

# INSPECTION REPORT

**ALCESTER HIGH SCHOOL**

**Technology College**

Alcester, Warwickshire

LEA area: Warwickshire

Unique reference number: 125750

Head teacher: A Guyver

Reporting inspector: R M Hyde  
2410

Dates of inspection: 28 February – 3 March 2000

Inspection number: 186047

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Modern
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Gerard Road Alcester Warwickshire
Postcode:	B49 6QQ
Telephone number:	01789 762285
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	R Dover
Date of previous inspection:	25 September 1995

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
R M Hyde	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it?
			The school's results and achievements
			How well is the school led and managed?
			What should the school do to improve further?
M Speirs	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development
			How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
A E Allsop	Team inspector	Physical education	How well are pupils taught?
D Beaumont	Team inspector	Design and technology	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
T M James	Team inspector	History	How well does the school care for its pupils?
		Religious education	
M Griffiths	Team inspector	Equal opportunities	
		Mathematics	
V Fraser	Team inspector	English	
P E Bishop	Team inspector	Science	
S Bacon	Team inspector	Information technology	
P J Bishop	Team inspector	Geography	
L Foster	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
J Rowland	Team inspector	Art	
J Neely	Team inspector	Special educational needs	

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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Alcester High School is a non-selective secondary modern school with technology college status which caters for 650 boys and girls aged 11 to 16 years. Popular and growing, it draws its pupils from a relatively wide rural catchment area which, though quite affluent overall, contains some elements of deprivation. The attainment levels of pupils on entry are broadly in line with national averages, although the presence locally of selective grammar schools means that there are fewer high attaining pupils than might be expected and the proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs is above the national average. A below average six per cent of pupils is registered as eligible for free school meals, however, and fewer than one per cent are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school's population is comparatively stable with low levels of pupil movement in or out of the school.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

This is a good school. It is expanding, improving and very effective. The standards achieved by its pupils are in line with those for all maintained schools nationally and well above those for similar schools. The overall quality of teaching is good. Attendance, behaviour and relationships in the school also are all good. The school is well led, managed and governed. It knows its strengths and weaknesses, and is committed to and has the capacity for further improvement. Resources are managed and deployed effectively and efficiently, and the school gives good value for money. Very good use has been made of the opportunities associated with technology college status to extend and enhance the range and quality of educational provision.

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

- Strong and effective leadership from the head teacher and governing body provide the school with a clear sense of direction and shared commitment to further improvement
- Standards are generally high in comparison with those in similar schools. They are particularly good in design and technology, history, music, and science, and in the GCSE religious education course.
- The quality of teaching is good overall.
- Information and communication technology is firmly established across the curriculum and used effectively to raise standards.
- The school has a caring ethos and very good relationships.
- Pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning and demonstrate good behaviour, attendance and punctuality.
- Financial planning, management and control are good, resources are deployed effectively and efficiently, and the school gives good value for money.

#### **What could be improved**

- The use made by teachers of formative assessments of pupils' work to make teaching and learning more effective.
- The limited range and type of teaching strategies employed by some teachers.
- The ways in which information gained from the classroom observation of teachers is used to improve teaching in some departments.
- Arrangements for tracking pupils' attainment, progress and personal development and their use by tutors in providing individual support and guidance.
- The school's accommodation for art, music, drama and physical education (PE).

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

## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made significant progress and successfully established itself as a technology college since it was last inspected. The high standards then prevailing for a school of its kind initially dropped a little but have been regained and built upon since 1997, and the quality of teaching has improved markedly. Effective responses have been made to two of the three key issues identified for it: to review curricular arrangements and ensure appropriate provision for technology, RE and personal and social education, and to re-define and develop the roles of senior staff and subject line managers. The third key issue about implementing a daily act of collective worship has not been achieved and elements of the school's accommodation remain inadequate. The nature of the school's response to these matters, along with its current leadership and ambitions, give confidence in its desire and capacity to improve further.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 14 and 16 year olds based on end of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum test results and the average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
Key Stage 3 SAT results	C	C	C	A
GCSE examinations	C	C	C	A

Key	
very high	A*
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E
very low	E*

The school's results in National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science and in GCSE examinations are in line with national standards and are high in comparison with those achieved by similar schools. Standards are improving generally in line with national trends and the school has set suitably aspirational performance targets for the future. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, pupils performed at standards significantly above national average levels in design and technology, history, music, RE and science, but below those levels in such subjects as business, English literature, geography, IT and French. Pupils generally make good progress and achieve at appropriate levels. The standard of work seen during the inspection was satisfactory or better in all subjects.



## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good: pupils' attitudes towards the school and the educational opportunities provided are generally very positive and productive
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good: behaviour is good both in lessons and more generally around the school. The atmosphere is friendly, comfortable and secure.
Personal development and relationships	Good: relationships within the school are very good. Pupils willingly take responsibility and develop well as learners and as people
Attendance	Good: attendance is better than the national average, is encouraged and monitored closely, and has improved.

This is an area of strength for the school. Pupils' attitudes, values, behaviour, relationships, attendance and punctuality all make a positive contribution to their academic attainment and progress, as well as to their personal development.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching in both key stages is good overall. It is satisfactory in English and mathematics and good in science. Teachers' subject knowledge and management of pupils are particular strengths. Planning is satisfactory overall but is least effective in mathematics, science and PE, particularly in Key Stage 3. The use made of ongoing assessment has some weaknesses. Literacy and numeracy are taught satisfactorily in ways which meet the needs of all pupils. In Key Stage 3, teaching was satisfactory or better in every lesson seen by inspectors, with one-fifth very good or better. In Key Stage 4, it was satisfactory or better in 96% of lessons, with one-quarter very good or better. All aspects of pupils' learning are good with the exception of them knowing how well they are doing, which is satisfactory overall but has some weakness.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good: the curriculum meets statutory requirements, is appropriate and relevant, and provides a good range and quality of learning opportunities for all pupils in both key stages.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good: pupils with special educational needs are effectively integrated into the school and have full and equal access to curricular provision. Well supported by teachers and good learning support assistants, they make sound progress and achieve appropriate standards.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good: since its last inspection, the school has produced a clear and helpful policy for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Provision for their moral, social and cultural development is good now and there are planned opportunities for spiritual development on which to build further. Overall, pupils' personal development is good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good: pastoral care continues to be a strength of the school. Both pupils and parents are clear that very effective support structures are in place for pupils.

- Parents generally are supportive of the school and are pleased with the standards achieved by their children. They find the school approachable and receive substantial amounts of information, including reports, from it. A significant number of parents would like more detailed information about their children's attainment and progress, and how they can improve.
- The curriculum meets the statutory requirements for teaching the National Curriculum and RE, and includes a full personal, social and health education course and a growing programme of work-related activities. Provision for and use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum is strong and the school is meeting successfully its aims as a technology college. It still does not provide a daily act of collective worship.
- The school caters well for the care and welfare of its pupils. There are particularly good systems in place for inducting new pupils into Year 7. It is less effective in monitoring and guiding individual pupils' overall academic progress.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good: the head teacher provides strong and positive leadership which has a clear focus on quality and improvement. She is closely supported by an accessible and hardworking team of managers whose work has become increasingly effective.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very well: the governing body is well informed, authoritative and influential and makes a considerable contribution to the leadership and effective management of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good: the management processes of review, monitoring and evaluation have developed significantly since the last inspection and the school is well aware of its strengths, weaknesses and priorities for development. The effectiveness of practice at departmental level is uneven.
The strategic use of resources	Very good: the school makes efficient and effective use of available resources to pursue its educational priorities in a planned manner and, in doing so, gives good value for money.

The school generally is well led and managed. There are, however, some inconsistencies in the manner and effectiveness with which its policies and initiatives are interpreted and applied at departmental level. Financial and other resources are managed and controlled well and the principles of best value are applied when consideration is given to purchases or provision. The school is appropriately staffed and has adequate resources to support pupils' learning. Provision for ICT is very good. Accommodation is well maintained and mostly suited to the needs of the curriculum, but it is too small and particular deficiencies have an inhibiting impact on standards in some subjects including art, music, drama and PE.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children mostly like the school.</li> <li>Children make good progress.</li> <li>The school expects children to work hard and achieve their best.</li> <li>Parents are comfortable about approaching the school with questions or problems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The consistency with which homework is set.</li> <li>The closeness with which the school works with parents and the information that they receive about how their children are performing and progressing.</li> <li>The range of activities provided outside of lessons</li> </ul>

The inspection team agrees with the matters that please parents. Homework is set with reasonable regularity and consistency in accordance with a school policy and is being kept under review. Parents receive a great deal of information from the school and have ready access to it. What they get does not always include clear and explicit subject-specific details about children's attainment and progress, however, or what they need to do in order to improve. The school does offer a full range of extra-curricular opportunities in which

many pupils participate, but others choose not to involve themselves or are constrained by transport problems.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and achievements**

1 Pupils' results in National Curriculum tests in 1999 at the end of Key Stage 3 were in line overall with the national average for all maintained schools and high in comparison with similar schools. Results in English have improved in recent years to broadly match the standards expected nationally. In science and mathematics pupils also achieved standards generally in line with national averages. Compared with other non-selective modern schools, the standards attained by pupils in a three core subjects were well above average, although, as is to be expected for a school of this nature, relatively few pupils achieved the higher levels. Overall, boys did slightly worse and girls did better than the average for their gender nationally, the most significant gaps between their performances being in English and mathematics.

2 Standards achieved in lessons by pupils in Key Stage 3 are generally slightly above those expected nationally and in no subject are they less than satisfactory. They are particularly strong in English, history, music and science, and in information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum. Pupils with identified special educational needs generally achieve appropriate standards in their work and make sound progress.

3 Pupils' literacy skills are generally good. Throughout the school, pupils' speaking and listening skills are good overall and most, including lower attaining pupils, display confidence in oral work. Higher attaining pupils are particularly articulate. Reading skills are also good and enable pupils effectively to engage with and benefit from the curriculum. All pupils read competently and higher attaining pupils read fluently and expressively from a range of texts, including challenging ones. Writing skills are satisfactory overall, although pupils need to be encouraged to write in more depth and detail. This is especially true of lower attaining pupils who often have work sheets that require them to write only short answers.

4 Pupils' number skills are generally good and used effectively to support their learning across the subjects of the curriculum, particularly in science, geography and technology. Although there is no whole school policy for numeracy development, pupils extend and reinforce their basic skills in measurement, calculation and the interpretation and use of data in their work in subjects other than mathematics. ICT is being used with increasing effect, especially with boys, to enhance pupils' reading, writing and number skills, and to raise standards generally across the curriculum. Pupils' ICT experiences and capabilities are considerably enhanced by the extensive opportunities presented for its use in many subjects.

5 Pupils achieve high standards in comparison with their peers in similar schools in public examinations at the age of 16. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more higher grade (A\*-C) GCSE passes in 1999 was close to and just above the national average for all maintained schools, as it has been consistently in recent years, and almost all pupils recorded at least one pass grade (A\*-G). Following the last inspection in 1995, results fell away a little but over the last two years they have returned to their previous levels and since 1997 have improved overall in line with national trends. The school is committed to

raising standards further and is making good progress towards achieving the appropriately aspirational and challenging performance targets that it has set itself for the year 2000.

6 In the 1999 GCSE examinations, particularly good results were achieved by pupils in design and technology (D&T), history music, religious education (RE) and science which were well above the relevant national benchmarks. In English language and mathematics pupils attained standards that were broadly in line overall with national averages. Subjects in which results were below national standards or less good than those obtained by the same pupils in other subjects included business education, English literature, geography, IT and French. In other subjects, including art and German, pupils achieved results close to national averages or more generally in line with their achievements in other subjects.

7 Girls generally performed better than boys, but the average points scores recorded by both girls and boys in the 1999 GCSE examinations were above the relevant national figures and the gap between them is less than that found nationally. Boys performed comparatively well in D&T, ICT and science, but less well in English literature, French, geography and mathematics. Girls were strong in English, D&T, history and science, but less successful in English literature, geography and mathematics.

8 The standards achieved by pupils during their lessons in Key Stage 4 in many ways confirm the picture presented by the analysis of examination results, and point to general improvement. Standards in D&T, history, music, science and in RE examination courses continue to be particularly high, and pupils display good levels of competence in their general use of ICT. All departments are striving to raise standards and in no subject are they less than satisfactory within lessons. Teachers have high ambitions for their pupils and generally teach them well. As a consequence, almost all pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress and achieve appropriate standards in their work as they move through the school.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development**

9 Pupils' attitudes to the school are very positive and productive and they are keen and proud to come to school. They are cooperative, attentive and interested, and concentrate in lessons, helped by the overall good quality of teaching. A number take part in extra-curricular activities but some pupils show little interest or are restricted to lunchtime activities by their need to catch a bus home immediately after school.

10 Behaviour is generally good in lessons and movement around the school is orderly with pupils following the expected codes of behaviour. Relationships are very good and pupils take responsibility within the school, show initiative when opportunities arise and develop well both as effective learners and as people. The prevailing atmosphere is friendly, positive, comfortable and secure.

11 Attendance procedures meet statutory requirements with registers completed at the start of morning and afternoon sessions. Attendance is closely monitored by the school and the education welfare officer follows up persistent absentees. The school has recently tightened its control on the authorisation of absence. The average attendance rate for the 1998/99 school year was over 93%, which is better than the national average for this type of school and an improvement on the 1995 inspection figure of 91.4%. There is a reward system for good attendance and the school has set itself an internal target of a minimum of 95% attendance. Unauthorised absence for the 1998/99 school year was, at 0.92%, in line with the national average. Pupil punctuality throughout the day is good and assisted by the double period system with breaks between lessons.

12 Pupils' good attitudes to the school, the positive ethos, increasing attendance levels and good punctuality all have a positive effect on pupils' attainment and progress.

### **HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?**

13 The overall quality of teaching in both Key Stages 3 and 4 is good. Teaching is always at least satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and in about three-fifths of lessons it is good or better. At Key Stage 4, teaching is satisfactory or better in almost all lessons and in three-fifths of them it is good. In one quarter it is very good.

14 The quality of teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection reflecting the emphasis placed upon it by the school to improve pupils' learning. Teaching and learning permeate the school's aims, policies and staff development activity. The senior management team monitors teaching and provides detailed feedback on individual class and year group performance. Governors are kept well informed of this work. The resulting amount of good and very good teaching impacts positively upon the quality of learning in both key stages. Pupils' learning was at least satisfactory in nearly all of the lessons seen and in Key Stage 4 it was good or better in three-fifths of them. Some heads of department are also now incorporating classroom observation into their management role, but, as yet, such monitoring of teaching is not being used effectively to improve practice in every department.

15 Teaching overall is very good in history and good in art, D&T, ICT, science and RE in both key stages. In music, it is good in Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4, and in geography it is good in Key Stage 4 and satisfactory in Key Stage 3. In English, mathematics, modern foreign languages and PE it is satisfactory in both key stages.

16 The teaching of pupils who have special educational needs is always at least satisfactory. Teaching of discrete groups of pupils with special educational needs is good, and pupils are well supported by learning support assistants who are skilled at meeting their needs through the generally effective use of individual education plans (IEPs).

17 Teachers have good subject knowledge, which they use well to promote pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. In most subjects teachers give expositions and helpful demonstrations of skills and techniques. In art and D&T this has a positive influence on creativity as well as on pupils' knowledge and understanding. In English, history and modern foreign languages clear use of learning objectives helps pupils to understand their work and what they need to learn.

18 Good use of questioning to challenge pupils' understanding was evident in a range of subjects, including PE, where in all year groups it promotes accurate performance. However, science and geography make less effective use of this strategy. Artefacts, source materials and good learning resources generate lively interest and activity by pupils in geography, history, RE and art.

19 The teaching of basic skills is satisfactory overall and subject teachers are now more aware of their responsibility for promoting them. Pupils use writing frames, dictionaries, drafting and communication skills effectively across the curriculum. A purposeful atmosphere for quiet reading has been created in English lessons in Key Stage 3. Speaking and listening skills are well developed and in D&T teachers provide learning situations in which pupils have to use and develop their literacy and numeracy skills. In modern foreign languages, good use of writing frames promotes confidence in literacy.

Overall, pupils' understanding of number is good. Outside of mathematics, it is reinforced and extended in a number of subjects, including D&T, geography and science.

20 Teachers' planning is detailed and thorough, and ensures that work is suitable for all pupils. The best schemes of work are comprehensive and allow for continuity and progression in pupils' learning. In some subjects plans include clear learning objectives which identify the knowledge, understanding and skills that pupils should acquire. This practice needs to spread to other departments, such as mathematics, where the focus is on tasks and activities rather than on objectives and outcomes relating to National Curriculum requirements. Most subjects produce and use quality learning materials, which effectively support teaching and learning. The range and variety of stimulating materials used in geography is a particular strength.

21 Pupils and teachers have high expectations of each other in all subjects of the curriculum. Teachers' expectations are clear and appropriate, and effectively provide challenge and support for pupils. Pupils respond well to challenge and the good pace of most lessons, and engage willingly with their teachers and with each other in the pursuit of high achievement. When given the opportunity to do so they show initiative and display commitment and enthusiasm for their work.

22 In several subjects teachers use a rich variety of activities designed to stimulate and motivate pupils. However, in some subjects teachers rely heavily on exposition, a restricted range of activities and strong teacher direction which limits the opportunities for pupils to learn by developing their own ideas and strategies. Across the school there is a good mixture of whole-class teaching, small group work and individual activity with most teachers using a sound balance of methods and organisational strategies in lessons and across the key stages. Good quality explanations and demonstrations, active learning, good use of technology and effective classroom support create lessons which effectively promote pupils' learning and progress. Investigations and problem solving enable pupils to work to their potential independently and the effective use of questioning raises standards of attainment and challenges understanding and knowledge in subjects like modern foreign languages, history and PE. Pupils of different abilities, including the most able, are sometimes prevented from achieving their potential by lessons that are too teacher directed or work that is not designed to meet their particular individual needs.

23 Teachers' relationships with pupils are warm and purposeful. They are complemented by effective classroom management, which is well considered and positive. Pupils are self-disciplined which, linked to effective organisation and support by teachers, creates a purposeful working atmosphere. Constructive classroom management strategies enable staff to deal effectively with behaviour problems. This aspect is a real strength across all subject areas.

24 Greater confidence by teachers in their use of ICT is increasing its impact on both teaching and learning. This is evident in English, mathematics and science as well as in a number of the foundation subjects. In a Year 8 history lesson the playing of the Marseillaise led into an ICT exercise which considered a text and how it reflected the French Revolution. Pupils interviewed commented favourably upon the access they have to computer technology, both in lessons and at lunchtime when they can make use of facilities in the library.

25 The school's other learning resources generally are at least adequate and appropriate, and are often good. Teachers make good use of them to stimulate pupils' interest and progress. Limitations in the accommodation available to such departments as

art, drama, music and PE inhibit what they can achieve, but teachers make good use of what they have to create effective environments for learning. Effective use of support staff is evident across the curriculum. Learning support assistants are skilled and work well with both teachers and pupils. They have copies of work schemes and classroom materials, and share with teachers the implications of IEPs and how to implement them.

26 Assessment is satisfactory in some respects but has significant weaknesses. The school assessment policy is detailed but does not relate effectively enough to objectives for teaching and learning. Most departments use some aspect of assessment effectively in the classroom but each tends to develop one method without reference to others. History makes good use of assessment portfolios, modern foreign languages hold regular unit tests, which provide summative information, and English keeps detailed records and uses moderation to ensure standardisation across year groups. This information is not used consistently and effectively to help pupils identify strengths and weaknesses, however, and in many departments is not informing curriculum practice to ensure that the work set meets the needs of pupils with different levels of attainment. There is a need for more management and coordination of formative, as opposed to summative, assessment practice in departments. Not enough use is made of peer and pupil self-assessment to aid learning, although science incorporates self-assessment into its end of unit tests.

27 Insufficient use is also made of subject specific assessment criteria which, linked to inconsistent marking and feedback across and within departments, results in too little informative advice being given to pupils about the quality of their work. More references to the levels being reached within the National Curriculum set within a framework of how to achieve them would be beneficial in a number of subject areas. This would improve the effectiveness of targetsetting which is often insufficiently subject specific and does not always provide appropriate time scales for monitoring the achievement of targets. The Year 10 pilot for target setting is trying to tackle this but, as yet, still focuses predominantly on presentation, generic skills, behaviour and quantity rather than quality. Some of these issues were raised in the last report and therefore need to be considered as a priority for development.

28 Homework generally is set and marked in accordance with the school's policy and, where used effectively in such subjects as art, modern foreign languages and history, reinforces and extends pupils' skill and understanding. In some subjects, such as mathematics and geography, it is not marked regularly and consistently across the department, however, and homework diaries display inconsistent use by pupils and evidence that some teachers do not always adhere to the homework policy. The school is keeping the situation under review.

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

29 The school is successfully meeting its curriculum aims as a technology college. The quality of the curriculum and the range of learning opportunities in both key stages are good. The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is broad, balanced and relevant. Requirements for teaching the National Curriculum and RE according to the local agreed syllabus are met. ICT is fully covered through the taught course in Years 7 and 8 and through extensive cross-curricular work in both of these years and in Year 9. Work in ICT in Year 9 currently is being effectively mapped, assessed and evaluated by the key stage co-ordinator. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is extended by drama units in Years 7 to 9, a silent reading programme, field work and industrial and cultural visits. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is similarly broad, balanced and relevant, with an increasing work-related content, which



includes, for example, strong links with the Education/Business Partnership. Requirements for teaching the National Curriculum and religious education are met. The curriculum is extended through the option scheme to include English literature, drama, business studies with French and German, and ICT key skills. There is now a full and timetabled programme of personal and social education, including extensive work in careers education and guidance. The course is of a high standard and this is a major improvement since the last inspection. All pupils in Year 10 undertake a work experience programme with good preparation and follow up activities. A small number of pupils are disapplied from modern foreign languages in order to undertake the local SWIFT work-related learning initiative. These pupils receive some French experiences through participation in the Youth Award Scheme course which is designed to encourage responsibility, initiative and an understanding of living in a community.

30 Timetable arrangements are made over a two-week cycle to aid flexibility and maximise option choices. Banding and setting arrangements have been extended in both key stages to enable pupils of different abilities to be targeted more effectively. Whilst these goals have been broadly successful, current comparative weaknesses in provision include: only limited curriculum time for PE in Year 9, infrequent or all afternoon lessons in mathematics, an uneven spread of lessons for one Year 10 modern languages option group and GCSE D&T groups timetabled last period on Friday on both weeks. In addition, the school still does not comply fully with requirements for a daily act of collective worship.

31 The school offers good curricular provision for pupils with special educational needs. A range of subjects offer Certificates of Achievement in Key Stage 4. There has been a positive move towards less withdrawal and therefore more integration of all pupils since the last inspection. In English and mathematics, this has largely been in the form of setting. It is more successful in English than in mathematics where disaffected boys in bottom sets sometimes have a negative effect on learning. Where withdrawal takes place, continuity and progression is preserved by covering similar schemes of work to mainstream classes. The SWIFT, Youth Award and ICT keyskills schemes, cater well for lower attaining pupils. The very high quality of support from the learning support teachers and assistants leads to many pupils achieving well in relation to their prior attainment. Pupils with special educational needs are integrated successfully into all aspects of the life of the school and equality of access and opportunity are good.

32 Provision for teaching literacy skills is effectively reinforced through relevant subjects of the curriculum. For example, key words are made explicit in many subjects and pupils are encouraged to use technical vocabulary. In some subjects good use is made of writing frames and in D&T considerable attention is given to oral and written evaluative skills. Silent reading is part of the English scheme of work. Pupils have good basic numeracy skills because of the extensive concentration of these activities within the mathematics curriculum. They are able to use these skills effectively in subjects such as geography, science and D&T. However, the school does not yet have a finally agreed literacy or a numeracy policy, and links between Key Stages 2 and 3 need to be developed further to ensure continuity of learning and build on current practice in primary schools. A literacy strategy group is currently undertaking a survey of existing practice in literacy with a view to producing a policy statement for consideration by the governing body. A similar development for numeracy is also proposed. The provision for and use of ICT across all subjects of the curriculum is a strength of the school.

33 A good range of extra-curricular activities is provided which makes an effective contribution to the school's ethos of partnership with its community. Many pupils are enthusiastic about the wide range of lunchtime activities which include easy access to

computers, sport and team games, use of technology, art and music facilities, and a reading club. Staff are prominent in supporting these activities. Staff from the learning support team provide good opportunities for study outside the school day and help pupils to complete homework. Some extra-curricular activities take place after school but the numbers participating are severely constrained by the need to catch buses home. A late bus provision might enable many more pupils to participate. A large number of pupils take part in concerts which include dance, drama and music. An extensive range of excursions, including fieldtrips, theatre visits and cultural visits are provided and increasing numbers of pupils successfully participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.

34 A comprehensive programme of personal and social education is available for all years and this is effectively extended into careers education in the upper school. This represents a considerable improvement since the last inspection. A small group of staff now teach the subject across the school resulting in a much higher standard of achievement. There is appropriate coverage of health, drugs and sex education with good support from outside agencies. Further development to include more aspects of citizenship is being constrained by the time available.

35 Careers education and guidance is a strength. There is a very productive partnership between the school and further education providers in the area. Visits by staff from the colleges enable pupils to be well informed about the range of post 16 vocational and academic courses offered. The collaboration between the careers co-ordinator and careers service adviser is strong and individual interviews are provided for all pupils. Pupils have very good access to a comprehensive careers library and CD-ROM facilities in the school resource centre.

36 Relationships with feeder primary schools are very productive. Transfer of information is effective and this is used well to place pupils in appropriate groupings. Visits of primary pupils to the school to use computers as part of the technology college initiative help smooth the transition process and promote continuity of experience. However, subject progression between Key Stages 2 and 3 needs to be improved particularly in the core subjects of mathematics and science.

37 At the last inspection, provision for the spiritual and multi-cultural development of pupils was judged to be a weakness. Since then a policy for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has been written and implemented. The policy was devised from an audit of practice and strengthened by the identification of opportunities to focus on these aspects of personal development across the curriculum. Provision is now good overall, with considerable improvement in the previously weak areas, which are now sound.

38 There are now clearly planned opportunities for spiritual development in history, RE, art and music. In assemblies there is planned time for reflection and some consideration of human values. Each classroom and some public areas have a 'thought for the week' prominently displayed, although this is not always considered during form tutor time. Provision in this area is now sound but needs to be strengthened further. Opportunities which become available in subjects across the curriculum are to be used and developed.

39 Provision for pupils' moral development is good. Expectations of good behaviour are understood by pupils and the sanctions policy is appropriate and used effectively by staff. Pupils show a good sense of right and wrong. They respect the environment of the school and there is minimal litter or graffiti. Teachers provide good role models and pupils have a strong sense of values and demonstrate good attitudes and manners. Moral issues figure prominently in a wide range of subjects across the curriculum. These often form the

basis of good discussion and debate, but opportunities are not always exploited adequately.

40 Many aspects of school life embody its aspiration to promote pupils' social development and the school is successful in achieving this aim both within the formal curriculum and in the daily life of the school. Lessons in many subjects promote collaborative working in pairs and groups, and the development of tolerant attitudes towards others. This figures strongly, for example, in the humanities, English, D&T, PE and ICT. It is not always as strong in science and mathematics, where more narrowly focused learning strategies do not exploit opportunities for learning through social interaction. There are good working relationships both inside and outside the classroom. Pupils also have opportunities to take and exercise responsibility through the school council, as prefects and through working in the community.

41 Provision for cultural development is good. It is unevenly spread across the curriculum but incorporates a range of subject and extra-curricular activities which include visits to places of worship, trips and occasional inputs by artists and performers. Wider cultural understanding is extended through a study of black writers in English, learning about world religions and consideration of prejudice and racism in English history and RE. Displays in school and books and reference materials in the library and resource centre, reflect aspects of a multi-cultural society. Pupils in the school, very few of whom come from ethnic minority backgrounds, have relatively few direct experiences of a range of cultural perspectives, or opportunities to explore their own attitudes to living in a multi-cultural society.

42 Governors and senior managers have responded positively to the issues raised in the last inspection report and should continue to build on the strong foundations they have established for promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

### **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?**

43 Pastoral care continues to be a strength of this school. Pupils and parents are clear that very effective and supportive structures are in place to ensure pupils' welfare, health and safety. Parents speak highly of the links they have with tutors and teachers when they need to discuss an issue or concern relating to their children.

44 A good balance is achieved between encouragement, rewards and sanctions, with an emphasis on positive and constructive strategies and clear indications that sanctions are not the preferred route and represent only a last resort in achieving good responses and behaviour from pupils. Pupils like the merits system which can lead to commendations.

45 Strategies to deal with unacceptable behaviour such as bullying are fully established but are rarely used because the school has a very positive atmosphere and behaviour of pupils is generally sound and mostly good. The systems for promoting attendance continue this very positive line because the various communications to parents are supportive but unambiguously stress the need for full attendance to secure personal improvement and achievement. This is a very strong message and attendance is good and improving. Child protection procedures are fully in place and all staff understand when and how to react.

46 Support for pupils when they transfer from Key Stage 2 to 3 is good. Prior to their entry, Year 6 pupils are invited to the school to take part in lessons. A bridging project focusing on ICT particularly has proved to be both enjoyable and helpful to pupils. Pupils'

attainment is assessed to identify their stages of development in relation to the requirements of the National Curriculum and their Key Stage 2 National Curriculum test scores are used when placing them in sets. The head of year visits the feeder primary schools to ensure that pupils' needs are known and met upon entry. In addition, parents have an interview with tutors to provide further information on their child. Liaison with primary schools is especially detailed and effective in relation to pupils with special educational needs.

47 The school's systems for assessing and guiding pupils' attainment and progress are sound in many respects and are being developed, but there are significant deficiencies in current practice. Monitoring of the attainment of pupils is heavily focused on Key Stage 4 public examination performance where National Curriculum test scores and other examination results provide the data for the diagnosis of subject progress and development. The assessment manager coordinates this activity well and members of the senior management team interview all heads of department to identify issues relating to pupil performance and departmental provision. This structured approach has raised standards. Ambitious exam performance targets are agreed with staff and governors who have a good overview of the process.

48 The focus now needs to move more to the development and use of formative assessment which informs teaching and maps and guides pupils' progress and learning, especially at Key Stage 3. The establishment of clear assessment criteria linked to learning objectives, as already practised by some departments, will provide more information for pupils about the strengths and weaknesses of their performance and what they need to do to improve. It will also create opportunities for more precise target setting and self-review by pupils and staff. Elements of weak assessment practice were identified in the last report. As a result, the assessment policy has been reviewed and some changes have been made, but there remains some inconsistency of practice and effectiveness across and within departments. Quality practice does exist within some subjects but it is fragmented and does not provide enough information to assess pupils' subject-specific skills in a coherent pattern across the school. Pupils are more aware of their general performance and personal development, than they are of their attainments in relation to specific subject skills at appropriate levels within of the National Curriculum.

49 Procedures for the identification of pupils with special educational needs are good, although the school assessment policy does not incorporate these procedures. The reviewing and monitoring of pupils' progress from Stage 3 to 5 of the Code of Practice is particularly good but Stage 2 monitoring lacks the same rigour, although pupils' progress is monitored regularly through link groups.

50 In every year pupils and parents receive an attainment report and two effort reports. The majority of the attainment reports meet statutory requirements and are positive and encouraging. Comments made by teachers are generally thoughtful but vary in their quality and subject-specific content. The identification of generic skills, behaviour and personal development are helpful and supportive but there needs to be an improved emphasis on subject detail relating to National Curriculum levels which will inform pupils' learning and target setting. There are particularly good examples of practice in English and D&T.

51 Pupils, supported by their teachers, complete a section in their reports where they identify what they have done well and what they need to improve upon. This will be more effective when all subject staff identify and record clearer subject statements about attainment as pupils obviously read their reports to identify issues for their section. Tutors' reports provide a detailed overview which shows they take a real interest in the way pupils

are developing in school and the activities they are involved in. There are annual parents' meetings for each year group and parents are encouraged to contact the school at other times if they have concerns about their child's development.

52 Effort reports provide information to parents each term about the attitudes and behaviour of their children. Parents generally find these reports useful, as they do the individual reports compiled by the school when pupils are causing concern or underachieving.

53 The school recognises that tutors should be more involved in the ongoing monitoring and guidance of pupils' progress and development, as well as in their care. The school has reinforced the pastoral system to ensure that there is a tutor responsible for each year group. To emphasise the commitment to change, a Year 10 pilot target-setting initiative has been introduced. This is improving the quality and usefulness of targets set for pupils and both pupils and staff are working hard to make it successful. Criteria for assessment and subsequent targets are clearer now but, building on current practice in English and science, a greater emphasis on attainment levels is needed in all subjects. The principle development target for pupil care should be to draw together more fully the school's systems for promoting pupil welfare, guidance and academic performance, and improve the effectiveness with which tutors monitor and support their academic progress and personal development. To facilitate this, more efficient use should be made generally of the time spent by tutors with their pupils in form periods.

#### **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?**

54 Parents are generally supportive of the school, satisfied with the standards achieved and confirm that their children like school and make good progress. Behaviour and teaching are seen as being good and parents say that the school expects pupils to work hard to achieve their best. Parents feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or problems, outside of the regular parent meetings if necessary, as the school operates an open door policy.

55 A significant number of parents, however, express a concern that they do not receive enough information on their child's attainment and academic progress to enable them to work closely with the school in supporting and encouraging their work. Parents receive substantial annual reports and effort reports on their children's progress. However, the annual school report does not have a consistent format between departments and often is not specific enough in providing clarity for parents on pupils' attainment and progress, or what they need to do to improve. There are some departments whose good example could be used as a model by others. Home-school diaries, which should be a regular method of communication, are not being used consistently by teachers or parents.

56 The school produces regular newsletters, which are of a good standard. A number of parents participate in the Friends of Alcester High School, organise functions, raise money for the school and generally support its work.

57 Parents have high expectations of the school and there is a need for it to review some aspects of its provision of information to them. The school was surprised at the high percentage of negative responses in the parents' questionnaire and by some of the comments made at the parents' meeting. The parent governors are keen to follow up all parental concerns and could assist by acting as a focus to examine and resolve the information gap that is perceived to exist by a number of parents.

## HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

58 Alcester High School has a very clear, shared sense of purpose and direction. This embraces a strong commitment to raising standards, improving the quality of teaching and promoting a scientific, technological and vocational educational culture, which, along with the establishment of closer links with the local community, lies at the heart of its mission as a technology college. Particularly good use has been made of the opportunities and resources that have become available to the school as a result of being awarded technology college status. This has included extending and enhancing its provision and facilities while also pursuing its wider educational aims and values, including those associated with establishing a safe, caring, equitable and aspirational environment for learning.

59 The school generally is well led and managed at all levels. The head teacher has high standards and expectations, and provides strong and positive strategic leadership which has a clear focus on quality and improvement. She is closely supported by an accessible, co-operative and hardworking team of senior managers who are linked to designated departments and whose roles are in the process of being re-defined so that they can more effectively monitor and promote the development of the curriculum, teaching and learning. The various departments of the school and its pastoral system are also mostly managed well, although there are some inconsistencies in the manner and effectiveness with which particular policies and initiatives are interpreted and applied at departmental level. An informed, authoritative and influential governing body fulfils its responsibilities thoroughly, works closely with the school and makes a valued and significant contribution to its leadership and efficient management. The school has improved in recent years and has the capacity for continued improvement.

60 The management processes of review, monitoring and evaluation, including performance analysis and the direct observation of teaching, have developed significantly since the last inspection. The school now has a secure and realistic view of its strengths, weaknesses and needs which it uses to determine its priorities for development and the deployment of resources. The school's development plan, which usefully includes sections for the whole school, governing body, premises, pastoral system and individual subject departments, sets a clear framework and appropriate agenda for action and improvement. The quality of development planning is not consistent, however, and some departmental plans are insufficiently clear about costings, success criteria, monitoring and evaluation, or fail to focus in an explicit manner on the core issues of teaching, learning and raising standards. Some departments also fail to make adequate use of the information they gather through review and monitoring activities, including classroom observation, to plan for and achieve improved practice.

61 The school has good systems in place for financial management and control, and makes efficient and effective strategic use of available resources to pursue its educational goals. It is very cost-conscious, has engaged in considerable self-help, uses special grants for their intended purposes and applies the principles of best value when determining its purchases and provision. Resolute financial management has turned a significant budget deficit into a secure surplus and funds that became available to the school through its involvement in the technology college initiative have been spent wisely to enhance its educational and technological capacity. When balanced account is taken of its context and pupil intake, comparatively low unit costs and overall standards, achievements and effectiveness, the school can be judged to be giving good value for money.

62 Appropriately staffed for its curricular and organisational needs the school has in

place effective systems for the induction, appraisal and development of its teachers. The management, quality and availability of professional development opportunities have all improved considerably in recent times and the school's progress is now soundly supported by in-service provision which is linked appropriately to staff performance targets and to the priorities included in the school and technology college development plans. The school benefits from the services of competent and hard-working support staff.

63 The site and buildings are mostly well maintained and suited to the curricular needs of the school and some of its specialist facilities, for example for science, technology and computing, are of good quality. There is no evidence of graffiti or vandalism and the grounds are generally free from litter. The overall range and scale of its accommodation is limited for a growing school of its age-range and size, however, and particular deficiencies in the areas allocated to art, drama, music and PE have an inhibiting effect on the quality and standards of the work they can achieve. There are also more general issues relating to the school's toilets, eight temporary classrooms and small learning resource centre and dining areas. Circulation areas are congested but present few real problems because of their good management by staff and the sensible and generally considerate behaviour of pupils.

64 Expenditure on learning resources was limited at the time of the last inspection and there have been further periods of austerity since. More recently, however, aided by its improved financial circumstances and by grants linked to the technology college and National Grid for Learning initiatives, the school has been able to improve its resources for learning to the point where they are now generally adequate. The ratio of pupils to computers has moved from 10:1 to a better than average 4:1 and the school's provision for ICT is now good. The library has been developed into a high quality multi-media resource centre which, although comparatively small, is well managed and used intensively by teachers and pupils throughout the day. The book stock generally is of a good range and quality but requires more foreign language texts.

### **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

65 The governing body should include the following key issues in its post-inspection action plan. They are listed in order of importance.

66 In order to build on the progress made since the last inspection and continue to raise standards in the school, the head teacher, staff and governors should:

#### **Improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching even further by:**

- making more use of ongoing, formative assessment to inform curricular planning, help pupils to understand what they need to do to improve and support self-assessment and subject-specific target-setting in all subjects (paragraphs 26, 27, 48, 74, 86, 99, 102, 108, 114, 120, 133, 144 and 155);
- continuing efforts to extend the range and effectiveness of the teaching strategies used by some teachers (paragraphs 22, 40, 86, 87, 95, 96, 97, 111, 114, 126, 133 and 148);
- making fuller use of the information gained from the classroom observation of teachers to improve teaching in all departments (paragraphs 14, 60, 99 and 135).

#### **Improve the effectiveness with which tutors monitor and guide pupils' academic**

**progress and personal development by:**

- developing further current arrangements for tracking the attainment, progress and personal development of individual pupils and improving the personal support and guidance provided by tutors (paragraph 53).

**Improve and expand, as and when is possible, those areas of the school's accommodation that inhibit the standards that can be achieved, most particularly in art, music, drama and PE** (paragraphs 25, 63, 76, 101, 141 and 151).

The following issues are of lesser importance but will also require action:

- the production of a whole-school numeracy policy (paragraphs 4 and 32);
- the establishment of an explicit strategy for higher attaining pupils (paragraphs 22, 114, 123, 133 and 147);
- the value and efficiency of the time currently spent by pupils with their tutors (paragraphs 38 and 53);
- the consistency and effectiveness with which some teachers and departments interpret and apply school policies and initiatives (paragraphs 14, 28, 48, 55, 59, 60, 89, 104 and 110);
- the improvement of curriculum continuity between Key Stages 2 and 3 (paragraphs 32, 36 and 94).



## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	145
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	42

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1.5	21	38	38	1.5	-	-

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

### Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	651
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	39

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	17
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	151

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	12
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	23

### Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	6.2
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.6
National comparative data	1.1

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	57	71	128

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	28	41	37
	Girls	56	54	41
	Total	84	95	78
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	66 (70)	74 (59)	61 (63)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	30 (36)	43 (37)	18 (31)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	30	38	43
	Girls	63	50	54
	Total	93	88	97
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	73 (57)	69 (63)	76 (70)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	37 (17)	33 (26)	30 (34)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	61	58	119

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	24	56	60
	Girls	33	57	57
	Total	57	113	117
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	49 (49.3)	95 (92)	98 (100)
	National	46.3 (44.6)	90.7 (89.8)	95.7 (95.2)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	39 (37.7)
	National	37.8 (36.8)

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

### ***Ethnic background of pupils***

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	
White	651
Any other minority ethnic group	

### ***Exclusions in the last school year***

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	22	5
Other minority ethnic groups		

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

### ***Teachers and classes***

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	37.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.5

11

#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked per week	261

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.8
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	20.6
Key Stage 4	21.0

### ***Financial information***

Financial year	1998-99
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	£
Total income	1327149
Total expenditure	1276996
Expenditure per pupil	2031
Balance brought forward from previous year	7620
Balance carried forward to next year	57773

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	651
Number of questionnaires returned	223

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	31	58	7	3	1
My child is making good progress in school.	31	60	6	1	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	21	60	10	0	9
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	19	55	17	7	2
The teaching is good.	25	62	6	1	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	20	54	20	5	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	43	47	6	3	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	42	53	3	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	15	48	27	4	6
The school is well led and managed.	29	51	7	1	12
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	26	59	9	0	6
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	14	38	22	6	20

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

### **ENGLISH**

67 In English and drama pupils' levels of attainment are satisfactory overall and good in Key Stage 3. Pupils' levels of attainment at Key Stages 3 and 4, as reflected in national test and examination results, are well above national averages when compared with similar schools. They are broadly in line with national averages when compared with all schools nationally. Over the last four years results at the end of Key Stage 3 for English and at Key Stage 4 for English and literature have generally shown a steady improvement. Although the results have varied for drama over this period of time they have generally been in line with national averages. Girls' performance in literature in GCSE examinations is better than boys and this difference is greater than that found nationally

68 Pupils' speaking and listening skills are on the whole good. Most pupils, even lower attaining pupils, display confidence in their oracy skills. Collaborative talk opportunities enable all pupils of all abilities to engage in constructing arguments and analysing concepts.

69 Reading skills are generally good. This is particularly the case in Key Stage 3. All pupils are able to engage with the curriculum and gain meaning from their reading. Writing skills are overall satisfactory. Drafting is encouraged and this leads to better quality and greater accuracy of work. However, it does not necessarily lead to greater depth and detail in terms of argument or plot. This is especially true of the lowest attaining pupils whose written responses are often short and undeveloped. The use of ICT has enhanced pupils' reading and writing skills and raised standards for boys at Key Stage 3 as they apply greater effort to their English work and take more pride in it.

70 Pupils display positive attitudes to their learning and their behaviour and responses in lessons are good. Punctuality is excellent. Many pupils are enthusiastic about their studies and enjoy the learning resources their teachers provide. Many are able to sustain concentration on their work for long periods. They are polite, courteous and respectful in their interactions with their teachers and with each other. They are keen to assist visitors.

71 Teaching in both key stages is satisfactory overall with many good features. Teachers' subject knowledge is secure and they are confident and enthusiastic with respect to literature and language learning. Management of pupils is generally effective and the relationships between staff and pupils are on the whole warm, secure and respectful.

72 Teachers' long-term planning is thorough. Schemes of work are comprehensive, follow the requirements of the National Curriculum and examination board syllabuses and promote continuity and progression in pupils' learning. However, teachers' knowledge of the links between ICT and the English curriculum is not yet sufficiently developed to ensure that the best use of ICT skills matches best practice within English.

73 Learning is satisfactory overall and good in Key Stage 3. Teachers often make lesson objectives clear to pupils and this aids their learning. Pupils apply effort to their studies and this is often seen in a good work output, especially when their time and tasks are well defined.

74 Pupils' progress is satisfactorily monitored and supported. Class teachers keep consistent and thorough records of pupils' progress and attendance, and effective

moderation procedures are in place for Key Stages 3 and 4 to ensure standardisation across year groups. Provision for pupils' personal development, especially their moral and social development, is good. However, feedback to pupils about the quality of their work is generally not specific enough and assessment is not used to inform curriculum planning at departmental level. Procedures for reporting to parents are generally unsatisfactory because reports lack specific guidance on how parents can assist and guide their children's progress.

75 The department is well managed and led. All staff are well qualified with a good range of experience between them. Many staff continue to pursue their professional development in ways that directly benefit their pupils and induction arrangements for those new to the department are very effective. Administrative procedures are clear, thorough and result in efficient delivery of the curriculum by all class teachers.

76 Learning resources are satisfactory. However, a lack of purpose-built drama facilities impacts significantly upon provision for drama. Set design and stage management issues remain abstract concepts for pupils to learn. The curriculum, especially the literature GCSE course, would be made more suitable for boys' interests by including more contemporary fiction and media texts.

77 The department has made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. Changes to the curriculum have included improved ICT and drama provision at Key Stage 3 and better quality media units in Key Stage 4. Strategies to promote pupils' independent reading choices have been very successful and now need to be extended to Key Stage 4. These changes have led to improved results in national tests and examinations. Study skills need to be taught at Key Stage 4 to improve all pupils' chances of success in examinations.

78 The English department is currently unsettled because of staffing changes. This temporary situation has resulted in a some lowering of the quality of teaching which has not yet impacted upon standards and the quality of learning. A more permanent level of staffing is advised to ensure that standards are maintained and levels of improvement are secured and built upon.

79 Pupils' literacy skills across the curriculum are generally good. Speaking and listening skills are good overall. Most pupils are confident in their use of oral language and this is true even for lower attaining pupils. They are able to respond to each other's suggestions and this shows that they are actively listening in class discussions. There are good examples in English, D&T and PE where pupils are required to collaborate together to talk through their set work. In other subjects pupils need more opportunity to talk constructively with their peers about their learning tasks.

80 Pupils' reading skills are also generally good. Higher attaining pupils read fluently and expressively a range of texts, including challenging ones. All pupils are able to read competently the reading materials provided by their teachers.

81 Pupils' writing skills are on the whole satisfactory. Many subject areas encourage the use of note-making, including D&T, English, history and business studies. This helps pupils to consolidate their learning of the essential features of their lessons. Drafting is encouraged in English and geography. This leads to better quality presentation of work and greater accuracy. The use of ICT has also benefited these aspects of writing. However, pupils need to be encouraged to write in more depth and detail, especially lower attaining pupils who often have work sheets that require them to write in short answers.

## MATHEMATICS

82 Overall attainment in mathematics is broadly in line with national expectations. Attainment in mathematics at Key Stage 3 is in line with that found nationally. In 1999 the National Curriculum tests results were in line with the national average and well above the results for similar secondary schools. Attainment in the GCSE examinations in 1999 was just below the national average for the higher A\*-C grades and has been consistently so in recent years. The number of pupils attaining grades A\*-C was 41.4% and just below the national average of 45.6%. The number of pupils attaining A\*-G grades, at 87%, was well below the national average of 96% and did not reflect the school's results in the previous three years, which were in line with the national average. The 1999 results were due to a significant minority of boys (17%) not completing the end of course examination. The number of pupils gaining the highest grades (A\*-B) is less than the national figure and does not reflect the unusually high number of pupils who scored at level 7+ in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1997. At both Key Stage 3 and at GCSE, girls perform consistently better than boys in mathematics. At GCSE in 1999, both girls and boys performed less well in mathematics than they did in the other core subjects.

83 Pupils' overall number skills are good. This level of skill enhances their learning of other subjects where number is used, for example, in science and D&T. Pupils are able to calculate accurately in the four rules of number using a calculator appropriately. Generally, they can measure accurately and are able to interpret and use data with increasing confidence, particularly in science.

84 In lessons in both key stages pupils achieve sound standards in mathematics. In Key Stage 3 pupils use number confidently, have a good knowledge and understanding of shape and space and are confident in using ICT for data handling and spreadsheets. They are, however, less confident in using and applying mathematics using different strategies to solve problems, including trial and error, and communicating what they have done and why. Higher attaining pupils in Years 7 and 8 show ability in understanding linear equations and the concept of inequality in algebra. In Key Stage 4 there is good use of the calculator in dealing with number and trigonometry problems and pupils' skills in ICT are increasingly supporting improved attainment in number and graphical work. Higher attaining pupils are competent in problems related to standard deviation and use of the sine rule. Pupils' ability to consider different lines of mathematical argument, to find ways of overcoming difficulties that arise and to develop and use their own strategies is limited.

85 Pupils with special educational needs make sound progress and generally attain a GCSE grade at the end of their course. Individual education plans are generally used effectively by teachers to identify and meet particular pupils' needs but are largely of a general nature and rarely focus specifically on what pupils need to do to improve their mathematics.

86 Within the department teaching is variable but is satisfactory overall in both key stages. At Key Stage 3 it varies from very good to satisfactory whilst at Key Stage 4 it varies from good to unsatisfactory. Teachers have particular strengths in subject knowledge, in ensuring that high expectations prevail, in the effective use of ICT and in handling class issues with sensitivity and good humour. Teaching in mathematics is at its best where, in addition to the above, teachers make clear the objectives for the lesson, engage the pupils in learning quickly and use a good set of strategies for developing and checking out the knowledge, skills and understanding being gained. However, too often planning does not include sharing clear learning targets with pupils or giving them the

opportunity to offer and discuss tentative answers and to learn through questioning which brings challenge and pace to the lesson and deepens pupils' mathematical understanding. Many lessons are taught in a directed and controlled style and at Key Stage 4 are focused upon the very narrow expectations of examination papers. The use of day-to-day marking and assessment to move pupils on in their learning is inconsistently applied and pupils are often unsure as to what they have to do to improve. The medium to long-term use of assessment would be more effective if clear learning targets were identified for each unit of work in the department's scheme of work.

87 Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good overall and often very good. Where teaching is satisfactory or better, then pupils' learning generally reflects this as they almost always cooperate, stay on task, listen and relate well to one another and to their teachers. A significant minority, particularly at Key Stage 4 and generally boys, find the often narrow range of teaching methodologies boring and respond badly in ways which affect the learning atmosphere for all in the class. Girls are more willing to accept the teaching and learning diet available to them and do their best to respond with improved attainment. Homework is set regularly but is inconsistent in its usefulness and assessment.

88 The mathematics curriculum has breadth and balance, though more emphasis needs to be given to using and applying mathematics. Pupils are increasingly involved and motivated by the use of ICT in their learning. The present distribution of mathematics lessons is not helpful sometimes to the development of progression and continuity in the pupils' subject skills and understanding. Pupils are actively encouraged to take part in the UK Mathematical Challenges. Some staff willingly give of their time to offer GCSE classes after school and at lunch time.

89 Leadership of the department is good. The management is more variable, being very good in relation to the development of systems and administration, but less good at developing an effective, consistent teaching and learning strategy across the department. Development planning is at present unsatisfactory as it does not clearly identify the desired effects of its priorities on raising pupils' attainments.

90 Since the last inspection, results at the end of Key Stage 3 have improved whilst GCSE results in the same time have fluctuated, generally at levels below the national average, when the national trend has been upwards. ICT developments are impacting positively upon standards.

91 There are inconsistencies in teaching which need to be tackled. The department needs to work at the identification and setting of clear learning objectives and targets, the development of a wider range of teaching and learning strategies which will enthuse pupils and extend all in their work, and the use of more appropriate assessment processes so that pupils know where they are in their learning and what it is they have to do to improve. These initiatives need to be developed by effective departmental planning and monitored and evaluated regularly to ensure that they impact on pupils' attainment.

## **SCIENCE**

92 Attainment in science is in line with national expectations at the end of Key Stage 3 and is above national averages at the end of Key Stage 4. Pupils entering the school at the age of eleven are achieving results in national tests which are very similar to those expected nationally. In 1999, the results of the standard national tests for pupils at the age of 14 closely matched those achieved by pupils nationally reflecting satisfactory progress in science in the first three years in school. Both on entry to the school and at the end of Key



Stage 3 there are, however, fewer pupils reaching the higher levels of the National Curriculum. Overall, the results are well above those expected from comparable schools in areas where there is selection of pupils at the age of 11. At the last inspection, results at the end of Key Stage 3 were the same as those for 1999 although the school had achieved results above national averages in 1997 and 1998.

93 At the end of Key Stage 4, it is expected that all pupils are entered for the double award GCSE science course. In 1999 their performance was above national figures, with 60% gaining an A\*-C grade and 100% passing at the A\*-G grade. The results in 1999 were below those in 1998. In the period between the last inspection and 1998 there had been a steady improvement with the school's results being consistently above national figures. Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 4 with a significant group achieving the highest grades and those with special educational needs gaining at least a graded pass. In 1999 the performance of boys was better than that for the girls. This does not reflect results nationally nor the relative performance of girls to boys in other subjects in school.

94 In Year 7 pupils are introduced to basic laboratory procedures and they learn to use equipment safely, to record their work in different forms and to develop a range of scientific and study skills. They are particularly enthusiastic about a task which requires them to use ICT and to research and present work on a famous scientist from the past. Other units build on biology, chemistry and physics topics already started in Key Stage 2. For example, most pupils are able to recall earlier work on the solar system and then go on further to investigate planets using CD-ROMs and other library resources before completing the unit with a power point presentation to their peers. Closer collaboration with the contributory primary schools would, however, ensure that work is not repeated unnecessarily and that planning for continuity and progression in science, is more informed and secure. In this way all pupils will be challenged to achieve the highest levels of attainment possible.

95 By the end of Year 9 most pupils use chemical symbols and equations with confidence and they can manipulate electrical apparatus to complete experiments, take measurements using data-logging equipment and use computer programs to record data and present results as graphs and charts. ICT is sensibly integrated into schemes of work and it is helping pupils to make progress in science by providing motivation and by supporting numeracy and literacy skills. Their use of scientific vocabulary and retention of facts from one unit to another is very good. However, in Key Stage 3 pupils have insufficient experience of proper investigative work which limits their ability to make predictions, to carry out their own plans and to use their scientific knowledge to interpret what they have done. These skills are developed more fully in Key Stage 4 and the requirements for GCSE coursework in scientific enquiry are met completely. An imaginative and effective fieldwork day in local woodland is used to bridge the gap between Years 9 and 10 after pupils have taken the national tests. Pupils investigate an ecological problem, make observations and take readings in the field, analyse findings, evaluate their methods and word process a final report. Regular and rigorous testing along with frequent practice at examination questions prepares pupils well for GCSE examinations, helping them to make good progress and achieve well in all aspects of the course.

96 Pupils who have special educational needs make satisfactory progress throughout the school. The use of ICT is playing an increasingly significant role in allowing them to present their work more neatly and correctly, and to record and handle scientific data more easily. The individual education plans are practicable and are well applied by the classroom support assistants who know pupils well and know how to improve the quality of their work. Further developments are needed to ensure that teachers work more closely with the

support assistants to use worksheets more effectively and to develop a wider range of teaching strategies matched to the learning needs of these pupils.

97 Pupils are punctual to lessons and come with a positive attitude. These factors affect the standards of work achieved. In class pupils are expected to be attentive, to settle to tasks quickly and to concentrate on their work. Inappropriate behaviour is checked and misdemeanours are usually dealt with firmly and sensitively. Pupils develop a mature and respectful relationship with staff and this is apparent in the open and relaxed talk which often occurs at the end of lessons. They are very good listeners responding well to what teachers say. They are able to carry out practical work in groups by agreeing different roles for each other and collaborating to achieve a common goal. Although pupils do speak clearly and confidently in informal settings they are not allowed sufficient opportunity in class to share and debate ideas in paired and group work nor are they encouraged to contribute to extended and more formal discussion with the whole class. Such experiences would allow pupils to develop further their understanding of more difficult scientific ideas.

98 Overall, the quality of teaching is good in both Key Stages 3 and 4. Teachers are knowledgeable, enthusiastic and confident about their subject and they plan their lessons to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum and the GCSE syllabus. Lessons are well organised using a range of resources and laboratories are efficiently prepared for work by the competent technicians. Teachers are skilled in giving instructions, carrying out demonstrations and in explaining facts and more complicated topics. They question pupils well to check that earlier work has been remembered and understood but they are less good at using questions to challenge pupils' ideas and to develop their thinking skills. In the best lessons, the learning outcomes and expectations are made clear to pupils and they are given freedom, within a clear framework, to acquire knowledge and understanding by working things out for themselves.

99 An appropriate range of homework tasks is set to complement class work but note books are not checked frequently enough and this allows some pupils to be careless about the presentation of their written work. Teachers do not give full and helpful feedback on the standards of work achieved nor do they set specific targets on how pupils can do better in the future. Apart from regular testing, teachers are not assessing other aspects of work in science nor are they using the criteria of the National Curriculum to build up a complete profile of the achievements of each pupil. The rotation of teaching groups, when a specialist teacher teaches pupils particular science topics has some merit. However, this organisation makes it more difficult for teachers to make links between topics and to help individual pupils make progress by building up their skills and developing their knowledge across the units of work. There are examples of excellent teaching in the department. The present arrangement to monitor and evaluate teaching needs to be developed so that good practice can be shared and all teachers can have a chance to extend their repertoire of teaching methods.

100 The leadership of the department is sound with well-documented systems in place to ensure that routine administration runs smoothly and that financial management is efficient and effective. The issues of classroom organisation raised in the last inspection have been dealt with satisfactorily. There remains a need to monitor and upgrade the requirements for health and safety in laboratory practice. The quality and provision of resources, particularly the access to computers and associated software, are good and play a significant part in the high standards reached. The teaching and technical staff work well together as an experienced team, striving to keep up to date and dedicated to support the achievement of all pupils.

## ART

101 Standards in art in Key Stage 3 and in Key Stage 4 are in line with national expectations. Pupils in both key stages develop strong imaginative images in their compositional work and have good control over the visual elements. They use a range of media, including ICT, with increasing skill and confidence and are able to develop their ideas effectively in art from one medium to another. Pupils' use of sketchbooks to gather information and record and develop their ideas is good in both key stages and in Key Stage 4 is sometimes exceptional. As they move through the school pupils increasingly use the work of artists with good effect to support the development of their own work. Drawing from first hand observations is least well developed for many pupils across both key stages. In Key Stage 4 pupils do not have opportunities to develop skills using more advanced media or to visit galleries in order to extend their knowledge and understanding about art and artists. The limited size of the art rooms means that pupils cannot experience working on larger scale drawings, paintings and 3D work, and this inhibits their attainment.

102 The quality of teaching in art is good overall and occasionally it is very good. Teachers have a secure knowledge of the subject. This means they are able to effectively challenge pupils to develop high standards in all aspects of their work. Clear demonstrations and explanations ensure that pupils understand what they have to do and as a result they make good progress in developing practical skills in art. Teachers intervene sensitively with individual pupils in order to assess their progress and guide them on ways to improve their drawings, paintings and three-dimensional work. However, the criteria against which their work is assessed is not clearly explained to pupils, especially in Key Stage 3. This means they are less secure about how to evaluate their work effectively in order to make improvements. Positive relationships within art lessons are based on high expectations and the effective use of praise. This leads to good behaviour with pupils clearly enjoying the subject and displaying responsible attitudes to the art room environment. Interesting project designs means pupils are motivated and concentrate well during lessons. The good management of the workrooms and resources enables pupils to work independently and to quickly settle to their tasks. Very good use is made of homework and sketchbooks to reinforce and extend classroom activities. However, there are few comments in sketchbooks to help pupils to make improvements to their work.

103 The department has successfully maintained the strengths identified in the previous inspection report and has made very good progress against two of the three main key issues. These relate to improving pupils' knowledge and understanding about the work of artists and cultures and to the use of sketchbooks. However, pupils still do not have sufficient opportunities to develop their skills in printing or to work with textiles, and this remains an area for development.

104 The department's leadership and management is good and is appropriately focused on the achievement of high standards. There is a positive ethos of constant improvement through the monitoring of performance and this is a strength in the department. Good teamwork means that there is consistency in the way the department approaches all aspects of its work. The department's schemes of work are good but there is no overall plan to show how key skills in art are developed progressively across Key Stage 3. The department development plan does not currently include methods for evaluating the effectiveness of particular initiatives.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

105 GCSE results in the last two years have been well above the national average and significantly better than the school average. Girls attain at a higher level than boys but the

gap between boys and girls attainment is less than that found nationally. The department has been successful in raising attainment significantly between the end of Key Stage 3 in Year 9 and the GCSE examinations. The improvement is due in part to the universally good quality of teaching and learning, but also because the subject now forms part of the core curriculum for all pupils in accordance with the technology college development plan. Classroom observation and scrutiny of pupils work indicate continued success in producing high quality outcomes in information systems, textiles and graphics courses, but in resistant materials pupils do not achieve to the same standard. Projects in this area are completed on too large a scale, lack refinement and attention to detail, and use materials which are inappropriate for the work. The use of ICT in increasingly sophisticated ways has had a significant influence on higher levels of achievement, especially by boys.

106 In Key Stage 3, standards overall are in line with those expected nationally. The use of ICT is having a positive impact on raising attainment levels by Year 9, and this needs to be further extended in earlier years. The design process is well established and pupils achieve outcomes which reflect their ability because of the demands made upon them by staff. Practical skills are high in textiles and electronics. Most pupils with special educational needs make good progress, some reaching standards which meet the national expectation. Graphic skills need to be developed more systematically by a greater consistency of approach in teaching these skills in Years 7 and 8. Practical construction skills also need to be further improved by using a wider range of quality materials.

107 Pupils have very good attitudes to work. They are motivated by the subject and through good teaching and learning strategies, which include literacy focused work, personal development, values and self-esteem develop well.

108 The quality of teaching and learning is good. There is a consistency in the quality of teaching across the department including a significant proportion of very good lessons. Teachers have good subject knowledge and have been able to adapt schemes of work to include ICT in a very effective way. Literacy and numeracy skills are prominently addressed, for example in exploring imaginative names for courses when designing a menu on the theme of space and time. Pupils work well independently, in pairs and groups, taking responsibility for their own learning. The use of homework is a real strength. It is set regularly and appropriately and the outcome used effectively to aid design work in both key stages. Work is marked and good records are kept, but there is inconsistency in the use and styles of formative assessment between the teachers. However, this does include some good practice. Reports for pupils and parents are of a high standard.

109 Leadership of the department is good. There is a clear sense of direction set by the curriculum leader, and a good team spirit, well illustrated by the adoption of new skills in the use of ICT. High aspirations for pupils have been rewarded by very good examination results. The department actively looks outside itself to extend and make work more relevant to industrial practices and the world outside school. There are current weaknesses in improvement planning which needs to progress beyond that required to gain technology college status. Improvement since the last inspection is very good overall, but work still needs to be done on providing variation in the demands made on pupils of different attainment levels by the tasks set.

110 In order to improve standards further, the department should teach graphic skills more systematically in Key Stage 3 and improve practical tool skills when using resistant materials in both key stages. It should also seek to establish greater consistency between staff in the application of policies and approaches through more detailed monitoring of teaching and learning and make action planning for improvement more comprehensive.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

111 Attainment in geography at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with national standards. At the start of the key stage pupils gain a good grounding in a range of geographical skills, including sketch maps, cross sections, graphs and interpretation of data. The inspection report for 1995 stated that pupils' ability to carry out geographical enquiry was underdeveloped. This remains true, for there is little opportunity for pupils to gather their own information, work collaboratively and discuss ideas and concepts. The demands made upon pupils increase in Year 9, and opportunities are provided for pupils to consider issues involved in environmental protection and in world trade and development. The department has responded to criticisms in the 1995 inspection report that pupils had inadequate study of places in which to exercise their skills, by including modules on Italy, Japan and Kenya.

112 Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is in line with national standards and above that for similar schools. GCSE results were in line with or slightly above the national figure for each of the years 1995 to 1998. In 1999, less good results coincided with the absence through illness of the head of department. Work in Years 10 and 11 builds on the skills gained in Key Stage 3. Pupils are able to discuss concepts clearly, and use word processing skills to draft and redraft reports to a good standard. The personal research module of the GCSE course is well managed by staff and has produced work of a very good, and occasionally excellent standard in recent years. Boys and girls attain similar standards in the classroom and in examinations. Pupils with special educational needs make sound progress and often produce work comparable with that of other pupils.

113 Teaching is good overall. It was sound or better in all lessons observed, and good or very good in two thirds of them. Clear schemes of work, provide key questions, teaching strategies, skills and concepts to be studied, and promote consistency of approach and standards across the department. The effective management of good quality resources, which are developed cooperatively by departmental members, further ensures consistency. Teachers are well organised and use digital projectors, slides, video and overhead projectors in high quality presentations. The brisk pace of lessons and productive teacher-pupil relationships ensure effective learning in purposeful lessons in which a high proportion of pupils' time is spent on task. Departmental management is good and the department is efficient.

114 There are several issues for development, some of which were noted in the last inspection report. Greater degrees of oral work and geographical enquiry at the start of Key Stage 3 are needed. A wider range of teaching strategies needs to be employed in all years that would meet the needs of all pupils. Higher attaining pupils in particular need to be challenged further by setting hypotheses for them to test, by requiring them to gather information and by involving them in discussion. The department needs to clarify its marking procedures. Criteria for marking are not clearly expressed and are not shared with pupils. Pupils do not, therefore, know what to do in order to attain higher standards. More explicit marking criteria would allow the department to introduce targets for pupils expressed in terms of geographical skills and explanations.

115 The head of department has recently returned from lengthy illness and there is now stability in departmental staffing. The department currently has a good vision for the future and a solid base on which to build.

## **HISTORY**

116 Standards in history are high. This has been accomplished by extremely effective teaching and an imaginative and accessible curriculum which has successfully both motivated and challenged all pupils.

117 Attainment is good. At GCSE the results for higher grades [A\*-C] are regularly at least ten percentage points above the national average, and therefore substantially above the national average for this particular type of school, and all pupils usually secure an overall pass. This pattern of high attainment is repeated at the Key Stage 3 assessment, and is consistent throughout Key Stage 3. These high levels of attainment are characterised by good communication skills throughout, with extended and reflective writing being a particular strength. Good speaking and reading skills at Key Stage 3 are joined by good listening skills as pupils progress through Key Stage 4. In contrast with the previous inspection, investigative and deductive skill development is now a strength across both key stages, and historical concept development, such as cause and effect, is also strong. Most pupils are capable of using ICT to support their historical studies. Lower attaining and pupils with statements of special educational needs succeed well because they are enabled to access the curriculum through well-matched materials and because they are closely monitored and supported.

118 Pupils' attitudes to history are always positive and they have a deep regard for their teachers. They consistently refer to previous learning to inform their present work, show a determination to progress within lessons and respond well to the challenges offered. They are particularly enthusiastic about their ICT and other active learning experiences. A re-enactment of a 19th Century amputation at GCSE level and the use of a modern-day rendering of the 'Marseillaise' by French rugby players to spur learning about the French Revolution in Year 8 are illustrations of the active experience which arouses such responses.

119 Teaching is consistently very good. It is characterised by high expectations, high levels of challenge, careful planning and clear identification of learning objectives. The range of teaching and learning techniques, many of which involve energetic questioning, create the enthusiasm which leads to high standards of attainment. The way ICT is used to extend historical understanding is exceptional. All this occurs in a context where there is a clear learning programme which promotes progression in skill development in an accessible way from Year 7 to Year 11.

120 The degree to which the quality of teaching, the high levels of pupil attainment and pupil progress are inextricably linked is a result of imaginative and careful leadership. This provides historical flair alongside careful planning, so that the department has been able to respond readily to current thinking and innovations, including the implications of the school's mission as a technology college. An area for further improvement is in the provision of formative and subject-specific target setting in marking, reporting and the emerging area of pupil self-assessment so that pupils and parents can be better informed about how to improve pupils' attainment further.

## **INFORMATION and COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

121 Standards of attainment in ICT in the Key Stage 3 taught courses are sound overall and are considerably enhanced by extensive cross-curricular application in many subjects. Pupils experience the full range of the National Curriculum requirements either through a taught course in ICT in Years 7 and 8, or through specific modules provided within science

and D&T. Pupils are able to use generic software such as word processor, spreadsheet and database effectively and some make use of presentation software to communicate their ideas to the class. Extensive use is made of CD-ROMs and the Internet and pupils are familiar with accessing a wide range of resources to research, illustrate and support their work.

122 In Year 9 there is no taught course in ICT and pupils develop their ICT capability through using ICT across the curriculum. Mechanisms to ensure that the full expectations of the IT National Curriculum are in place but are not yet fully effective. Assessments of pupils' progress are made at the end of Years 7 and 8, but in 1999 were not made at the end of Year 9. Consequently, progress made in ICT by the end of the key stage was not reported to parents. Assessment procedures for recording pupils' attainment levels in cross-curricular work are now in place for Year 9 and these will be included in future reports to parents.

123 Standards of attainment overall in Key Stage 4 are good. The standards achieved by pupils studying the ICT key skills course and business studies and ICT GCSE course are sound. A majority of pupils make considerable use of ICT across the curriculum, however and outcomes generally are of a comparatively high standard. These experiences enable pupils to progress well in their use of ICT through the key stage, although there are insufficient opportunities for higher attaining pupils to achieve the highest National Curriculum levels in ICT.

124 Pupils' development of ICT skills, knowledge and understanding is very significantly enhanced and enriched by extensive and high quality use of the technology in all subjects across the curriculum. Many examples of effective use of ICT were observed during the inspection including composition work in music, research work in science, management of numerical data in science and mathematics, presentation of work in history and other subjects, and use of the Internet and CD-ROMs for research in many curriculum areas.

125 Teaching in ICT as a subject, and in other subjects, is good overall and sometimes very good. Effective use is made of relevant software, and teachers themselves use word processing and presentation software to support their teaching. In the computer rooms, teachers use software to enable them to demonstrate concepts on all the computers simultaneously thus ensuring that all pupils can see the demonstration. Pupils learn effectively and make good progress because teachers provide very effective in-class support for learning. They support individual pupils very well and intervene at a class level when this is required. As a result, pupils learn effectively and make good progress. Computer rooms invariably provide a businesslike and purposeful environment for learning.

126 The school aims to provide for the full range of attainment levels by ensuring that there is variety of possible outcomes for the tasks set. While this works well most of the time, there are occasions when pupils would be better served by having different tasks to work on which would either stretch the higher achieving pupils more or would enable lower achieving pupils to produce more complete pieces of work. The school should review the range of activities it sets for pupils in this respect, particularly in the taught courses in ICT.

127 The development of ICT provision in the school has been well managed. Staff have received training in the use of ICT in their subject areas and are currently engaged on a further training programme. Their high levels of competence and confidence with ICT are evident and this contributes to the very positive attitudes in the school towards ICT. Pupils and teachers alike are confident users of ICT.

128 The school has made very significant progress in ICT since the last inspection. While the provision for teaching and learning in ICT was sound at the last inspection, the school did not have a clear strategy for developing or replacing its ICT equipment. The acquisition of technology college status has ensured that the school has secure plans for enhancing and replacing its ICT equipment over time. The huge investment in equipment and software in the last eighteen months, together with a comprehensive programme of training for staff, has significantly contributed to the teaching of subjects across the curriculum.

129 The school is developing its ICT Policy. This work needs to be completed quickly as it underpins future developments. As part of this work, and the implementation of the ICT development plan, the school needs to embark on a phase of reflection and evaluation in its use of ICT to support learning. Although extensive use is being made of ICT in many areas of the school teachers are not always evaluating the contribution which it is making to learning. Developing a critical approach to the use of ICT will ensure that the resources are well targeted to areas where they can make the most impact.

### **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

130 Standards overall at Key Stage 3 are in line with standards expected nationally. Standards are above average in listening. Most pupils can understand instructions promptly. Higher attaining pupils deduce broad meaning from detail in recorded dialogues. They coped well, for example, with a challenging passage on recycling. Standards of writing are average. Many pupils know the basic rules of grammar and can identify patterns. The highest attaining pupils are good at applying these in French, using a range of tenses and other simple structures independently. For example, pupils redrafted a piece of work on rooms in the house and corrected their own mistakes. They can describe a journey, which includes a range of tenses, and are above average standard, on course for National Curriculum level 5 by the end of the key stage. Lower attaining pupils describe from memory what other people are wearing. They write in full sentences using word processing, clip art and boxes to enhance the presentation. In German, they write well, producing extended writing in the present tense, but without a wide enough range of structures to be above average overall. Reading is below average. Pupils understand words and phrases when they are part of the current topic. They understand short passages but extended reading is still not established. Speaking is also below average. Many pupils are hesitant speakers. Higher attaining pupils ask and answer single questions, using full sentences. Lower attaining pupils answer questions with words, phrases or short sentences.

131 At Key Stage 4 overall standards in GCSE were similar to the national averages in 1999 and are above the average attained in similar schools. Standards in French have fallen since the last inspection from well above the national average to just below in 1999. This is partly due to a change in the examination system in 1998, when the 100% coursework option was no longer available. In 1999, the school was experiencing staffing difficulties, which resulted in a further dip in performance. In German, standards have improved since the last inspection and are broadly in line with the national average, having risen to well above them in 1998. Standards in French with business studies were above the national average in 1999. However in 1999, standards in French were not as high as they were in other subjects in the school. Boys' performance in French is almost one grade below that attained in their other subjects and this performance gap is significantly greater than the national difference. Girls' performance is broadly in line with the national trends.

132 In lessons, standards by the end of Key Stage 4 are at average levels overall for



both boys and girls. Higher attaining pupils can write letters, descriptions and conversations at length in both languages, using a range of tenses and structures and are on course for grades B/C. Lower attaining pupils can write in the present tense and their meaning is readily understandable. Pupils with special educational needs attain appropriately. Pupils at all levels of attainment can use word processing for e-mails and faxes, inserting clip art and speech bubbles. In reading, higher attaining pupils can understand the gist and extract details from authentic texts and use bilingual dictionaries to aid their understanding. In listening they identify main points and details from a challenging passage describing people. In prepared speaking tests they talk fluently and with confidence using accurate pronunciation and a range of tenses and structures on a variety of topics. Lower attaining pupils speak at length in the present tense, with some anglicised pronunciation. However, pupils' performance in unprepared speaking is below average.

133 Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall in both French and German in both key stages and have improved since the last inspection. In Key Stage 4, teaching and learning are good in French and satisfactory in German. Most teaching is satisfactory and approaching one-third is good or very good. Where teaching and learning are good, teachers use the language well in giving instructions and explanations, ~~that~~ pupils develop their listening skills and accurate pronunciation. The use of authentic materials, for example magazine articles and leaflets from a tourist office, develops pupils' cultural awareness and inspires them with enthusiasm to use and understand the language. Pupils are well managed, so that they concentrate well and carry out tasks promptly. The clear explanation of learning objectives and good organisation and preparation of activities and materials enables pupils to learn at an appropriate pace. Homework is used to good effect to extend or consolidate learning, for example in extended writing, drafting and redrafting of work. Where teaching and learning are unsatisfactory, there is too much teacher direction and support, so that pupils are not challenged to think for themselves. Higher attaining pupils are not challenged to develop extended speaking and writing independently. Too much time is spent on low level copying tasks and pupils have limited opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning. Even when teaching has good features, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to practise speaking, either as a whole class or in pairs. As a result pupils lack confidence in speaking and higher attaining pupils are not challenged to speak at length. Teachers do not provide different tasks at the appropriate level, so that higher attaining pupils in some sets are not stretched and challenged and lower attaining pupils do not always succeed in the task set. Teachers' regular marking of work does not provide feedback on levels of achievement or guidance in terms of targets for improvement and ways in which to achieve the targets. Consequently, pupils in Key Stage 3 do not know at what level they are performing or how to improve.

134 Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory overall and have improved ~~on~~ since the last inspection. They listen attentively and concentrate well in most classes. Relationships between pupils and with teachers are good. However some inappropriate behaviour from a minority of boys at times impedes their progress.

135 Leadership and management is satisfactory, resulting in satisfactory improvement overall since the last inspection. The schemes of work now provide clear direction and appropriate pace in French and German at Key Stage 4 and in French at Key Stage 3. The development plan identifies appropriate targets for development and a programme of monitoring and evaluation of teaching has recently been introduced. Tests are now standardised in both key stages and advice on how pupils can improve is given on reports to parents. Appropriate resources are readily available in lessons. There are however weaknesses which still need attention. Lesson observations do not support part-time teaching staff. The Key Stage 3 German scheme of work is incomplete. Planning does not

yet allow pupils to develop extended independent reading. Tasks need to be developed, so that all pupils can be appropriately challenged and supported in their learning. Judgement of National Curriculum levels at Key Stage 3 has been inaccurate and has provided false information on pupils' attainment. The target setting, which is currently in place after tests, is too broad to be helpful to pupils. For example, a target identifying a need to improve reading, needs to be broken down into small achievable steps. Library resources need extending to support pupils' independent, extended reading.

136 The modern foreign language curriculum has breadth and balance. ICT enhances learning and the teaching of literacy skills is satisfactory. Adequate time is available for the teaching and learning of languages at Key Stage 4. Extra-curricular provision is good. Pupils have the opportunity to take part in a range of visits to Europe and the USA. Italian classes are offered to pupils who visit Italy. A day trip to Paris helps to prepare Key Stage 4 pupils for their speaking assessments. A project on citizenship is planned with schools in Sweden and Italy. However there are some weaknesses in curriculum provision. The uneven spread of lessons over the two-week timetable in one year 10 option block affects the continuity of provision for some pupils. In Key Stage 3, the provision of both French and German for the equivalent of one lesson per week means that curriculum coverage in Year 7 is slow in French and German. This is being monitored by the department and should be kept under constant review to ensure that pupils cover sufficient ground in order to maintain current standards.

## **MUSIC**

137 The standards attained in music by the end of Key Stage 3 are generally above the national average. Where standards are very good, pupils are able to work independently and with confidence, developing listening skills and acquiring specific specialist knowledge in order to extend their understanding and learning. Where standards are less than good, pupils are not always on task, a situation made worse by poor accommodation. This tends to be an issue in earlier years within the key stage. Standards of attainment during and by the end of Key Stage 4 are consistently very good. GCSE examination results in recent years are significantly above those at a national level, whether comparing these with all schools or schools of a similar nature. Expectations are high and pupils take responsibility for their learning to good effect. At Key Stage 3, girls perform better than boys on the whole, although at Key Stage 4 GCSE results do not indicate any significant difference.

138 The overall quality both of teaching and learning is good. At Key Stage 3, teaching is particularly good when expectations are clear, appropriate and focused on activities which are varied and stimulating as, for example, in lessons where theoretical and practical activities are planned to involve whole class, individual and paired work. Where teaching is less good, teachers' expectations are not always clear, and a small number of pupils perform at below expected levels. At Key Stage 4, teaching is never less than very good. Teachers have high expectations of pupils, teaching materials are challenging, lessons have good pace and a particular emphasis is given to the use of technology to enhance learning. Technology is never an end in itself but a means towards pupils using technological devices to improve their musical skills, knowledge and understanding. Composition is well taught in both key stages, and pupils are able to use ICT resources to aid this aspect of their learning. Good use is made of specialist musical language and in all years work is well matched to pupils' previous attainment, including those with special educational needs.

139 Pupils' attitudes towards the subject are very good, and in some cases excellent. Pupils are immediately involved positively and enthusiastically, and on those rare occasions

when they are not it is because inappropriate teaching strategies allow them to move off task. Relationships between teachers and pupils are always good and pupils support each other through paired work.

140 The department is very well led with the head of department using individual teacher's strengths to best effect. Other departmental teaching staff are given appropriate support, despite the difficulties of a timetable which does not allow for observation. The scheme of work, contained within a comprehensive departmental handbook, has clear and relevant aims and objectives, but should be reviewed to ensure that the balance of pupils' experiences is appropriate. Singing, for example, should be an objective in its own right, rather than only a vehicle for other curricular activities. Similarly, the scheme of work for Key Stage 4 should indicate more clearly teaching strategies and learning outcomes. In both key stages the scheme of work should identify where and how assessment should be used. Whilst music forms part of the creative arts faculty, opportunities for cross-arts curricular activities and programmes are not taken up.

141 Since the last inspection, standards of both teaching and learning have improved across both key stages. Concerns expressed about a lack of emphasis on the work of significant composers and music as an art form have been addressed satisfactorily, as have issues of health and safety. However, accommodation remains a serious matter of concern. The number, size and shape of rooms is inappropriate, and this is having a negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning, especially where practical work is concerned.

142 A team of visiting instrumental teachers regularly visits the school, providing a wide range of instrumental support to approximately twenty per cent of the school population. The quality of teaching and learning corresponds to that of other music teachers within the department, and teaching provides good value for money. A wide range of extra-curricular activities is offered, although the department has rightly recognised that more should be done for more advanced players and singers.

143 Although excellent use is made of technological equipment, little use is made of classroom instruments of a non-technological nature. On the other hand, the current poor accommodation would make their use extremely difficult.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

144 By the end of Key Stage 3 the standard of pupils' attainment in PE is in line with or slightly above the national expectation. In Key Stage 4, it is in line with national levels. However, the National Curriculum aspects of planning and evaluation are insufficiently developed, especially at Key Stage 3.

145 In both Key Stage 3 and 4, pupils work with accuracy, confidence and enthusiasm. They cooperate effectively in teamwork and show initiative in self-organisation. They understand the effects of exercise on their bodies, referring to muscles that are utilised in exercises.

146 By the end of Key Stage 4 they undertake more complex activity which requires a range of skills, application and teamwork. In some lessons they plan and evaluate the routines they undertake and apply them tactically in games.

147 Pupils with special educational needs perform to a satisfactory level supported by good teaching strategies. However, tight control by teachers does not enable the higher

attaining pupils to achieve their full potential. Overall, the standard of teaching and learning in both key stages is satisfactory with examples of good practice. Pupils' behaviour is very good in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4.

148 Teachers' planning focuses on tasks to be completed rather than on learning objectives and outcomes. Teaching strategies ensure maximum pupil participation and high expectations, good subject knowledge and quality instruction improve practice, but too often they also restrict opportunities for independent learning and the application of knowledge and understanding. Where teachers provide opportunities for pupils to plan and evaluate they respond confidently.

149 Good relationships with pupils and effective classroom management and use of time, space and resources create a positive working atmosphere and ensure progress in learning. However, pupils who are not participating in the lesson are not provided with meaningful activity. Formative assessment by teachers is used insufficiently as a teaching tool and there are few opportunities for peer or self-assessment by pupils. Extra-curricular activities are supported by all members of the department and are appreciated by pupils.

150 The GCSE course is in its second year. Practical lessons are good, but theory lessons involve too much direct teaching and provide little opportunity for pupils to learn independently.

151 Since the last inspection the department has made satisfactory progress overall. In particular, the teaching team is now mainly specialist and all staff are knowledgeable and committed to the subject. The head of department provides sound leadership. Staffing, resources and accommodation are all effectively deployed. Physical space is limited, however, as a result of outdoor facilities being quickly affected by wet weather and the need to share the hall with other subjects. Planning is now more detailed and focused but is an area for further development. This should include identifying learning objectives for each aspect across the key stages, establishing the levels of knowledge, skill and understanding required for each year group so that there is clear evidence of progression by the end of the key stage, and developing criteria for formative assessment, including peer and self-assessment.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

152 Standards in religious education (RE) are good. Attainment in the GCSE short course is high with the pass rate at higher grades [A\*-C] in 1999 being five percentage points above the national average for all schools and substantially above the average for similar schools. Since the introduction of this provision, overall pass rates have been in line with national levels. Elsewhere at Key Stage 4, and throughout Key Stage 3, attainment is in line with national expectations. Written communication skills are sound or better, with speaking and reading aloud being stronger than listening at Key Stage 3. Many pupils communicate their coursework assignments confidently using word processing and desktop publishing techniques. Most have a good understanding of what it means to be religious and generally understand religious rituals and other practices, and at Key Stage 4 many demonstrate that they can apply religious ideas effectively to new situations. Lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs succeed well in RE because of the individual monitoring and support that they receive.

153 Behaviour is always sound and at Key Stage 3 it is usually good. Pupils are respectful to the teachers. Progress in learning is always sound and frequently good. It is promoted by regular reference to previous learning, by pupils taking responsibility for the

quality of their own work in such areas as the use of ICT and by the application of deductive and comparative skills. Pupils' determination to progress lessons, arises from the enthusiasm that many have for this subject. They enjoy active learning and a good example of this was the re-enactment of the Last Supper in Year 7, during which a whole class demonstrated that they could adopt roles.

154 The quality of teaching is consistently good, frequently being very good. It is characterised by careful planning, an insistence on high levels of respect and behaviour, good pace and challenge, clear identification of learning objectives, and a very evident level of teacher knowledge and enthusiasm. The good range of teaching and learning techniques used is a major factor in creating an enthusiastic response for RE. As a result of criticism in the last inspection report, the school has now complied with statutory requirements and provides adequate curriculum time to deliver the locally agreed syllabus. The consequence of this is that a very positive five-year learning pathway has now been created. It is this that has encouraged increased participation in the GCSE short course in religious studies and has created a demand for a full GCSE course, which is now being conducted at lunchtimes. The success of this department is built upon capable and thoughtful leadership which has particular strengths in curriculum planning and which is well informed about current educational developments. This leadership has been instrumental in securing substantial levels of external sponsorship from local churches and the business sector, to the extent that the department is currently well resourced with appropriate textbooks.

155 Significant progress has been achieved in RE since the last inspection, most notably in the context of attainment and resources. Areas for future improvement should include be a more sustained approach to formative assessment and subject-specific target setting in marking and reporting, and in the emerging area of pupil self-assessment so that more advice is available to pupils and their parents about how to improve pupils' attainment levels further. The use of assessment data to inform future curriculum design also requires further development.