tended to achieve better results than boys, the difference being greater than nationally, although the overall decline in 1999 is accounted for largely by a decline in girls' results from a high level the previous year. Standards in English and mathematics were below average in 1998. Results in science were close to the national average in 1998 but fell considerably in 1999.

Results at A Level have fluctuated while being overall below national averages. The small numbers of pupils in each subject make comparisons with national results impossible.

• **Quality of teaching**

	<b>Overall quality</b>	<b>Most effective in:</b>	<b>Least effective in:</b>
Years 7-9	Satisfactory	IT, PSE, drama	art, history
Years 10-11	Unsatisfactory	English, music, PSE, drama	art, history
Sixth Form	Good	geography	
English	Satisfactory		
Mathematics	Good		

Overall the teaching was satisfactory or better in seven out of eight lessons and good or very good in a half, but unsatisfactory or poor in one out of eight. There was some unsatisfactory teaching in most departments, but particularly in history and art. There was no unsatisfactory teaching in the Sixth



Form. Teaching and in-class support for pupils in the two bases for pupils with sensory impairment and specific learning difficulties was good but unsatisfactory for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream classrooms.

*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**

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Behaviour	Good: most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school; a minority of pupils do not; more opportunities to exercise responsibility are needed.
Attendance	Satisfactory overall: attendance is close to the national average but a higher rate of absence in Year 11 needs to be tackled.
Ethos*	Satisfactory: attitudes to learning are satisfactory, although some pupils lack enthusiasm; relationships between pupils and teachers are mostly good; policies to raise standards need to be turned more effectively into action.
Leadership and management	Unsatisfactory overall: the leadership provided by the headteacher has increased the popularity of the school and enabled improvements to take place in accommodation, equipment and staffing. Management at all levels has not taken sufficient action to improve standards and to monitor the performance of departments; strategies planned for improving the quality of teaching and learning need to be turned into effective action.
Curriculum	Satisfactory overall: the curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4 is broad and balanced; a good range of A Level courses and two vocational courses are offered in the Sixth Form in a consortium with another local school.
Pupils with special educational needs	The provision for pupils in the bases with sensory impairment and specific learning difficulties is good. In the rest of the school pupils make good progress in small group sessions in some lessons, but their progress in lessons where they are not supported is often unsatisfactory and sometimes poor.
Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development	Satisfactory overall: good moral and social development, and satisfactory cultural development; spiritual development is unsatisfactory.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	Satisfactory overall: good staffing levels with satisfactory arrangements for professional development; satisfactory resources in most departments and satisfactory accommodation which is about to be enhanced by a substantial building programme.
Value for money	Satisfactory: the school has an average level of income per pupil when compared with similar schools, and this has been used efficiently to manage the expansion of the school.

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

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

**What most parents like about the school**

- IV. The school provides a caring environment in which all pupils are valued as individuals.
- V. The school is approachable and parents are encouraged to play an active part in the life of the school.
- VI. They are kept well informed about their children's progress.
- VII. The school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities.
- VIII. The school caters well for all pupils and enables them to achieve good standards of work.

**What some parents are not happy about**

- IX. No items of concern were raised either in the

Parents support the aims and achievements of the school. The inspection team generally supports the positive views of parents in all but the quality of pupils' work. The majority of pupils make satisfactory progress but standards are lower than they should be in some subjects, notably art and history.

· **KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION**

The school needs to take steps to raise standards. It should:

- X. improve teaching quality by implementing rigorously its plans to monitor teaching, identifying strengths and taking firm action to eliminate weaknesses, in particular by:
  - XI. ensuring that teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils particularly as the attainment of pupils on entry to the school has risen
  - XII. providing training to ensure that teachers have the skills necessary to meet the learning needs of all pupils in their classes, so that they provide a greater challenge for all pupils, and in particular for higher attainers
  - XIII. ensuring that teachers plan and use appropriate methods and strategies for the full range of abilities in each class, providing tasks and activities that are closely matched to the needs of all pupils
  - XIV. ensuring that marking enables pupils to identify how they can improve their work, helps them to eliminate repeated mistakes and inaccuracies and requires them to respond to instructions given
  - XV. tackling low attainment in art and history;
- XVI. increase the effectiveness of management at all levels, by:
  - XVII. focusing the work of the school more sharply on its first aim of increasing individual achievement

- XVIII. strengthening and clarifying the accountability of middle managers to the senior management team
- XIX. giving clear targets for subject improvement and taking steps to ensure they are met;
- XX. improve progress for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream classes, by:
  - XXI. ensuring that targets in individual education plans are specific and measurable
  - XXII. strengthening working relationships between support staff and subject teachers
  - XXIII. ensuring that subject teachers make greater use of assessment information about pupils with special educational needs and match work more closely to the learning needs of individuals
  - XXIV. introducing more courses at Key Stage 4 which are appropriate to the needs of lower attainers
  - XXV. providing whole-school training in writing targets for individual education plans, in matching work to different needs and in the use of support staff
  - XXVI. regularly monitoring all aspects of provision for special educational needs.

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

- XXVII. provide a daily act of collective worship
- XXVIII. ensure that a course in religious education is available for all pupils in the Sixth Form
- XXIX. reduce the number of GCSE examination courses taken by some pupils
- XXX. ensure that subject schemes of work include the use of mathematical skills both in investigations and to solve problems.

- **INTRODUCTION**

- **Characteristics of the school**

1. Barnwell School is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive with 776 pupils on roll. This is an increase of over 100 since the last inspection and the school is over-subscribed in the current Year 7 and Year 8. There are more boys than girls on roll. The school offers a range of courses in the Sixth Form in a consortium arrangement with a local school. There are currently 100 Barnwell pupils on the Sixth Form roll. There are two bases on the school site, one with places for pupils with sensory impairment and the other for specific learning difficulties. These pupils are taught partly in the base and partly in mainstream classes. There are 18 pupils with statements of special educational needs and a total of 220 pupils on the school's register of special educational needs. Pupils largely come from Stevenage itself, from a mixture of owner-occupied and local authority housing. There are very few pupils from ethnic minorities. Attainment on entry to the school is

below average.

2. The school's aims are to:
- maximise individual achievement
  - develop extensive links with the community
  - create the best possible working environment.

**Key indicators**

**Attainment at Key Stage 3<sup>2</sup>**

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1998	53	53	106

National Curriculum Test Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	14	19	21
	Girls	33	24	24
	Total	47	43	45
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	45	41	43
	National	65(56)	60(60)	56(60)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	12	18	11
	National	35(23)	36(37)	27(29)

  

Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	11	21	21
	Girls	29	25	28
	Total	40	46	49
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	39	44	48
	National	62(59)	64(63)	62(61)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	11	15	23
	National	31(28)	37(37)	31(29)

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

### Attainment at Key Stage 4<sup>3</sup>

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1998	70	47	117

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	16	51	59
	Girls	25	46	49
	Total	41	97	108
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	35	83	92
	National	44.6 (43.3)	89.8 (88.5)	95.2 (94.0)

### Attainment in the Sixth Form<sup>4</sup>

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

Year	Male	Female	Total
1998	5	11	16

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A Levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A Levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	16.0	11.3	12.5	2.0	2.2	2.1
National	N/A	N/A	17.6 (17.1)	N/A	N/A	2.8 (2.7)

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

	Number	% Success rate
School	37	59.0
National		72.5

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

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

## Attendance

Percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year:			%
	Authorised	School	8.5
	Absence	National comparative data	7.9
	Unauthorised	School	0.4
	Absence	National comparative data	1.1

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## Exclusions

Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school age) during the previous year:		Number
	Fixed period	33
	Permanent	4

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## Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is:		%
	Very good or better	12.4
	Satisfactory or better	87.1
	Less than satisfactory	12.9

## **PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL**

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

#### **Attainment and progress**

1. Attainment is below and at times well below average in most age groups throughout the school, although it is better at Key Stage 3. As the school has become oversubscribed the attainment on entry of pupils has improved, as shown from their Key Stage 2 Standard Assessment Tasks (SATs) results and other standardised tests. This is reflected in the higher attainment observed in lessons and seen in an examination of the pupils' books at Key Stage 3 and particularly in Year 7.
2. In the 1998 Key Stage 3 SATs, the pupils' attainment was well below the national average overall and well below the average for similar schools. Their attainment was well below the national average in English and mathematics, and below average in science. Attainment in all three core subjects was well below the average for similar schools. Girls consistently achieved better results than boys over the period from 1996 to 1998, the difference being greater than that seen nationally. There has been some fluctuation in the results for English and mathematics while those in science have changed little. The 1999 results showed an improvement in all three subjects with each registering an increase in the proportion of pupils reaching at least the expected Level 5 and an increase also at Level 6 and higher.
3. The GCSE results in 1998 were an improvement on those of 1997 and were above those at the time of the last inspection in 1995. The proportion of pupils achieving A\*-C grades in at least five subjects was 35% in 1998, a figure which was below the national average. Although there has been an upward trend, the average points score per pupil has risen at a slower rate than the national average and is below the national average and well below similar schools. Since the previous inspection the proportion achieving at least five grades A\*-G has fallen, while the figure rose nationally. The proportion of pupils achieving five A\*-C grades fell in 1999 to 28%, while those gaining five A\*-G grades rose, the effect being to increase the average points score per pupil. The school has had no means of assessing whether these results show sufficient progress for the pupils from the start of their courses two years earlier, having ceased some time ago to use a nationally-validated system for measuring progress during Key Stage 4. New systems are in place, but insufficient data was available for analysis at the time of the inspection.
4. There were considerable variations in the GCSE results. Attainment in science was close to the national average in 1998, but below average in both English and mathematics. There was a considerable fall in the science results in 1999. Results in drama, information studies, French, geography and music were above national averages in 1998, while those in design and technology, German and history were below average and very low in art. There was a further decline in art results in 1999.
5. As at Key Stage 3, girls have consistently achieved better results than boys in GCSE, the difference being greater than nationally. In 1998 the proportion of girls gaining five or more A\*-C grades was above the national average. There was a considerable drop in the performance by girls in 1999 reflecting their poorer results at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1997. While the school was under-subscribed, places were filled by pupils moving from other schools for a variety of reasons. The examination results of these pupils overall were lower than those pupils who had been at Barnwell since Year 7. Their results lowered the school's overall results at GCSE.
6. A consortium arrangement with a local school enables a wider range of GCE Advanced Level

and GNVQ courses to be provided. Numbers entered for two or more A Levels have been low, with a final points score well below the national average. The size of some cohorts makes invalid any comparison with national figures. In 1998 59% of pupils achieved the GNVQ Intermediate qualification against 72.5% nationally. As with GCSE, the school has ceased to use a nationally validated system for assessing whether its pupils make adequate progress from GCSE to A Level and has no other data to make such an assessment possible. The reasons for these unhelpful decisions are unclear, but the consequence is that the school has no means of knowing whether pupils are doing as well as they should at GCSE and A Level.

7. The attainment of pupils as observed in lessons and assessed from an examination of their books and other work is above average for about a sixth of the pupils, average for just over a half but below average for 30%. Within these overall figures there are some variations by year group and by subject. At Key Stage 3, there is more average attainment in Year 7, reflecting the improved intake and the mixed ability teaching in most subjects, but considerably more below average attainment in Years 8 and 9. Attainment in the current Year 11 is the lowest, with below and well below average attainment in 50% of lessons. This mirrors the standards reached by these pupils at the end of Key Stage 3. The subjects with higher numbers of pupils reaching above average attainment within the overall levels stated are design and technology at Key Stage 3, information technology, mathematics and music at Key Stage 4 and science at both key stages. The subjects with the highest proportions of low attainment are art, history and modern foreign languages, these being particularly low at Key Stage 4. There is a wide spread of attainment in lessons in English, science, music and religious education with much above average, but also high proportions of below average attainment. Attainment in geography in the Sixth Form is above average.
8. The school recognises the need to improve the pupils' literacy and some strategies have been introduced, although it is too early yet to assess their impact. Subjects other than English vary in the extent to which literacy is developed. Most pupils speak confidently and the majority listen attentively. Few pupils, however, speak at any length. Pupils are encouraged to participate in question and answer sessions but they have few opportunities to develop oral skills apart from in drama. Not all teachers encourage the use and acquisition of subject specific vocabulary. Reading comprehension is generally sound but higher-level reading skills are not well developed. Opportunities for pupils to read aloud are limited. Research and information retrieval skills are generally satisfactory, being particularly well developed in geography and at GNVQ. The pupils' written work is the greatest weakness. In many subjects, such as history, there is little writing at length. Even for higher-attaining pupils the range of styles is limited and the work of weaker pupils contains many inaccuracies. The importance of presentation is emphasised in most subjects but there is not a consistent approach to developing accurate spelling.
9. Standards of numeracy are satisfactory at Key Stages 3 and 4. Calculators are mostly used appropriately and almost all higher-attainers in Year 8 and in Key Stage 4 also use graphics calculators well. Basic numeracy, measure and graphical skills are mostly used satisfactorily in science. In design and technology, however, basic measurement and accuracy in practical work are not always satisfactory and the lower-attainers in Year 10 struggle to manipulate and solve algebraic equations involved in circuit work. Insufficient opportunities are provided for pupils to apply mathematics in other subjects such as geography.
10. Information technology (IT) skills are sound in Year 7, where pupils have a weekly lesson. This course is enabling pupils to gain a satisfactory grounding in IT skills. Pupils can use the computer network effectively and carry out detailed searches of CD ROMs. Basic skills are not being sufficiently reinforced by the regular use of IT in other subjects in Years 8 and 9, and insufficient opportunities are provided to enable pupils to reach the higher National Curriculum levels. The gap between IT sessions leads to some pupils forgetting how to use basic software.



Attainment is satisfactory and at times good at Key Stage 4. The keyboard is used effectively and the majority of pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of various IT devices.

11. The progress made by pupils is satisfactory or better in the majority of lessons but it is unsatisfactory in one in six. There are some variations by key stage. Pupils in the Sixth Form make at least satisfactory progress in lessons, while in two-thirds progress is good; however, progress is less than satisfactory in almost a quarter of lessons at Key Stage 4. Progress over time is judged to be satisfactory, although the sample of work provided by the school contained pupils' books only from the start of the term. Some of the unsatisfactory progress is due to weaknesses in teaching particularly when teachers fail to challenge pupils sufficiently or when they provide tasks and activities poorly matched to their needs. In some lessons the response of pupils has an impact on their progress even when the teaching is otherwise satisfactory. In Year 9 French, for example, several pupils were very reluctant to take an active part in a lesson requiring verbal responses from them, thus restricting an important part of their language development. At other times some disruption, caused by small numbers of boys in particular, has an impact on their own progress and that of others in the class, as in some history lessons.
12. Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) make good progress when withdrawn from lessons to work either individually or in small groups. Progress is satisfactory and at times good when they are supported in lessons; however, when not supported, their progress is more often unsatisfactory and at times poor. This is largely because insufficient use is made of assessment information, leading to tasks not being directly matched to the learning needs of individual pupils. The progress made by pupils with specific learning difficulties and for those with special educational needs in the main part of the school is unsatisfactory over time in English.
14. **Attitudes, behaviour and personal development**
13. Most pupils in the school behave well and show respect for teachers, their peers and their environment. In lessons they show good attitudes to their work and are attentive and concentrate well, although they are often passive learners despite the efforts of some teachers. There are, however, some instances of disruption by a minority, usually boys, and this affects their own and others' progress when it is left unchecked. A firmer approach by some teachers is needed.
14. Pupils are polite and courteous to visitors and move from lesson to lesson quickly and quietly. At break-times and after school most pupils sustain high standards of behaviour and can be trusted to have access to all buildings and facilities which they use responsibly.
15. Pupils enjoy good relationships with their teachers and each other. When opportunities are given, for example in personal and social education (PSE), pupils work well in groups, respecting the feelings and values of others. Pupils find staff approachable and value their support and sensitivity. Year 7 pupils who have only been at the school a few weeks stressed how at ease they were with the staff. There is little bullying and pupils feel safe and happy. Opportunities to share and respect the beliefs of others are limited and could be developed further.
16. The number of exclusions from the school is in decline. All pupils sign an agreement stating their rights and responsibilities and most respect this. There is a variety of opportunities for pupils to take on responsibility within the school and pupils are willing volunteers. They show pride in the school and enjoy acting as guides and mentors on open evenings and on other occasions when visitors are in school. They are encouraged to think of others through several charity fund-raising initiatives and raise significant sums for both national and local charities.

18. **Attendance**

17. Attendance for many pupils is good with a lower than usual incidence of unauthorised absence. Attendance overall was 91% last year which is in line with the average nationally. Since the last inspection, attendance has improved and is now given a much higher profile; however, despite the school's many endeavours, the number of pupils taking holidays in term time has increased which has a detrimental effect on attendance overall. There are also a few pupils whose attendance is very poor.
18. Registers are marked accurately and efficiently at the beginning of the morning and afternoon sessions and there is consistent adherence to the rules on recording late arrivals; however, more effective use should be made of the morning registration period. Most pupils arrive promptly at school and most lessons start on time. There was no evidence of truancy from lessons during the week of the inspection. The school complies with the statutory regulations for attendance.
19. The good attendance of many pupils makes a positive contribution to their learning.

21. **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED**

21. **Teaching**

20. Teaching was satisfactory or better in 87% of lessons, including a half of all lessons where the teaching was good or very good. There is more of the unsatisfactory and less of the good teaching at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3. The proportion of unsatisfactory teaching at Key Stage 4 was high at one in six. The teaching in the Sixth Form was always at least satisfactory, and it was good or very good in two out of three lessons. This contributes significantly to the good progress made by these pupils. There was a high proportion of good and very good teaching in English, mathematics, drama, science, information technology, geography and music, although also some unsatisfactory teaching. There were high proportions of unsatisfactory and poor teaching in history and art.
21. The teaching is good in the two bases for pupils with special educational needs and in withdrawal lessons in the learning support department. Support teachers and learning assistants generally provide good in-class support; however, there are weaknesses in the lessons when support is not available. The system of making some classes smaller to help pupils with special educational needs is ineffective as subject teachers do not adapt their strategies to meet the needs of individuals or groups of pupils. Subject teachers have not always used the targets within individual education plans when planning work, some not being able to identify pupils on the special educational needs register without turning to their mark books. Staff from the base for pupils with specific learning difficulties work very effectively with individual pupils but the support provided by the subject teachers for these pupils is often unsatisfactory and sometimes poor. Subject teachers rarely involve support staff sufficiently in planning and fail either to match tasks or adapt their teaching methods to the needs of special educational needs pupils.
22. Good subject knowledge characterised some of the better teaching seen. This was evident in a very good Year 9 design and technology lesson through the very good practical demonstrations given by the teacher. The enthusiastic style and encouragement given to pupils to offer their own ideas gave them confidence and enabled them to develop their skills in the use of hand tools. The very good subject knowledge of the teacher in a Year 7 science lesson was demonstrated by the quality of the introductory question and answer session and by the range of activities planned. This supported the development of the pupils' experimental skills. In a Year 10 English lesson

using extracts from *Of Mice and Men* the teacher's knowledge of the requirements of the examination was used to good effect. The objectives of the lesson were made clear to the pupils and the teacher was effective in encouraging greater accuracy in their answers to comprehension questions and more attention to detail. Very good questioning ensured the pupils gained a deeper understanding of the text. The very good use made of discussions and evaluations in an A Level drama lesson improved the pupils' improvisations. The teacher continually challenged, questioned and probed to develop the pupils' ideas. The teacher's high expectations and the positive relationship with the pupils in a Year 8 French lesson, the very good pace generated and well-directed questioning were all used to good effect when introducing new vocabulary. The good variety of activities, including games, generated interest and enthusiasm within the class. The pupils with special educational needs within the class were not daunted by the work and were able to contribute well.

23. There are some particular weaknesses causing several lessons to be unsatisfactory and limiting the progress made by classes or groups of pupils. In many classes teachers do not take into account the wide range of prior attainment present and teach to those of average ability. This leads to a lack of challenge for the more able and insufficient opportunities for weaker pupils to consolidate their learning before moving on. This causes lessons to slow down and some pupils become frustrated and restless, their subsequent behaviour not always being effectively managed. The school has made insufficient progress from the last inspection in dealing with this weakness.
24. Low expectations of what pupils can achieve is a feature of some of the poorer teaching. In a Year 10 art lesson the choice of task to be undertaken was undemanding and its potential to extend pupils' learning very slight. Very little thought was required by pupils, the pace of the lesson was slow and little progress in either technical skills or conceptual understanding was evident. In a Year 10 history lesson on the nomadic life of American Indians much of the lesson time was spent cutting out pictures from the sheet provided and copying out notes. This lesson made insufficient demands on the more able pupils. Although the teacher emphasised some historical skills, these were at a basic level. Insufficient planning for the full range of pupils in a Year 8 mathematics class resulted in the lesson lacking pace and challenge for the better pupils. This was further reduced by some weaknesses in dealing with the poor behaviour of some pupils. The progress made by pupils in writing algebraic formulae using words and symbols was slow.
25. There is a clear marking policy which gives details of how corrections should be made. Not all departments have fully implemented this policy. Marking is not sufficiently consistent in quality to ensure that pupils can improve their work. Some comments consist only of very generous praise, giving no indication of how pupils could make improvements. Pupils do not always respond to the suggestions given either to correct work or to improve its quality. In many cases only an effort grade is given and pupils report that they do not always understand what the marking is telling them either about the quality of their work or how they might improve. In some departments the marking of pupils' work is very good. In drama, marking clearly shows pupils their strengths and weaknesses and how they could improve, while in A Level geography useful comments pose further questions for the pupils' consideration.
26. The homework policy highlights the value of regular and appropriate homework, but there is a variation in quantity and quality. Homework is generally satisfactory, with suitable tasks to consolidate learning. In some subjects homework is often finishing off work not completed in the lesson rather than setting new work to consolidate, extend or prepare for the next lesson. Homework is monitored by the headteacher and the heads of year but this is not as effective as it should be given the inconsistencies seen. Where homework at Key Stage 4 is to continue with coursework, insufficient guidance is given on the shorter targets which pupils need to reach so that they can plan their work over a long period. Pupils also report that those in higher sets receive much more homework. This leads to some reduction in quality, particularly for those

faced with a heavy load.

**28. The curriculum and assessment**

27. The curriculum at Key Stage 3 has breadth and balance overall. It covers all the subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education. All pupils take two modern foreign languages in Year 8 and Year 9 in an appropriate amount of time. The curriculum is enriched with drama and well-planned personal and social education (PSE). There is satisfactory provision of lessons in information technology (IT) in Year 7 and some further lessons within the PSE programme in Year 9. There is insufficient use of IT in a number of subjects.
28. At Key Stage 4 the curriculum is appropriately broad and balanced. It offers the subjects of the National Curriculum together with religious education. All pupils take the GCSE short course in IT. Pupils make a guided choice of three subjects from a list of ten options, one of which is a vocational course in caring, which counts as two subjects.
29. A satisfactory range of subjects at A Level is offered in the Sixth Form in conjunction with another local school. Courses are also provided leading to General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) in business at advanced and intermediate levels and health and social care at intermediate level. There are opportunities for pupils to retake English and mathematics at GCSE and to study a further foreign language. All pupils take 'complementary studies' which includes PSE, IT and physical education. There is a small element of religious education in the PSE programme, but it does not meet statutory requirements.
30. Personal and social education (PSE) has been given a much higher profile since the last inspection and enjoys a good level of support throughout the school. The programme is well planned and includes health and sex education, relationships, careers, citizenship and study skills. PSE is taught by a tutor team specially selected for their commitment and skill. They meet every half term to share ideas, and the schemes of work are amended to include new successful teaching practice. All lessons seen during the inspection were judged to be at least satisfactory and in most cases good or very good. The department has a comprehensive development plan which is under regular review to ensure successful progression and achievement of targets. In order to ensure a consistently good approach a monitoring programme is in place in which the co-ordinator will observe each of the team teaching. The programme of careers education and guidance is good. It is well planned and taught as part of the PSE programme by a small team of teachers. It provides pupils with a wide range of opportunities to learn more about continuing education, industry and commerce. Pupils receive help with curriculum vitae and interview techniques.
31. In both key stages arrangements for the timetabling and organisation of pupils into sets according to their ability are generally satisfactory. Planning to ensure continuity in pupils' learning as they move through both key stages is effective in most subjects; however, it is poor in art and does not ensure that the subject is taught in sufficient depth or breadth. Science teaching at Key Stage 3 builds well from pupils' experiences in primary school, as planning for Year 7 is based on a knowledge of the local primary science scheme.
32. The curricular provision for pupils with special educational needs has improved since the last inspection. Pupils are taught through a mixture of support in mainstream classes and withdrawal. Some pupils are disapplied from modern languages to provide time for individual or small group work. The curriculum provided by the bases for sensory impairment and specific learning difficulties focuses effectively on the needs of individual pupils. The school is

considering extending its curriculum provision at Key Stage 4 to meet the needs of lower-attaining pupils. A work-related course and supported study sessions are already provided; however, there are limited opportunities to take alternative courses to GCSE.

33. Extra-curricular provision is strong. There is a good range of sports activities and several pupils achieve county and national recognition. There is a good variety of clubs, including, for instance, several music clubs, drama, dance, gymnastics, judo and an animal club. The modern languages department runs a very popular day trip to France. In English pupils are encouraged to take part in theatre trips and writing and debating competitions. Year 7 pupils make a day trip to St Albans in connection with religious education, history and geography.
34. The assessment policy has been in place since September. Not all departments have implemented its recommendations. At both key stages effective systems to assess work and progress are in place in most departments; however in art, little progress has been made since the last inspection when assessment was an identified weakness. Assessment in music is poor and statutory requirements are not being met at the end of Key Stage 3. The school has embarked on a system to collect pupil data from all subjects and publish this to all teachers to enable them to set targets for individual pupils. There is little evidence that departments use assessment data to inform curriculum planning.
35. The learning support department conducts initial assessments to identify pupils with special educational needs and maintains records of pupils' responses in lessons; however, insufficient attention is being paid to recording special educational needs pupils' progress. In the base for pupils with sensory impairment, initial assessments involve external specialists. The pupils' progress is carefully monitored to enable staff to identify accurately what help a pupil might need. The assessment system within the base for pupils with specific learning difficulties enables staff to identify their strengths and weaknesses.
36. Improvements have been made in the provision for religious education since the last inspection in response to a key issue for the school. Although arrangements are now satisfactory at Key Stages 3 and 4 this is not the case in the Sixth Form where provision remains unsatisfactory. Curriculum arrangements for the teaching of modern foreign languages have been improved. There is now no overlap between PSE and the previous modular studies programme, which has been discontinued. The current fundamental review of the curriculum is expected to publish its findings in January.
38. **Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**
37. Barnwell is a caring community, which attaches great importance to the rights and responsibilities of each of its members. In so doing, it makes a good contribution to the moral and social development of the pupils. Although the school has increased the time allocated to religious education since the last inspection, it does not make sufficient provision for pupils' spiritual development. The school promotes pupils' knowledge and experience of their cultural heritage, both through the curriculum and in extra-curricular activities. The pupils' exposure to the riches of other cultures is still inadequate in the curriculum.
38. Spiritual development is being fostered mainly through religious education, which gives pupils the chance to examine a range of religious beliefs and values, and opportunities to think through their own ideas in class discussion. Opportunities to reflect on life and beliefs also occur in English and drama, but are not evident in other areas. School policy in the area of spiritual development is still at the embryonic stage, so there is little guidance for teachers on how they

can contribute in their subjects.

39. The moral education of pupils is well supported through the religious and personal education programmes, teaching pupils the principles on which to base decisions about moral choices. In particular, the Year 10 course in religious education covers major moral issues on the sanctity of life, war and peace, world poverty and human rights. In other subjects moral issues are raised, such as environmental concerns in science and geography, the responsible use of new technology, and an exploration of personal values in literature and drama. The school's values are promoted effectively in assemblies and through the personal example set by teachers. Parents agree that these values have a positive effect on their children. An enlightened contract of rights and responsibilities, which has been fully discussed throughout the school and signed by all pupils, is the basis for individual respect and fair treatment for all.
40. Pupils make good progress in their social development as they move through the school. There are many opportunities for them to develop social skills through group work in most subjects, especially in drama and music, in science practicals and team games. There are opportunities for pupils to take responsibility, such as electing their representatives to year councils and to the school council. Their sense of responsibility to others is evident from the impressive fund-raising for charity. A hundred pupils attended the launch of this year's World Vision appeal at the House of Commons and the school went on to raise a record sum of £2,400 on the sponsored fast. During inspection week, a cheque was presented to the NSPCC from money raised on the annual sponsored walk. Involvement in the local community is fostered through lettings to local clubs that cater for young people, and community projects, such as the Barnwell School's team challenge, that involve pupils from Year 8 onwards in practical action in the local area.
41. The school makes satisfactory provision for pupils to develop an appreciation of cultural traditions through the curriculum and through participation in extra-curricular activities. On two expressive arts days in the summer term, Barnwell pupils work with local primary school pupils on an arts project, culminating in a performance for parents. GCSE drama pupils and the various music groups and choirs are given the opportunity to perform their work in front of an audience. Some thirty instrumentalists had the opportunity to work with members of the English Symphonia in a performance of Michael Nyman's *Symphony of Stevenage* last spring. Sports teams and science clubs add to the range of activities where pupils can pursue their interests further, and there are some visits abroad, notably a day trip to France for Year 7 pupils and a cultural visit to Italy Year 11 and Sixth Form pupils. Multi-cultural education is barely satisfactory. It appears in the range of English texts and musical forms studied and in the cultural influences of major religions; however, the richness of other cultures is under-represented in the curriculum as a whole.
43. **Support, guidance and pupils' welfare**
42. The school has a calm, happy and caring atmosphere where pupils feel valued as individuals. Pupils find staff very approachable and have no hesitation in asking for help or advice. Parents are pleased with the way the school looks after the pupils' interests and are happy with the attitudes and values promoted by the school. The pastoral system ensures that teachers know the pupils well and that help is readily available from staff, who take their pastoral responsibilities very seriously.
43. The school has recently introduced new measures to monitor pupils' academic progress but it is too early to judge their effectiveness. These involve monitoring progress and setting targets for improvement, which in turn will lead to an analysis of the progress made in each subject over time. Further initiatives have been introduced over the last few years for Key Stage 4 pupils.

These include a mentoring programme in which a staff member has special responsibility for working with a small group of pupils. This has now been extended into Year 13.

44. The pupils' personal development is monitored by their tutors who know the pupils well. They are supported by the heads of year who contact parents if a problem arises and also inform them of extra effort or good work.
45. There is now a much greater consistency in individual education plans (IEPs) for special educational needs pupils than at the time of the last inspection; however, targets are still not specific enough and therefore provide little direction to subject teachers when planning lessons, and they do not provide a suitable record of pupils' progress. The procedures for annual reviews of pupils with special educational needs meet statutory requirements.
46. The systems in place for monitoring behaviour are sound. Parents are informed of both good and poor behaviour. The introduction of a structured report system, whereby pupils' behaviour is monitored in each lesson has contributed to the decline in the number of exclusions and incidents of very poor behaviour. Good behaviour and attitudes are promoted through the clear guidelines and expectations of the code of conduct, the agreement of rights and responsibilities and through the merit system. In conjunction with a PSE module on bullying which raises awareness, the anti-bullying policy is effective.
47. Recording and monitoring of attendance have been improved significantly since the last report. The administration assistant, who is responsible for recording data from the school's electronic registration system, closely monitors levels of attendance. Daily updates on pupils who are absent and overall figures for absence each week are provided for heads of year and the deputy headteacher. Absences are rigorously followed up by the administration assistant who contacts pupils on their first day of absence if the school has not been contacted by parents. The educational welfare officer provides good support when necessary. The school is tackling problems of non-attendance with the help of the Stevenage Support Centre, a member of whose staff visits the school twice a week. Prompt arrival in the morning is encouraged through detentions for persistent lateness.
48. The school has effective measures for child protection and pupils' welfare during the school day. Since the last report a new medical room has been allocated next door to the reception area where the welfare assistant is based. Pupils were seen to be well cared for when they became ill at school. The school nurse holds an open session one lunch hour each week. She also liaises with the special needs and PSE co-ordinators on matters such as personal health, hygiene and sex education.
49. Sex education is taught through the PSE and science curriculum, and parents are invited to view the sex education policy which covers the areas where provision is built into curriculum.
50. Health and safety is thorough. Site inspections and risk assessment are carried out regularly and site staff deal with general maintenance. No areas of concern were noted during the inspection.
51. The provision for careers education and preparing pupils for life after school is good. Pupils have mock interviews with local business people and are taught how to produce a curriculum vitae. Some pupils are involved in work-related learning in a two-year course specially prepared for those disapplying from modern foreign languages. There is a good level of support from the Hertfordshire Careers Service. All pupils undertake work experience and are monitored whilst working. There is an area of the library specially designated to careers with a well-organised

system of information on a comprehensive choice of careers. This also includes prospectuses for local colleges, but no university prospectuses were on show during the inspection. These should be made available and may contribute to raising pupils' expectations. Pupils have access to relevant software on four computers in the library.

52. Preparation for entry to the school is good. All prospective Year 7 pupils are visited at their own schools. Pupils and parents have opportunities to visit before starting and some attend the school for activities such as the expressive arts day and sports. A very successful example of liaison with two local primary schools is through IT when Year 5 classes attend lessons at Barnwell. A summer school is run for some Year 6 pupils, concentrating on literacy and numeracy. The ease and speed with which the present Year 7 pupils have settled is testament to the success of the induction programme.

54. **Partnership with parents and the community**

53. The school works hard to encourage parents to become involved but the level of support is variable. Parental support is good on occasions where the interests of their own children are involved, such as parents' evenings and when invited to discuss any problems affecting their child, but there is less support for more general events. Parental support has increased since the school has become over-subscribed with more pupils who put Barnwell as their first choice school.

54. The quality of information to parents is good except for the annual reports. The home/school agreement was drawn up after consultation with parents. Parents sign this and return it to school whilst keeping a copy for themselves. Although parents express satisfaction with the quality of annual reports, citing clear and helpful information supported by pupils' involvement in identifying their own strengths and setting targets for improvement, not all the reports seen were of a high quality. They included National Curriculum attainment levels but many did not state what the individual pupils know and can do and how they can improve. They consisted of a list of work covered in the subject over the year. There needs to be stricter monitoring to ensure consistency across all subjects.

55. The behaviour policy stresses the importance of parent partnership and parents are involved in discussions at an early stage if problems arise. Most parents are supportive of the school's stance and want to be involved.

56. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA) is run by a committed few but events are usually quite well attended. Many events are fund-raising activities and help to supply the school with equipment for the benefit of pupils. The PTA also organises evenings of interest to parents such as drugs awareness and topics relating to other areas of the curriculum.

57. The response from parents at the parents' meeting held before the inspection was very positive and this was echoed in the parental survey with a return of over 50%. The topic which attracted the most dissatisfaction was about homework, many of parents suggesting that there are inconsistencies about the amount of homework given on different nights. Most parents, but not all, support pupils well with work done at home. The school's homework clubs at lunchtime and after school offer support and help to pupils to try to address this.

58. Barnwell's links with business and the local community are a significant strength of the school. The business and community link partnership, which has been established for five years, has over forty working partners who have made a long-term commitment to work with the school. It



involves pupils throughout the school. They benefit enormously from the increased opportunities to gain familiarity with and confidence in the world of work.

59. There is good liaison with local feeder primary schools both at a curriculum level and through assistance given by Barnwell pupils at primary school events. The link with a special school, which involves pupils sharing a lesson each week at Barnwell as part of the City and Guilds health and social care course, greatly enhances the learning of both sets of pupils.
60. Lettings to sports clubs, meetings of local organisations, the local education authority and for social functions earn extra revenue and enhance the school's standing in the local community as well as giving opportunities to pupils after school to broaden their experiences.

## 62. THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

### 62. Leadership and management

61. There are some weaknesses overall in the leadership and management of the school. At the time of the last inspection the headteacher had been in post for eight days and was faced with declining pupil numbers and a shrinking budget. He has successfully overcome both of these difficulties and has worked hard to generate a positive ethos within the school and a positive view of the school within the community. Pupil numbers are increasing and the school is now expanding. The headteacher has the support of parents and the Governing Body. Where the management of the school has made insufficient impact is in improving classroom practice and raising standards. Insufficient attention has been paid to some of the key issues and other weaknesses reported at the time of the last inspection. Therefore, although GCSE results have improved, they have done so at a slower rate than seen nationally. Several weaknesses reported in the quality of teaching remain and standards are lower in some subjects than in others.
62. The senior management operate well as a team. A series of reviews of departments has been carried out. This process had the potential to identify strengths and weaknesses yet did not get to the heart of some of the unsatisfactory teaching or attack shortcomings with sufficient rigour. Some school policies, such as those for marking and homework, are not consistently followed. In some cases this is because of a failure of middle-managers to monitor with sufficient care the work of their staff. Faculty structures in those containing more than one department are not always effective in this regard. Some staffing problems at this level have been dealt with firmly by senior management, yet others have been tackled less effectively. There is a need to strengthen the accountability of middle-managers to the senior management and ensure that targets for improvement are met.
63. The Governing Body has developed as an effective group over the last few years. The committee structure enables it to frame school policy and monitor developments. Governors are attached to departments to provide support and to gain an understanding of their work. This, coupled with attendance at training, has enabled governors to gain considerable expertise. The Governing Body has been involved in preparing the longer-term strategic view of the school and has supported the school well in planning its recent development. Governors are aware that standards are not rising as quickly as they would like and are keen to ensure improvements take place.
64. Structures and strategies for monitoring the quality of teaching and standards are in place but require a sharper focus to be effective. Careful target-setting now takes place and quite challenging GCSE targets have been set following an analysis of Key Stage 3 SAT results. Unfortunately, the school has not been in a position to establish whether or not it is adding value to its pupils or to identify underperforming subjects at GCSE, having stopped using nationally validated systems. Alternatives are now in place, but data is only just becoming available for analysis.
65. There have been considerable improvements in the process of development planning since the last inspection but some weaknesses remain. Staff and governors attend an annual conference to establish the broad priorities for the school development plan. A five-year strategy, based upon developing a strong partnership between all those involved in the school informs this process. For ease of accountability and evaluation, the plan is written to headings representing each of the Governing Body committees. Although the priorities are clear and largely appropriate, those for subject departments do not focus sufficiently on how standards are to be raised by improving the quality of teaching. Target-setting is being introduced but there is no clear link between this and the process of planning within subjects.

66. Improvements have taken place in the management of special educational needs since the last inspection. The school has appointed a full-time special needs co-ordinator. Management of the learning support department and of the two bases is effective but there is insufficient monitoring of all special educational needs provision. Although a representative from each subject attends special educational needs meetings, this is having insufficient impact on the provision for pupils within departments.
67. The school is having some success in meeting two of its three aims, these being to develop extensive links with the community and to create the best possible working environment. It is not yet meeting its main aim of raising individual achievement. There is a commitment to raising standards from both the senior management and the Governing Body, but policies need to be turned into effective action. The school works hard to raise the self-esteem of pupils and has had some success in this. Attitudes to learning are sound, and relationships and behaviour are both good.
68. The school is meeting all of its statutory requirements in respect of the National Curriculum with the exception of religious education in the Sixth Form. The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship and does not, therefore, conform to statutory requirements. No appraisal is currently taking place in the school.
70. **Staffing, accommodation and learning resources**
69. The overall ratio of pupils to teachers is well below average, the school being very favourably staffed. This is partly because of the number of staff employed for pupils in the two on-site bases. Teachers have appropriate professional qualifications. There is a good mix of experienced teachers, many of whom have been at the school a considerable time, and younger and more recently-appointed staff. There has been some staff turnover, but at a satisfactory level; however, there have been severe staffing problems in modern languages which have adversely affected pupils' learning, although these are now resolved. Almost all staff teach within their subject expertise; where this is not the case there is no significant impact on pupils' attainment and progress.
70. The match of non-teaching support staff to the school's needs is satisfactory overall. There are sufficient support assistants for pupils with sensory impairment and specific learning difficulties. There are enough technicians to support the curriculum.
71. Arrangements for the induction of new staff, newly qualified teachers and initial teacher training students are all good, and teachers feel well supported. About five student teachers work with the school each year. Current national union advice has led to the appraisal process being suspended. A system of staff reviews and classroom observation continues to provide some monitoring and support informally and this should be developed further.
72. Arrangements for staff development are good and linked to the school and departmental development plans. Greater emphasis should be placed on ensuring that evaluation, dissemination and impact on pupils occurs after courses have been attended. The base for specific learning difficulties provides training not only for staff in the school but for staff from other schools in the local education authority. The base for sensory impairment also provides support for school staff. There are gaps in whole-school provision which need to be filled. For example, staff have had no training in how to provide support for pupils with special educational needs in lessons in recent years.

73. The school has tackled most of the faults in accommodation reported at the last inspection. Sufficient funding has been secured to enable the planned improvement in facilities for music and humanities as well as science and technology to go ahead. A five-year plan for the repair and maintenance of buildings is now well under way, and much redecoration and refurbishment have already been undertaken. Although the upper floors are still inaccessible to wheelchair users, ramps on the ground floor allow the extensive letting programme to include disabled groups.
74. Improving the environment has been a priority since the last inspection and has resulted in a well-cared-for and well-maintained school. There is generally a good standard of cleaning, and health and safety measures are thorough and effective. Improvements to site security have helped to prevent vandalism. Good quality displays in most classrooms and corridors contribute positively to the learning environment. There are, however, still some shortcomings. The accommodation for art in the Old Rectory is cramped and badly lit, and, while not the major factor affecting low standards, does not provide a positive learning environment. One of the two rooms used for drama has poor acoustics and soundproofing, with the result that it cannot be used for much of the summer term as the noise would disturb public examinations. This loss of amenity has some impact on teaching and on standards. Pupils using the library frequently find concentration difficult. It is too small to be used as a thoroughfare, as a private study space and to accommodate part of the school's IT facilities. The school should take measures to reduce the impact of the movement and noise generated.
75. Most subject departments are adequately resourced with books and equipment. The shortages of textbooks in the last report have been rectified. Some subjects such as science throughout the school, and history in Key Stage 4 provide each pupil with his or her own textbook. There are shortages in modern foreign languages resources. There needs to be some further resourcing of non-specialist rooms which are used for music with a range of sound sources for practical music making. The school has a good range of audio visual resources and good use is made of these along with the well-equipped reprographic facilities. The library is a useful resource. It is well used by pupils during the school day and after school. Library staff are helpful in supporting the work of subject departments. Good use is made of external resources for visits, field trips and residential courses as well as a number of visiting professionals. All of these help to extend pupils' learning experiences.
76. The number of computers is in line with national averages. The new IT facility opened in September 1998 has 80 computers on a fully integrated network and is the first to be linked to the local authority's Grid for Learning; however, the learning support department has insufficient IT hardware and software; there is some incompatibility amongst the equipment.
78. **The efficiency of the school**
77. The school has an overall level of income that is above average; however, a proportion of this is provided specifically for the two special educational needs units. When this is taken into account the level of income per pupil is broadly in line with other schools. Projections of income and expenditure show that a healthy surplus will be generated over the next two years. Spending decisions have been carefully undertaken based on the aim of maintaining staffing levels to enable the school to provide a broad and balanced curriculum. The school has managed its finances well through careful planning and the generation of other funding to enable building programmes to be undertaken. The finance committee of the Governing Body has been effective in supporting senior management over this period.

78. Satisfactory use is made overall of the resources available to the school, although there are some inefficiencies. For example, some A Level class sizes are small and uneconomic in spite of the consortium arrangement. The school justifies this decision as part of a longer-term plan for the expansion of Sixth Form provision. The funding which the school receives to provide for pupils with special educational needs is appropriately spent. This is a significant improvement on the position reported in the last inspection. The school needs to consider carefully, however, the effectiveness of having smaller classes as part of its overall provision for special educational needs pupils. Satisfactory use is made of learning resources including those for IT, which are regularly used at lunchtime and after school. The site and buildings have been considerably enhanced since the last inspection and plans have been finalised for further improvements to the accommodation for design and technology, humanities and music.
  
79. Financial control systems are good and have supported the management of the very tight budget. Regular monitoring of all budgets is carefully undertaken with the finance committee involved. The minor recommendations of the most recent auditor's report have been implemented. Administrative systems run smoothly, a particular feature being that each head of year has a specific administrative assistant who acts as the first point of contact for parents.
  
80. The school has an average level of income. Its pupils arrive with below average attainments and mostly make satisfactory progress. The school is giving satisfactory value for money.

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

### **82. ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE**

#### **82. English**

81. Overall attainment in English is low, although some of the most recent results show a slightly improving trend. In particular, the proportion of pupils reaching Level 5 or above in the Key Stage 3 SAT results for 1999 is considerably higher than in 1998. Earlier average scores for Key Stage 3, however, have been well below both the national average and the average for similar schools. Results in 1998 in English were similar to those in mathematics but below those in science. In GCSE English and English literature the proportion of pupils attaining A\*-C grades was well below the national average in 1997 and 1998: the results for 1999 are not markedly different.
82. Boys' results since 1996 have been consistently below girls' at both key stages, showing a gender gap that is much wider than the national one. In 1999, however, boys' results showed a slight improvement on the previous years in GCSE English and a marked improvement in GCSE English literature. The numbers taking A Level English have been low and results show no consistent trend. In 1997 a very high proportion gained grades A-B and the points score was well above the national average; in 1998, no pupils gained high grades; while in 1999 the number of entries doubled, all achieved a pass and a third gained higher grades.
83. Standards of speaking and listening are satisfactory overall. Many pupils are confident speakers and the majority listen attentively. Few pupils speak at length, although several in one Year 7 class provided lively, extended oral contributions using mature vocabulary during a comprehension lesson: an example of the generally higher profile of attainment in this year group. A high proportion of pupils at Key Stage 3 have low reading ages. Higher-level reading skills are less developed, although reading comprehension in Key Stage 4 is generally sound. The greatest weakness is seen in writing. While higher-attaining pupils are able to plan, organise and develop ideas fluently and at length, generally the range of styles is limited. The written work of weaker pupils contains many inaccuracies in spelling and expressions, and there is only restricted imaginative development of ideas. Most A Level pupils write well-constructed essays and show a sound knowledge of the texts studied. They sometimes lack the confidence to challenge ideas in class and are reluctant to take part in sustained intellectual debate.
84. Other subjects across the curriculum vary in the extent to which they promote literacy. Pupils are encouraged to participate orally in answering teachers' questions, but apart from work in drama lessons they have few opportunities for the wider development of oral skills. Not all teachers encourage the acquisition of subject-specific vocabulary, particularly at Key Stage 3. Reading skills are generally sufficient to support learning but opportunities to practise and develop the skills of reading aloud are limited. Pupils' research and information retrieval skills are generally satisfactory, and are particularly well developed in geography and on GNVQ courses. Pupils' writing skills are variable, but in many subjects there is little writing at length, and even when this is desirable, such as in history, a great deal of written work lacks detailed development. The importance of good presentation is emphasised in most subjects, but there is not a consistent approach to the rigorous promotion of accurate spelling. The school recognises the need to improve the pupils' literacy, and a number of measures have been introduced, although it is too early to judge their impact on standards. A literacy co-ordinator has been appointed, who will work with colleagues to develop a whole-school policy; stand-alone literacy lessons are being piloted with Year 7 English classes, while poor readers are being supported by a paired reading programme. 30 Year 7 pupils with low scores in the Key Stage 2 tests attended

a literacy summer school during the recent holidays and will be part of a literacy intervention programme.

85. The progress of the majority of pupils in English is generally satisfactory, both in their lessons and over time. When progress is unsatisfactory, this is sometimes due to poor lesson planning, when there is not appropriate provision for a range of individual needs and lesson activities are not carefully timed. Pupils with special educational needs only make good progress when there is an adequate level of support and when there has been effective liaison between the support teacher and the class teacher. The practice of target-setting has been introduced to encourage pupils to be more responsible for their own learning, but in too many cases it is not an effective strategy for promoting progress, as the targets set are not sufficiently specific. At Key Stage 4, good progress is seen during many lessons. Pupils in a Year 10 class studying *Of Mice and Men* made good progress during the lesson as a result of their teacher's lively approach and the opportunity for purposeful group work. There is gradual improvement in the quality of written work as pupils respond to the increased challenge of the GCSE course and as they make more use of IT to re-draft their writing. Sound progress is made by A Level pupils whose research skills improve together with their capacity to respond to texts in considerable detail. Progress in the development of critical skills is unsatisfactory.
86. In English lessons, the majority of pupils show satisfactory and often good attitudes. Most come to lessons well prepared and willing to learn. Classroom relationships are good and most pupils are attentive to their teacher. A substantial minority of pupils find it difficult to sustain concentration, particularly when the pace of the lesson is slow and activities are not sufficiently varied. As a result, restless behaviour sometimes develops towards the end of lessons. Most classrooms are orderly, however, and pupils' behaviour is generally good. There is a considerable amount of talk allowed while pupils are working; not all of it is about the work in hand and sometimes the noise level is distracting. Pupils co-operate well with their teachers and with each other.
87. Most teaching is at least satisfactory. All teachers have good background knowledge of their subject, some bring vigour and enthusiasm to their teaching, and classroom management on the whole is good. Many are skilled at developing the pupils' understanding by careful questioning as well as clear explanations. Most work is well marked, some, but not all, with detailed constructive comments. The pupils' response to marking, however, is not always checked. Teachers make regular assessments and use these to identify those pupils who are underachieving and who need to be given extra support. Increasing emphasis is laid on the importance of basic literacy, technical accuracy and examination techniques in order to raise attainment, but there is a lack of effective classroom strategies to ensure that pupils of all abilities make the progress that they should. More able pupils are not being extended, expectations are still too low, especially in Key Stage 3, and many pupils with special educational needs are not given work suited to their learning needs. Homework is regularly set, but some is undemanding, particularly at Key Stage 3.
88. There is a commitment to raising attainment within the department, with particular emphasis on improving the performance of boys. Several measures have already been introduced, with some degree of success, particularly at Key Stage 3, but more needs to be done to tackle the weaknesses in teaching already identified.
90. **Mathematics**
89. The 1998 SAT results at the end of Key Stage 3 were well below average, both nationally and when compared with other similar schools. They were similar to those in English but worse than

science. The 1999 results show an improvement. Girls out-perform boys by significantly more than the national average. Although many pupils are working at a satisfactory level in some aspects of mathematics, overall attainment is unsatisfactory. This is because insufficient opportunities are provided for pupils to use and apply their mathematics in investigations and when solving problems.

90. GCSE results have fluctuated over the last four years. The number of pupils achieving grades A\*-C declined to 32% in 1998, with figures for 1999 showing a further fall. Girls out-perform boys by significantly more than the national average. In the Sixth Form only four pupils sat A Level in 1998. Their results were broadly in line with national averages. Provisional results for 1999 are lower than previous years and below the school's average.
91. Basic numeracy is given importance at both key stages. Most pupils can perform calculations, mentally recall number bonds and basic mathematical knowledge to help solve simple problems, and use measure and graphical skills in simple applications. The focused and well-structured teaching of numeracy at Key Stage 3 is particularly effective. At Key Stage 4 simple algebraic manipulation is often used well by higher-attaining pupils. Subject-specific terms are often reinforced or learnt in lessons.
92. Opportunities are limited for the development of mathematical understanding through the use and application of mathematics in investigations or through problem solving. There is no guidance within the schemes of work for the teaching of this aspect, and coverage is unsystematic and insufficient. Pupils who stay on to follow A Level mathematics are not sufficiently prepared for the approach that the supported self-study course requires.
93. Attainment in the other aspects of mathematics is satisfactory. At Key Stage 3 higher-attaining Year 8 pupils work well with linear equations. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 9 can use and apply Pythagoras' theorem. Pupils in Year 9 understand and interpret tabulated data and scatter diagrams. Algebra is used satisfactorily at Key Stage 4. Some higher-attaining pupils plot and interpret with quadratic graphs and also use computers to support work which they undertake on Pythagoras' theorem and trigonometry. The attainment of the pupils in the Sixth Form is good and they are competent with elementary analysis of functions.
94. Overall progress over time at both Key Stages 3 and 4 is unsatisfactory as insufficient attention is paid to the development of pupils' mathematical understanding. This contrasts with the progress made in lessons at Key Stage 3 which is generally good or better and at Key Stage 4 where it is satisfactory. Progress is good when teachers have high expectations of their pupils, lessons are well-planned and conducted at a brisk pace. Occasionally progress is limited because there is an over-emphasis on consolidation and repetitive practice, with little new learning taking place. Progress is unsatisfactory or worse when pupils behave badly as in a Year 8 class, and when the teacher's expectation of a group of Year 11 pupils was poor. Progress in the Sixth Form is good and pupils begin to become more independent learners. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in lessons. Teachers are aware of their needs and liaise effectively with support staff.
95. Pupils generally approach their work well. Most can concentrate when required and many show interest when the teaching is stimulating. Behaviour and relationships are generally good; however, some restlessness and excessive noise, involving mostly boys, were observed in a few Key Stage 4 lessons. There were only a very few examples of pupils taking responsibility for their own learning at Key Stages 3 and 4. Generally pupils are too dependent and often learn passively. Exceptions involved some stimulating question and answer sessions, effective pairings in a Year 10 lesson and extended independent work on the IT network.



96. Teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection. The quality of teaching at Key Stage 3 was mostly satisfactory. It was good or better in nearly three-quarters of the lessons observed. At Key Stage 4 only one lesson observed was unsatisfactory while nearly two-fifths were good or better. The structure of lessons is good, particularly the start where activities to sharpen pupils' number skills are used to good effect. The teachers' knowledge and expertise of the subject are at least satisfactory, expectations are often high and lessons are mostly well prepared and well presented. The range of teaching methods observed has improved since the last inspection; however, it still needs to be extended if the department is to fulfil its stated aim of promoting a culture of active learning. Pupils' work is marked regularly but rarely informs future planning and is not often followed up. Homework is regularly set and extended at times by the provision of more challenging questions.

98. **Science**

97. At the end of Key Stage 3 SATs in 1998 pupils achieved results that were below national levels, but close to those for the other core subjects in the school. Results in science were better than in both English and mathematics. This year the results improved. Teacher assessments, which include assessment of experimental and investigative science, were better than the test results. In work observed in lessons, pupils' books and discussion with pupils, attainment was in line with national averages. For instance, in a Year 9 lesson, most pupils understood the importance of classification of animals and plants. In another, pupils demonstrated good knowledge of the structure and function of human organs following research on the Internet. Although it was not possible to observe any work on physical processes, attainment in the other aspects of science, including experimental and investigative science, was close to national levels.

98. At the end of Key Stage 4 in GCSE in 1998 the percentage achieving grades in the range A\*-C and in the range A\*-G were in line with national averages. Girls did significantly better than boys at A\*-C. In 1999 there was a significant drop in the percentage achieving A\*-C grades, although the percentage achieving A\*-G grades was maintained. A variety of levels of attainment was demonstrated in the lessons and in the work of Year 11. Overall the range of attainment matched national averages. A Year 11 group studying factors affecting the rate of a chemical reaction could construct word and symbolic equations for the reaction they were studying. On the other hand, a group planning an investigation had only basic knowledge of the factors that might affect the rate and were not able to suggest a scientific explanation.

99. At A Level small numbers of pupils take biology, chemistry and physics, some being taught as part of the consortium. They make satisfactory progress. The number of pupils gaining grades in the range A-B is small at 11% compared to that achieved nationally in comprehensive schools of 30%. The number of pupils gaining grades in the range A-E is lower than the national average.

100. Throughout Key Stage 3 pupils with all levels of attainment generally make good progress in lessons. A Year 7 group made very good progress in designing an experiment to investigate the dissolving of sugar. In a Year 8 group of lower-attaining pupils most made good progress in describing the properties of materials, while some were effectively building on previous knowledge. Over time, progress is satisfactory. Pupils in Year 9 are well placed to reach levels in line with national averages by the end of the year. Pupils with special educational needs generally make satisfactory progress because they are in smaller classes and there is often support in class. Occasionally, however, when pupils' individual needs are not fully understood, progress is unsatisfactory.

101. Pupils make satisfactory progress in most lessons at Key Stage 4. Occasionally progress is unsatisfactory when an appropriate learning environment is not maintained and pupils do not clearly understand the task they are being asked to do. Generally pupils make satisfactory progress over the key stage, although recently some pupils reacted adversely to the coursework demands of a large number of subjects and their progress in science was unsatisfactory. As at Key Stage 3, pupils with special educational needs are often taught in smaller groups, sometimes with additional support staff, providing better individual attention and resulting in satisfactory progress. Teachers generally have a good understanding of pupils' individual needs.
102. The pupils' attitudes to learning are generally good at Key Stage 3. Pupils are keen and interested. A Year 7 group required to construct charts illustrating the size and distance from the sun of the planets in the solar system, did so enthusiastically, with commendable co-operation in their groups and produced some effective posters. At Key Stage 4 response is most often satisfactory or better. Relationships between pupils are good, and their relationship with the teacher is normally helpful to progress. Occasionally, when the teacher finds it necessary to repeat instructions frequently and sometimes loudly, some pupils become resentful and unco-operative.
103. Teaching is good in most lessons in Key Stage 3. It is occasionally very good and never less than satisfactory. It is mostly satisfactory or good at Key Stage 4 and good in the Sixth Form. Lessons are conducted at a good pace, often in order to complete a practical exercise within the 60-minute period. There are appropriate changes of activity to maintain interest and concentration. In a well-planned practical lesson in the Sixth Form pupils gained a good understanding of the effect of enzyme concentration on the rate of a reaction. Practical work is generally well organised, although even at Key Stage 4 some pupils need to be reminded frequently about procedures, such as the use of eye protection, because good habits are not well-established.
104. All science teaching takes place in well-maintained laboratories, although some are in need of modernising. This, together with a satisfactory supply of apparatus and materials, enables a good range of experimental and investigative work to take place. The display of posters and pupils' work in laboratories, in corridors and in stairwells creates a good working atmosphere in the department that promotes learning. The department is well led and efficiently managed.
105. The requirements of the National Curriculum for science are broadly met at both key stages; however, insufficient attention is given to some aspects such as the nature of scientific ideas and the need for pupils to consider their own safety and assess risks. Although there is some good use of IT, this aspect is currently under-developed. Steps are being taken to improve this.
106. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 has steadily improved since the previous inspection, while, apart from a significant drop in 1999, the pass rate at GCSE grades A\*-C has been sustained. Satisfactory progress has been maintained at both key stages and a scrutiny of work at Key Stage 4 indicates that levels of attainment in GCSE are likely to improve this year.

108. **OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES**

**Art**

107. Since the last inspection, standards have fallen and GCSE results have declined so that in 1998 only 10% of pupils gained A\* - C grades compared with almost 60% nationally. In 1999, there was a further decline in results with only 3% of pupils achieving A\* - C grades; several pupils

achieved their lowest grade in art. In 1999, Barnwell School pupils took A Level art for the first time in three years but there were too few entries to make meaningful comparisons with national results.

108. By the end of Key Stage 3, most pupils' work is below national expectations. This is evident technically, in their understanding of elements of art, in their ability to analyse visually, and in their selection and use of visual reference material. The pupils' ability to use their imaginations and to communicate ideas is generally stronger than their ability to work from observation. There is limited work in three dimensions. By the end of Key Stage 4, most pupils' attainment is well below the expectation of GCSE. Pupils generally work in a limited range of materials. Some draw with reasonable accuracy from secondary sources but drawing from observation is weak for all but the highest attainers. Much preparatory work is fragmented or ideas only partially realised. Literacy difficulties are evident in the notes that support some pupils' practical work, and presentation could often be much better. In the Sixth Form, attainment is at or a little below national expectations. There is some emerging evidence of a personal response to work by other artists, and collections of imagery show visual awareness and a capacity to appreciate visual connections. The better preparatory work contains good experimentation.
109. Progress in individual lessons at Key Stage 3 is generally satisfactory but progress over time, both within years and across the key stage, is unsatisfactory. Whilst pupils make some satisfactory gains in knowledge of the work of other artists, they make unsatisfactory progress in the independent critical analysis of works of art and in the application of elements of other artists' styles and techniques to their own work. At Key Stage 4, progress over time is poor for the majority of pupils and very poor for some. Progress in lessons is mostly unsatisfactory and occasionally poor. Where progress is weakest, this is either the result of the pupils' poor behaviour and very poor attitudes to the subject or the result of tasks offering limited learning potential. Sixth Formers are making satisfactory progress in lessons and good progress over time, when their low prior attainment is taken into account. Pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to that of other pupils.
110. Pupils' attitudes to art are generally satisfactory, but they respond rather better at Key Stage 3 and in the Sixth Form than at Key Stage 4. Apart from poor behaviour in one Year 11 class and some occasional unsatisfactory behaviour in Year 9, pupils are co-operative and polite. They listen carefully, follow instructions, generally stay on task well and sometimes show real interest. Pupils' expectations of themselves tend to be low and this is especially evident in the way many complete their homework. Some working, especially at Key Stage 4, is exceptionally slow and some pupils need to work with greater care.
111. Teaching was satisfactory in just over two-thirds of lessons; the remaining lessons were mostly unsatisfactory but occasionally good or poor. Teaching at Key Stage 3 and in the Sixth Form is better than at Key Stage 4. Consistent strengths within teaching include good behaviour management, positive relationships with pupils, use of appropriate visual reference materials, homework which relates well to classwork and satisfactory individual support to pupils. Marking is satisfactory but could sometimes go further in showing pupils what could be improved. Where teaching is occasionally good, time is used well and questioning challenges pupils' thinking. Unsatisfactory teaching is characterised by a very slow pace with insufficient urgency about what is to be covered in the time, a tendency towards subtle communication of low expectations and, rarely, by difficulties in controlling challenging behaviour. At times, opportunities are missed for demonstrating practical techniques and work in art is not matched by task to the different learning needs of pupils. Where teaching is poor, tasks are ill-matched to the level of work required at GCSE.

112. The management of the art department is ineffective and this is having a very direct impact on the very poor examination results in the subject and the limited progress pupils are making at Key Stages 3 and 4. Curriculum planning was identified as a weakness at the last inspection and, despite revisions, the schemes of work still need to be rewritten - especially at Key Stage 3 - in order to provide greater depth and breadth. Assessment was unsatisfactory in the last inspection and although a new assessment form has very recently been drafted, there is as yet no effective means of assessment to inform planning or from which to report to parents. Portfolios of pupils' work are not being kept to illustrate progress across Key Stage 3. Conditions for art in the Old Rectory are poor and have a negative impact on the quality of provision and on the progress that pupils make.
114. **Design and technology**
113. By the end of Key Stage 3 overall attainment is satisfactory with examples ranging from very good to unsatisfactory. Attainment was very good in a Year 7 class involved in a project based on injection moulding. The teacher had a lively teaching style involving everybody in the class. Pupils were helped to identify commercial products made by this process, to build up the correct technical vocabulary and to apply what they learned to produce a simple injection moulded product.
114. At Key Stage 4 overall attainment is still below national averages. Most pupils follow a full GCSE course in design and technology, choosing from electronics, food, textiles or resistant materials. A small group of pupils is studying for a Certificate of Achievement in resistant materials. In 1998, GCSE A\*-C results across the department were below average when compared to national figures. In 1999 overall A\*-C results have fallen especially in food where results are very poor when compared with the rest of design and technology and national averages for similar schools. Attainment has improved in electronics and textiles and is now just below national standards. Attainment has also improved over time in resistant materials but it is still unsatisfactory. The overall percentage of pupils achieving a grade in the range A\*-G in design and technology subjects is above national standards at 96%, a significant improvement since the last inspection. In all subjects girls outperform boys but to a lesser extent than seen nationally. This is most marked in the 1999 results for food technology.
115. In a Sixth Form that has a very small number of pupils, attainment and progress are satisfactory in relation to prior attainment and national standards. The pupils make significant gains in organisational, practical and graphic skills. They improve the overall quality of design but there are weaknesses in product specification, design analysis and evaluation.
116. At Key Stage 3 pupils make satisfactory and occasionally good progress but there is a significant number of lessons where progress is unsatisfactory. Progress is satisfactory when pupils understand the task and can work on it at their own pace as in a Year 8 textiles class. The teacher provided clear instructions supported by appropriate written materials including a simple self-assessment sheet. The pace of the lesson was varied to match the range of practical activities.
117. In Key Stage 4 overall progress is satisfactory but in a significant number of lessons it is unsatisfactory. Pupils make satisfactory progress when they follow the project and time guidelines set out for them but many pupils are not using these effectively. Where progress is good in GCSE electronics the teacher acts in a consultant role. Pupils are set manageable tasks that are completed and assessed over a short period of time. Pupils receive regular, reliable assessments of their work and are advised on what they need to do to move forward.

118. At both Key Stages 3 and 4 pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress when engaged in practical activities but progress in design is more limited. Good progress was seen during a Year 7 class when a pupil who had difficulties with fine motor skills was able to use tools and machinery to good effect.
119. Pupils behave well, respond positively to good teaching and have a sound attitude to learning. Pupils respect facilities, resources and equipment, using them with care and due regard to safety. In a Year 7 class a boy with attention problems was so enthused by the teacher and so interested in his work that he remained on task throughout the whole of the practical lesson. Sixth Form pupils accept increasing responsibility well and use time for personal study to good effect.
120. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory with some being very good but some unsatisfactory. In the best lessons planning is good, as in the 'funny faces' project in Year 7. The teacher had accurate assessments so that lesson objectives and tasks matched the needs of pupils. By the end of this lesson pupils were using the correct terminology to describe and discuss their work. They were measuring more accurately as well as using chisels and machines safely to produce wooden jointed frameworks.
121. Where teaching is weak, expectations of pupils are generally low and the more able pupils are not suitably challenged. Teachers often over-value the achievements of their pupils especially at the end of Key Stage 3. Some teachers of GCSE courses find it difficult to interpret the assessment criteria in the new syllabuses adopted since the last inspection. This in turn affects the quality of lesson planning. In several lessons in food and textiles pupils spent too much time sticking cuttings from magazines on to design sheets. Examination folders may be attractive but many lack rigour and depth.
122. The curriculum in design and technology is suitably broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. Significant improvement in the schemes of work is evident but there is still a lack of continuity across subjects, for example Key Stage 3 pupils cannot see the links between designing in textiles and designing in construction. Where the scheme of work is effective as in the Key Stage 3 control courses, a detailed overview explains what pupils will learn. Activities relate to the programme of study and allow progression in designing and making. In other subjects the emphasis is often on correctly developing specialist skills but at the expense of developing design and technology capability.
123. There have been minor improvements to the resistant materials accommodation since the last inspection. There has also been a substantial improvement in IT provision. This is increasingly effective in supporting learning and raising standards as when pupils were seen designing, testing and modifying electronic circuits on screen without the need for expensive components. Other teachers need to consider the impact IT can make on raising standards. A significant and necessary improvement to the accommodation for design and technology is planned for September 2000.

125.

### **Geography**

124. In 1998, at GCSE, 62% of pupils gained A\*-C grades, a figure that was well above the national average; however, results have fluctuated, with 39.5% A\*-C in 1999 and 42% in 1997. A Level results fluctuate. The small number of A Level pupils makes comparisons with national results impossible.

125. Pupils were working in line with national standards in 70% of lessons at Key Stage 3 and 80% of lessons at Key Stage 4. In the other lessons attainment was just below national standards. Within A Level lessons, overall attainment was always in line with expectations of the course, and the standards in the current Year 13 class are higher than in the past.
126. Progress was satisfactory in all lessons at Key Stage 3 and in all but one lesson at Key Stage 4, when it was unsatisfactory because pupils worked too long on a task that did not extend their knowledge. At A Level pupils make good or very good progress as a result of the small class size and high quality teaching. Progress was greatest in lessons where pupils were engaged by the teacher's explanations, were challenged by the tasks set and were encouraged to talk about their work. In a Year 11 lesson pupils made notes during the teacher's explanation of renewable energy sources, which was illustrated with slides. They then worked in pairs, using text and library books to compile a detailed summary of one energy source. Least progress was made when tasks were not matched suitably to the range of ability within the class. For example Year 7 pupils worked on the same map skills tasks even though some pupils had completed similar work at primary level and some pupils were struggling to understand basic symbols and four-figure grid references. In the last inspection report the lack of suitable tasks and resources for some pupils was also highlighted and it is a matter that the department must now remedy with some urgency. In a significant number of lessons some pupils made little gain in their deeper understanding of the topic because they remained passive in the lesson despite good teaching.
127. There are more opportunities for pupils to use and improve their language skills than their graphical and number skills. A range of learning activities encourages pupils to practise literacy. Year 9 pupils used library books on tropical forests to gain information about deforestation, Year 11 pupils gave oral presentations about global warming and acid rain, while pupils in Year 13 argued over a series of options to establish a management plan for a nature reserve. Pupils are able to draw graphs appropriate to their age but are less confident about analysing them. Opportunities are given for every year group to use IT to support their learning. During the inspection Year 8 pupils created news pages reporting the effects of an eruption of Mount Etna in their work on Italy while Year 10 researched earthquakes using the Internet.
128. Pupils respond well in class; they are always well behaved and mostly attentive. They often work collaboratively. Year 7 pupils completed a map quiz in groups, Year 8 worked in pairs to produce a news page and Year 10, in groups, researched the effects of different earthquakes and then shared their findings with other groups.
129. The quality of teaching is at least satisfactory and often good, especially at A Level. Teachers mark work effectively but pupils rarely respond to their comments. Teachers must ensure that all pupils, but especially those with learning difficulties, make corrections and work on specific targets. Teachers use high quality, interesting and topical resources to engage pupils' interest. Textbooks are sufficient to meet the needs of pupils, an improvement over resource levels at the time of the last inspection.
131. **History**
130. Attainment at GCSE is significantly below the national average for the number of A\*-C grades, as it was at the time of the last inspection. The proportion of pupils reaching this level in 1997 and 1998 was about 34%, falling to 22% in 1999. A comparison of results in history in 1999 with the other results of pupils who took the subject indicates that the history group included some pupils whose attainment was generally low, but also a pattern of history being amongst the lower grades for several pupils. Both attainment and progress were therefore below average.

131. The number of entries for A Level history has been small for several years, falling from six in 1997 to one in 1998 and two in 1999. There are only three pupils currently studying history in Year 12 and two in Year 13. The group size is increased by combining with a neighbouring school. The results have generally been low, with the highest grade being C in 1997, D in 1998 and C in 1999. An examination of past pupils' coursework, which has been assessed by the school and moderated by the examination board indicates some continuing weaknesses, notably an excess of narrative and inadequacy of analysis.
132. At the time of the last inspection there was a wide variety in attainment at Key Stage 3 with higher standards in oral than in written work. This remains the case in some Year 8 classes and to some extent in Year 9. Standards in Year 7 are higher, related to expectations for that age group, with attitudes to learning generally more positive. The younger pupils are already asking and answering questions on historical developments well, showing a good understanding of why events happen and how various factors influence events. They are able to make deductions. In Year 8 there is a huge difference in the attainment of pupils supposedly of the same ability. Differences in attitudes and behaviour are the reasons. One class in Year 8 is able to speak and write well about Martin Luther, giving sophisticated responses for their age and using good arguments and vocabulary. Historical skills are generally low in Year 9 for pupils who are now in their last year of Key Stage 3. There is a wide variation in the quality of their written work, which is generally not up to standard. Many pupils, when they should be reading, digesting and recording history from texts are in fact copying without understanding and not recalling a week later very much of what they have studied. Progress in lessons and over a longer period is unsatisfactory, although Year 7, who have been in the school for only a few weeks, show greater promise.
133. At Key Stage 4 there is also inadequate attention to historical understanding and skills, even though development of these was part of the action plan following the last OFSTED inspection four years ago. The failure to achieve this goal is an important reason for continuing below-average attainment. Within this overall judgement there is a wide variety of attainment, but teaching rarely caters adequately for the wide range in mixed ability classes. There is an excess of exercises that record very simple facts, sometimes laboriously with time-consuming drawings for example on the American West, and insufficient opportunities for pupils to understand causes, analyse factors and appreciate the impact on history of economic and geographical conditions. Many abler pupils are insufficiently challenged and find the work easy. They are not being enabled to attain at the higher levels of work and achieve the higher grades in examinations of which they are capable. This is the case in well-behaved classes as well as those where disruption by some pupils is affecting attainment and progress. Only three of the five A Level pupils were present in school during the inspection. Observation of their lessons and of some of their work indicates satisfactory attainment and progress in tackling a difficult component of the course.
134. Whilst boys are more prominent in disrupting learning at both key stages, there are many boys as well as girls who work conscientiously to the standards expected of them. They could achieve much more if better order were maintained in some classes and if the teachers' expectations were higher.
135. There are strengths in the teaching of history, including some sound lesson plans and a commitment to the pupils' welfare, but the weaknesses outweigh them. About a third of the lessons seen were taught unsatisfactorily. There are problems of class control, with distractions from learning and direct rudeness to the teacher. The assessment of pupils' work is very generous and seldom includes specific advice on how a pupil can improve his or her work. The department

is not making a sufficient contribution to the school's improvement of literacy; there is little emphasis on the correct spelling of subject-specific words or of words commonly used in history such as 'government', 'parliament', or even 'until', with such words frequently incorrectly spelt without attracting the attention of teachers. Unfinished work is noted by the teacher, with an instruction to complete it, but the pupils usually ignore the instruction and the teacher does so as well. Much tighter control of classes and supervision of their writing and homework is required. The role of senior and middle management in the oversight of the subject needs to be much more rigorous.

136. The school's response to the previous OFSTED report has been inadequate. Of the four actions intended, only one has been carried out. That was to reconsider the roles and responsibilities for the subject. The outcome expected from that change was an improvement in the management of the subject, and that improvement has yet to be realised. The other intentions of four years ago - for example, raising pupil expectations at Key Stage 3, improving their written work, improving the pupils' key historical skills, catering for the needs of different pupils in mixed ability classes - still need to be realised.
137. The agenda for the improvement of the department is clear. It needs to be carried out without further delay.



139. **Information technology**

138. By the end of Key Stage 3 attainment in IT is sound overall. All pupils take a GCSE short course in information technology. This was examined for the first time in 1999. GCSE A\*-C grades in information studies have fluctuated in recent years but have been above the national average. There were fewer candidates in 1998 than in the previous year; however, results in 1999 showed a significant improvement from a much larger cohort of pupils.
139. At Key Stage 3, attainment was sound in the Year 7 IT course and in other lessons where IT was the main focus. The taught course is helping pupils to have an appropriate grounding in IT skills. Pupils have experience of all necessary aspects of IT. Even in the early weeks of Year 7 pupils were able to use the computer network effectively to access a range of software. The majority had mastered the necessary skills to carry out detailed searches of CD ROMs and transfer information appropriately into other applications. In several subjects pupils in Years 8 and 9 were using the Internet to obtain current information; however, basic skills were not being reinforced adequately by regular use in all subjects across the curriculum in Year 8 and 9. Procedures for assessing and reporting attainment in IT at the end of this Key Stage are appropriate.
140. By the end of Year 11 attainment is at least sound and often good, particularly when the pupils are using IT to communicate information. Pupils use the keyboard effectively for word-processing and are able to assemble effective visual presentations. The majority have a good knowledge of the functions and suitability of various IT devices. Some weaknesses were evident in the use of spreadsheets. Attainment in the Sixth Form is satisfactory overall. Some very good work by pupils following the complementary curriculum was seen, where the whole group was collaborating on an imaginative computer-based presentation for parents. There is much independent IT use by pupils throughout the school.
141. Progress in Year 7 is good, building upon a foundation made through links with the main feeder primary schools. In Years 8 and 9 progress is good but in some cases the variable gaps between IT sessions has led to some lapses in memory about basic software functions. Inadequate opportunities are provided in Year 9 to enable pupils to progress to the higher National Curriculum levels by the end of Key Stage 3. Progress in lessons at Key Stage 4 is mostly at least satisfactory, often good. The best progress seen was in information studies lessons. Progress at both key stages would be enhanced by more opportunities to practise IT skills in all subjects across the curriculum. The school needs to encourage more teachers to contribute to the cross-curricular provision of IT in all years and also ensure that schemes of work provide more opportunities for pupils to achieve higher levels at Key Stage 3. At least sound and often good progress is made in Years 12 and 13, particularly by those following the GNVQ business courses and attending the complementary curriculum.
142. The pupils' attitudes to learning at Key Stage 3 are good in all lessons where IT is the main focus. Pupils are well motivated, listen carefully to explanations and generally work hard to produce well-presented IT outcomes. Attitudes at Key Stage 4 in lessons are always at least satisfactory and at times very good, although in several lessons small numbers of boys were sometimes slow to settle. The attitudes of pupils in the Sixth Form are good. In all years, pupils work effectively in pairs or small groups. Computer rooms and equipment are treated with care and used appropriately at all times.
143. Teaching in lessons in Key Stages 3 and 4, where IT is the main focus, is good. Lesson objectives are clear as are the explanations given. The correct use of terminology is emphasised. Sensitive and appropriate support is given to individuals and the best lessons are skilfully

reviewed at the end. Activities and resources are particularly appropriate in Year 7. Some teachers use the Internet to good effect to provide pupils with useful up-to-date resources, for example finding information on recent earthquakes in a Year 10 geography lesson. Relationships with pupils are good. Homework is set regularly. Occasionally, however, pupils were observed using the keyboard with one hand without being checked. Some basic skills need to be reinforced more often to avoid pupils wasting time in lessons, particularly in Years 8 and 9. There is a need for further staff development in some subjects to enable more teachers to contribute to the current cross-curricular provision. The school should ensure that staff training needs are appropriately identified and that training is undertaken to ensure that staff have the appropriate skills and knowledge to respond to the challenges of the IT curriculum.

145. **Modern Foreign Languages**

144. GCSE examination results in French were well above the national average for A\*-C grades in 1998 with similarly good results in 1999, an improvement since the last inspection, when they were close to the average. They were below average in 1997, mainly because of a drop in the girls' performance. A\*-G grades were also above average in 1998 and similar in 1999 but below average in 1997. Boys performed at or close to the average in all years. German results have dropped from below average at the last inspection to well below average for the higher grades but they have been mainly above average for A\*-G grades. The school enters a wider range of pupils in German than most schools. A Level results have remained mixed, with mainly small groups of pupils. They were good in French in 1997 when all seven pupils obtained A-C grades, and A-B grades matched national averages. In 1999 in French there was one C and one E grade and in 1998 in German both candidates obtained C grades. The GCSE examination results in French are amongst the best in the school and represent a considerable achievement as there have been severe staffing problems since the last inspection, with disrupted learning for many pupils and additional work taken on by some teachers to alleviate the difficulties.

145. Overall, attainment observed in lessons and in pupils' work is below average. It is well below average in German and below average in French at Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 3 and in the Sixth Form there is a spread from above to below average, and overall attainment is close to the average. At Key Stage 3, at the beginning of new topics, many pupils are acquiring and practising new language at satisfactory levels. Their pronunciation is clear to good; many copy accurately and can use support materials to write several sentences. Most pupils in one Year 8 French group, including pupils with special educational needs, have good levels of attainment, especially in listening and speaking. They are confident of their ability to understand the teacher's language and material on cassette and listen intently until they do understand it. They ask and answer questions rapidly and with good accents and made very good progress with very good teaching in a lesson describing houses. In many other groups in both languages, the majority of pupils understand everyday classroom instructions and the gist and some detail of simple conversations on cassette. At Key Stage 4 most pupils' listening and speaking skills are much more varied and often at a low level, a drop in attainment since the last inspection. In many groups pupils are unable to understand classroom instructions and simple explanations, although in several groups in both languages the majority of pupils could understand key vocabulary in the topics which they had recently started. Most pupils make short, understandable responses to their teachers' questions or in pair work with another pupil, but usually with some form of written support. Many pupils cope better with reading extracts from their textbooks and often make sensible use of glossaries or dictionaries. Pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 are not currently reading more widely as the National Curriculum expects and supplementary reading materials are needed. Little work in the attainment target for writing was seen in pupils' exercise books, mainly new at the beginning of term, but in many groups pupils were weak in basic grammar.

146. In the Sixth Form, listening and speaking skills are good. Most pupils are able to interact naturally with their teachers throughout lessons. By Year 13 in French most are also able to speak at some length on a prepared topic with varying help from their notes. Reading and writing skills develop steadily from Year 12 to Year 13, using a wide range of tasks and material and helped by very good marking. There is most variation of attainment in writing, but some work of good quality was seen, including well-researched essays. Most pupils make good progress in lessons and over their courses.
147. Progress in individual lessons is usually satisfactory, occasionally good or very good and occasionally unsatisfactory. Progress in lessons at Key Stage 4 reflects this picture, with good progress in a German lesson on personal details where positive relationships and the teacher's knowledge of the pupils' strengths and weaknesses enabled good individual help to be given to a small group of pupils. Many pupils have, however, made unsatisfactory progress over time with poor knowledge of basic vocabulary and uneven or poor development of the language skills as illustrated earlier. This is at least partly because of disruptions to learning caused by staffing problems over several years and referred to earlier. At Key Stage 3 progress is satisfactory in a majority of lessons, but unsatisfactory in more than a third, either because of slow pace and deficiencies in lesson planning or because pupils are passive or not paying sufficient attention. Progress over time is satisfactory for the majority; however, time is tight in modern languages at both key stages and at Key Stage 3 pupils are taught in mixed ability groups. Many lessons need to be planned to cater better for pupils with special educational needs and higher-attaining pupils, particularly in Year 9.
148. Most pupils behave well in lessons, although a few do not. In almost half the groups at Key Stage 3 and half at Key Stage 4, although there is no misbehaviour a significant minority and occasionally most pupils are either slow to start work or are passive and uninvolved despite their teachers' efforts. In other groups at Key Stages 3 and 4 most pupils co-operate with their teachers, and relationships are good in some. In the Sixth Form most pupils respond well and work steadily in well-organised lessons.
149. Three out of four of the full-time teaching staff, including the head of department and the second in department, have been in post for four or five weeks. In many lessons teachers are still getting to know pupils and their strengths and weaknesses. Many schemes of work, criticised at the last inspection, have been recently revised and assessment arrangements altered, but it is much too early to see the effects of these or any other changes. The department is aware of the need to evaluate its work rigorously as these changes work through. Teaching is mainly satisfactory or better, with a small proportion of unsatisfactory lessons. Weaknesses relate mainly to lesson planning and low-level activities. Teachers' language skills are good to excellent, but many pupils have not been regularly taught in the foreign language and this is a key area for development for the department at Key Stages 3 and 4. Teaching strengths lie in good class management skills, clear objectives for lessons explained to pupils, and a recognition of the need to re-motivate pupils after a difficult period. In the best lessons, several of which have already been noted, there is a variety of appropriate and motivating activities with opportunities for all pupils to use the foreign language actively.
151. **Music**
150. Standards of attainment in music continue to be satisfactory overall with many pupils achieving national expectations or better in most years. GCSE and A Level results are good but small group sizes make comparisons with national statistics inappropriate.
151. At Key Stage 3 pupils in most classes are learning to interrelate composing and performing with

- listening and appraising music. Evidence of this good practice was seen in a Year 7 lesson on the organisation of sound in which pupils were using effectively the *Titanic* theme as a basis for composing, performing and listening. A Year 8 class was developing a sound understanding of compound time through some exciting, fairly idiosyncratic but purposeful teaching using the voice as an effective sound source, finally leading into some very good focused listening and appraising of music by Tchaikovsky. Listening skills continue to be good in most lessons with some notable exceptions. There is limited evidence of the use of IT and keyboards are not being used to their full potential for the development of the pupils' music technology skills.
152. At Key Stage 4 pupils are developing satisfactory or good aural skills. There was limited evidence of composition work during the inspection, but that in progress showed the competent use of melodic development and one or two completed or partially completed piano compositions at an acceptable examination standard. There is no evidence of the development of literacy as the music coursework does not require any extended writing. Written responses to listening tests showed a satisfactory use or understanding of music vocabulary and a range of musical styles.
153. The small, select group of A Level musicians are demonstrating high, and in one case exceptionally high standards of instrumental performance. These skills are also supporting the development of other areas of the music curriculum. The pupils are showing a working understanding of stylistic and sometimes fairly complex harmony and chord structures.
154. The pupils' attitudes to learning are positive for the most part and there are some good paired and group activities. Many pupils remain on task when not directly supervised and thus take responsibility for their own learning. One Year 8 class however, and to a lesser extent a Year 9 class, demonstrated less responsible attitudes and in the case of the former, disruptive and often insolent behaviour prevented any semblance of learning. Many pupils are enthusiastic learners who enjoy good working relationships with their teachers.
155. Most of the teaching is satisfactory or better. Good or very good teaching reflects sound subject knowledge, firm class control, appropriate teaching strategies matched to a variety of activities, high expectations and well-planned lessons. In the small minority of lessons in which the teaching was unsatisfactory some of these factors were missing. Urgent attention needs to be given to assessment procedures which are not meeting statutory requirements. Teachers enjoy a good rapport with their pupils in the classroom, in extra-curricular activities and in instrumental lessons.
157. **Physical education**
156. Attainment in physical education overall is in line with national expectations. Standards have risen since the previous inspection report. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils reach the standards that are expected in schools across the country. In trampolining, Year 9 pupils improve their basic skills when given the confidence to do so by the teacher. After limited experience on the water, pupils in Year 9 achieve satisfactory standards in canoeing because they are given a sequence of activities with clear explanations. Good teacher observation and appropriate individual challenge together with helpful comments from pupils in their group, enable Year 10 pupils to reach good standards in trampolining. At the end of Key Stage 4 attainment is satisfactory in table tennis but unsatisfactory in netball and soccer. Pupils lack consistency in the skills of passing in netball and defending in soccer and therefore are less effective when playing games. In Year 12 lessons, attainment is appropriate for the age group.
157. GCSE results this year are not as good as in the previous two years and still remain well below national averages. Four pupils passed GCE A Level examinations but not with the higher grades.

Boys and girls achieve similar standards in lessons. Pupils with visual impairment attain in line with their ability. Pupils' planning in lessons, such as planning practices in basketball with a partner, has improved since the last inspection but insufficient opportunities are given for pupils to observe and comment on their own work and that of others. This remains an area for departmental development in order to improve pupil attainment.

158. Some pupils succeed in winning places in teams beyond the school. One Year 11 girl plays rugby for London and the home counties, a Year 10 boy plays roller hockey for Great Britain and several pupils are members of the district swimming team.
159. Progress was satisfactory in all but one lesson, when the pace of the lesson and the lack of challenge failed to keep pupils focused on the task. Teachers enable pupils to make progress when they provide a framework for the lesson and keep pupils on task by their clear explanations. The pupils' self-esteem is raised by good feedback. During an A Level theory lesson, pupils made very good progress, because of detailed teacher planning, well-structured activity and very good relationships. The arrangements for teaching at Key Stage 3 are inconsistent; classes are sometimes organised in single gender groups and sometimes boys and girls are taught together. This arrangement, the result of timetable constraints, adversely affects continuity and progression. Pupils in Year 10 make better progress than pupils in Year 11. Appropriate assessment criteria for all pupils have been produced to measure pupils' attainment and progress at the end of most units of work. The sharing by the teachers of their expectations of pupils' achievement would help the department to agree standards for the end of key stage assessments. School reports in physical education do not reflect the National Curriculum.
160. The pupils' response to physical education is never less than satisfactory, often good and occasionally very good. This is an improvement on the last inspection report. Pupils are generally keen to participate, work hard and behave well. In most lessons pupils listen attentively but on rare occasions they are not committed to the lesson, which adversely affects their attainment and progress. An unacceptably high number of pupils are seen sitting out of the activity. Some teachers make good use of lesson evaluation sheets.
161. The quality of teaching is good overall, very similar at Key Stages 3 and 4 and best in the Sixth Form. This is an improvement on the last inspection report. Teaching is satisfactory in about half the lessons, good in slightly less and very good in one lesson. In the only unsatisfactory lesson the teaching did not have sufficient pace or challenge to keep the pupils on task or allow them to make progress. Teachers are well prepared and generally secure in what they teach. They set the framework for the lesson, enjoy good relationships, and on rare occasions use assessment criteria with the pupils to help them understand how well they are achieving. Catering for the needs of all pupils in lessons by setting different tasks is a target in the departmental development plan but has not yet been satisfactorily achieved. Teaching would be improved if pupils were encouraged to observe and comment on their work and that of others, as required by the National Curriculum.
163. **Religious education**
162. In 1998, pupils sat the GCSE examination on the short course for the first time. Their results were in line with the national average and compared favourably with other subjects at the school. The provisional results for 1999, from a larger number of candidates, show a fall in the average point score from the previous year.
163. At Key Stage 3, attainment is in line with national expectations. Pupils show sound knowledge

of Christianity and aspects of five other major world religions, through the study of common themes. In assessed work on Hindu and Buddhist stories, they are able to explain their meaning as ways of understanding what God is like. Year 9 pupils are able to find out information about birth and initiation ceremonies, when presented with artefacts and appropriate texts, but they are less successful in conducting their own research for homework. Their understanding of religious teachings on ultimate questions surrounding human existence is limited. On the few occasions where they are given the opportunity to respond to religious ideas or simulate religious experience, they can empathise with believers.

164. At Key Stage 4, attainment is in line with national expectations. All pupils follow the GCSE short course in Year 10 and over half continue on it in Year 11, the rest taking the school's own certificate course on beliefs. GCSE pupils have good knowledge of a range of religious beliefs and are able to explain different religious views on moral issues. Their coursework preparation shows a capacity for independent study and the ability to take into account religious teachings when forming their own views. They are beginning to evaluate different views from their own standpoint. In the non-examination groups, the standard of written work varies according to teacher expectation but is generally unsatisfactory. In discussion pupils were able to give an account of religious beliefs about angels and reincarnation, but could not explain their significance for believers.
165. Success at GCSE in the last two years has led to a small number of pupils joining the consortium class for A Level. Their attainment meets the standard expected on the course. In a philosophy of religion class, pupils were thinking through the problem of evil and showing understanding of different theories, but they were reluctant to challenge ideas.
166. Pupils make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 3. Introductory lessons in Year 7, including one on artefacts from a number of faiths, give them a good overview of the religions to be studied. In Year 8, the in-depth study on the life and teachings of Jesus helps them gain a broader understanding of Christian beliefs, which is not evident in their study of other faiths, where the treatment is more piecemeal. Individual target-setting is assisting most pupils to make progress towards their goals. Lack of suitable learning materials and adapted tasks for lower-attaining pupils means that they are not making sufficient headway on their learning targets. Class targets foster good progress in one Year 9 class, whilst in other classes inattention by a minority of pupils slows the pace of lessons.
167. Overall, progress is satisfactory at Key Stage 4. Year 10 pupils starting the GCSE course are already comparing different religious codes and reflecting on their significance in their own lives. In Year 11, the pupils' progress varies during the preparatory stage of the coursework assignment, with a tendency for the girls to be more advanced on the task. A schedule of interviews and deadlines is moving the work along. On the non-examination course, pupils are generally making satisfactory progress in lessons. Progress in the Sixth Form is good in lesson discussion, and coverage of topics in the pupils' files is thorough. Few assessment exercises are set, so it is difficult to assess their understanding, and this is a weakness that will affect the pupils' progress in developing the skills required by the examination.
168. The pupils' attitude towards the subject and their behaviour in lessons is generally good. The pupils show interest in the topics and activities and approach their work quietly and sensibly, respecting other faiths and handling artefacts carefully. This is not the case with some pupils in Year 9, who lack interest, lose concentration and hold up lessons by talking when they should be listening. Pupils taking the GCSE course are well motivated and take the lessons seriously, enjoying the opportunities for discussion and approaching coursework with confidence. On the non-examination course at Key Stage 4, some pupils do not listen carefully to each other's views,

which makes class discussion difficult to manage.

169. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, with some good features. It was unsatisfactory in just one lesson, where some pupils misbehaved and interrupted the progress of others. Teachers are developing courses imaginatively, to include a variety of activities and learning materials. Only very occasionally are pupils given the opportunity to respond to religious experience and reflect on its relevance to their own lives. Teachers plan their lessons well, identifying objectives clearly and keeping a balance between the skills outlined in the attainment targets of the Agreed Syllabus. There is little effective matching of tasks or materials to the needs of pupils with learning difficulties in the mixed ability classes. Management of some group work in Year 9 and class discussion on the non-examination course is barely adequate. The teachers' marking is often generous and not related to criteria.
170. Assessment procedures have been developed since the last inspection, in conformity with faculty policy, and a system is in place to monitor pupils' progress from year to year. The subject has been allocated sufficient time at both key stages to fulfil the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus. This has placed it on a proper footing. Standards are now in line with national expectations. The management of religious studies within the humanities faculty has given it parity with other subjects and the support it needs for developing examination work at GCSE and A Level. It remains to capture this development work in a more standardised scheme of work, that includes the common assessment criteria and makes explicit reference to the targets and themes in the Hertfordshire syllabus.
172. **Special Educational Needs**
171. The school has tackled some of the weaknesses in its provision for pupils with special educational needs identified in the last inspection. Practice within the two bases attached to the school – for pupils with sensory impairment and those with specific learning difficulties – and within the school's learning support department is generally effective; however, provision within mainstream subject lessons for pupils with special educational needs has several shortcomings.
172. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress when they are withdrawn from subject lessons by support staff to work either in small groups or individually. They make satisfactory to good progress in many subject lessons where they are supported. On some occasions they also make satisfactory progress when support staff are not present; however, their progress is more often unsatisfactory and at times poor when they are not supported. Progress over time for pupils with specific learning difficulties and for those with special educational needs in the mainstream school is unsatisfactory in English. It is unsatisfactory in religious education, especially at Key Stage 3. In history, some pupils with weak literacy skills cannot keep up with the pace of the work and have blank pages in their books; they are clearly making unsatisfactory to poor progress. In most other subjects, the overall progress of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory when pupils' prior attainment is taken into account, although there are instances of unsatisfactory progress in some lessons. Several factors give rise to unsatisfactory progress for pupils with special educational needs. These include: subject teachers making insufficient use of assessment information when planning the curriculum and in their teaching; class and homework tasks which are not matched to the learning needs of individual pupils; some ineffective use of support staff; and indirectly, lack of monitoring of special needs provision across the school.
173. Teaching is of good quality in the two bases and in withdrawal sessions in the learning support department. In the base for pupils with sensory impairment, there is an excellent awareness of the needs of pupils with visual impairment. Tactile 'props' are created to explain otherwise abstract concepts to pupils, and these are very carefully matched to the learning within the

subject and to each pupil's individual needs. In the base for pupils with specific learning difficulties, resources are well chosen, carefully targeted to each pupil's learning needs and used to good effect within the teaching. In the learning support department, withdrawal sessions are well planned, good use is made of time, there is appropriate challenge, and learning takes place in a climate which is both purposeful and encouraging.

174. Support teachers and learning support assistants from the bases and from the learning support department provide generally good in-class support. There are many examples of support teachers understanding the subject well and being able to contribute effectively in the context of different subjects. For example, a support assistant made purposeful intervention to reinforce key concepts in a design and technology lesson, and in an art lesson a support assistant provided effective questions and prompts to the visually-impaired pupil and offered rich language extension.
175. Staff from the base for pupils with specific learning difficulties work very effectively to help individual pupils with written or practical tasks, but the support provided by the subject teachers for these pupils is often unsatisfactory and sometimes poor. Subject teachers seldom involve support staff sufficiently in planning, despite written guidance that they should. Most subject teachers fail to match tasks and adapt teaching methods to the aptitudes and abilities of these pupils. This was seen in an English lesson, where no attempt was made by the teacher to involve pupils with specific learning difficulties in the discussion of the text and no account was taken of their very poor reading ages or of their individual education plans. Their progress was not monitored or recorded by the subject teacher, and the same homework task was set for all pupils though it was well beyond the capabilities of the pupils with specific learning difficulties. In such lessons, support staff are not involved in planning prior to the lessons in order to accommodate pupils' needs and they are not used effectively in the lesson. The time of staff supporting pupils with specific learning difficulties and that of staff from the learning support department is sometimes wasted when they are forced to wait for an opportunity to contribute. There is little evidence of collaborative teaching by subject teachers and support staff. Liaison between subject teachers and support teachers is rather better, however, in relation to adapting materials and making the curriculum accessible to pupils with hearing and/or visual impairments. Mainstream staff are able to take work for statemented pupils from the base or for visually-impaired pupils in the mainstream school to staff in the base for sensory impaired, for enlargement or to be brailled. There are also examples of collaborative planning by teachers from the sensory impairment base and subject teachers; this liaison contributes to the progress that these pupils make.
176. There are some classes with many pupils with special educational needs of all types which are not supported. The school has made classes smaller with the intention that this will be a means of supporting pupils who do not have a statement but who need additional help. This system is not effective at present, as it requires subject teachers to understand and accommodate a significant number of pupils with special educational needs, and many teachers are not currently fulfilling this expectation. Some have an awareness of the nature of pupils' difficulties but few adopt methods to meet the needs of individuals or groups of pupils. Different tasks are rarely provided and teachers are generally not considering individual learning targets. In general, subject teachers provide better for the needs of visually-impaired pupils than others with special educational needs. Subject teachers make limited contributions to the assessment of pupils, and subject targets within individual education plans almost invariably focus on behaviour or effort, rather than identifying specific learning targets. Even where pupils are not receiving support, some learning resources are inappropriate such as a textbook in design and technology in Year 9 which is above the reading level of some pupils. In these circumstances, pupils with special educational needs only have partial access to what is being taught.
177. The school is aware of the need to extend its curriculum provision at Key Stage 4 to meet the



needs of lower-attaining pupils better. It has already begun some activities, for example there is a work-related course for a group of Key Stage 4 pupils, and supported study sessions at Key Stage 4 provide help to pupils with their coursework. Pupils with special educational needs have however, limited opportunities to take Certificates of Achievement or other alternatives to GCSE.

178. There is a clear rationale for the withdrawal of pupils and the school has made suitable arrangements to disapply some pupils from modern languages to provide time for individual or small group work. This is appropriate to the needs of the pupils and marks an improvement on the situation at the last inspection.
179. A well-conceived multi-sensory curriculum which focuses effectively on individuals is provided by the bases for sensory impairment and specific learning difficulties. There is some strategic placement of pupils in classes to make the best use of support, for instance two visually impaired pupils who do not have statements are in a class with visually-impaired pupils from the sensory impairment base, so that there can be some overspill of support.
180. Individual education plan targets varied in quality at the time of the last inspection and they were inconsistent across the bases and the learning support department. There is now as much consistency in the format of individual education plans as there can reasonably be; however, targets in each of the bases and in the learning support department are not specific or measurable. Sometimes only general teaching targets and methods are included, and there is at times little reference to specific resources by which particular targets are to be met. Individual education plans therefore provide limited direction to subject teachers and do not provide the detailed record of pupils' academic progress that they should do. The planning by support teachers for withdrawal sessions is based on precise targets. This good practice needs to be disseminated throughout the school.
181. The learning support department conducts appropriate initial assessment, and ongoing records are kept of pupils' attitudes in lessons, but there is insufficient attention to recording pupils' academic progress. In the base for pupils with sensory impairment, initial assessments appropriately involve external specialists who conduct further diagnostic tests. Base staff carefully transcribe pupils' brailled work, records are very well organised, and the pupils' progress is monitored via internal records so that staff can identify exactly what help a pupil might need. In the base for pupils with specific learning difficulties, there is accurate diagnostic assessment of pupils' difficulties. The assessment system enables staff within the base to identify the pupils' strengths and weaknesses in reading, writing, spelling and study skills. A particularly strong feature of assessment is the recording of pupils' responses and progress in withdrawal sessions. The same system operates for pupils attending lessons in the mainstream school, but these records are completed by support assistants, not by subject teachers. Procedures for annual reviews meet statutory requirements.
182. Since the last inspection, the school has appointed a full-time special educational needs co-ordinator. Management of the learning support department is effective but there is insufficient monitoring of all aspects of special educational needs provision. Some liaison, for example, with support staff, is too informal. Documentation has been reviewed and is now satisfactory. The base for pupils with sensory impairment is very well managed, and that for pupils with specific learning difficulties is also effectively and purposefully managed. Again, systems for monitoring the effectiveness of teaching in subject lessons and observation of the use of support assistants by class teachers are not in place. There is a positive ethos for learning within the bases and in withdrawal lessons for mainstream pupils with special educational needs.
183. There are regular meetings between the deputy head who oversees special educational needs, the

special educational needs co-ordinator and the heads of the bases. This system works well though there is scope for some closer collaboration. A representative from each subject area attends special educational needs meetings but this arrangement is having insufficient impact on provision within subjects.

184. There are sufficient teachers and support assistants who are well qualified to provide effective support for pupils with sensory impairment and specific learning difficulties. The base for specific learning difficulties provides training not only for all staff in the school but also for staff from other schools in the local education authority; this is an improvement on the situation at the last inspection. The base for sensory impairment also provides support to mainstream subject teachers. New staff receive induction from the heads of bases and the special educational needs co-ordinator. Otherwise, training for mainstream staff on how to accommodate the needs of all pupils with special educational needs more effectively in lessons has not taken place. There is an urgent need for whole-school training in matching work to pupils' abilities, in writing precise learning targets and in the effective use of support staff.
185. The delegated budget for resources in the bases is sufficient. The learning support department has insufficient information technology hardware and software, and there is some incompatibility between existing equipment. The high quality teacher-made resources in the base for pupils with specific learning difficulties have the potential to assist all staff in overcoming the pupils' difficulties and they are available for purchase by other schools, thereby being an additional source of income.
186. The funding which the school receives to provide for pupils with special educational needs is appropriately spent and this is a significant improvement on the position reported at the last inspection. There is a need, however, to engage in detailed monitoring to assess the cost-effectiveness of the school's decision to make classes smaller as part of its overall provision for pupils with special educational needs. Inspection findings indicate that more needs to be done to make this strategy both efficient and effective in raising standards.

188.

## **PART C: INSPECTION DATA**

### **188. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

187. Fourteen inspectors spent 129 hours observing 203 lessons, covering all National Curriculum subjects, religious education and drama. Lessons in other subjects were observed, but judgements in these are not reported separately. The provision for pupils with special educational needs in the bases for sensory impairment and specific learning difficulties were also inspected. The lessons were chosen to ensure a spread across subjects, year groups and ability levels to embrace all teachers. Much data provided by the school in advance of the inspection was analysed and a commentary prepared for all inspectors on the basis of this data. Much work by pupils was examined, both during lessons and otherwise. The work of representative pupils from all years was examined, in order to establish their standards and progress over time. The same pupils were formally interviewed in year groups by two inspectors. Brief conversations were held with many pupils in lessons and around the school. Forms were observed during registrations and many were observed during tutor periods. Inspectors observed assemblies and many extra-curricular activities. Several representatives of the Governing Body were interviewed. Many formal and informal conversations were held between inspectors and staff. The headteacher and the registered inspector met daily.



## DATA AND INDICATORS

### 190. 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 – Y13	776	40	220	116

### 191. Teachers and classes

#### 191. Qualified teachers (Y7 – Y13)

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent):	53.86
Number of pupils per qualified teacher:	14.41

#### 191. Education support staff (Y7 – Y13)

Total number of education support staff:	13
Total aggregate hours worked each week:	276.0

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes: 85.6

Average teaching group size:	KS3	24
	KS4	21

### 191.

### 192. Financial data

Financial year:	1998/1999
	£
Total Income	1934436
Total Expenditure	1929350
Expenditure per pupil	2624.97
Balance brought forward from previous year	-5086
Balance carried forward to next year	0

### 192.

### 193. PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out: 776

Number of questionnaires returned: 336

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	28.3	61.0	8.0	2.4	0.3
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	45.5	45.2	5.4	3.3	0.6
The school handles complaints from parents well	22.0	55.8	14.6	6.4	1.2
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	23.8	58.9	10.4	5.7	1.2
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	30.7	55.8	5.4	6.0	2.1
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	32.5	55.8	8.4	2.7	0.6
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	35.8	51.3	9.9	3.0	0
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	22.2	60.1	8.4	8.1	1.2
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	31.6	51.0	11.6	5.7	0
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	25.1	55.7	12.9	5.4	0.9
My child(ren) like(s) school	35.7	49.4	8.6	3.9	2.4