

INSPECTION REPORT

The Honywood Community School

Coggeshall, Colchester

LEA area: Essex LEA

Unique reference number: 115226

Headteacher: Mr K Hotchin

Reporting inspector: Morton Phillips-Davies
2687

Dates of inspection: 6 March – 17 March 2000

Inspection number: 186069

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

© Crown copyright 2000

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

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Westfield Drive Coggeshall Colchester Essex
Postcode:	CO6 1PZ
Telephone number:	01376 561231
Fax number:	01376 563067
Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs A J Ward
Date of previous inspection:	30 October 1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Morton Phillips-Davies	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it?
			What should the school do to improve further?
			How high are standards? The school's results and pupils' achievements.
			How well are pupils taught?
			How well is the school led and managed?
Fran Luke	Lay inspector		How well does the school care for its pupils?
			How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
			Equal Opportunities
Graham Soar	Team Inspector	Science	
David Naylor	Team Inspector	Mathematics	
Adrian Conley	Team Inspector	Information Technology	
		Design and Technology	
Roderick Passant	Team Inspector	English	Special Educational Needs
Jim Kidd	Team Inspector	History	How high are standards? Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development.
			How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to the pupils?
David Howe	Team Inspector	Music	
Anthony Burdis	Team Inspector	Art	
Brian Downes	Team Inspector	Geography	
Martin Fee	Team Inspector	Modern Foreign Languages	
Olivia Hall	Team Inspector	Physical Education	
Stephen Lavendar	Team Inspector	Religious Education	

The inspection contractor was:

Advisory and Inspection Service
 Essex County Council
 PO Box 47
 Chelmsford
 Essex
 CM2 6WN

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

The Registrar
Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	15
The school's results and achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?	18
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?	20
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	22
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?	24
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	25
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	27
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	29
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	34

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Honywood is an average sized mixed comprehensive community school for pupils in the 11-16 age range with 828 pupils on roll, 428 boys and 400 girls. The school serves Coggeshall and surrounding villages, with about 15 percent of the pupils coming from outside the catchment area from a number of different primary schools. Socio-economically it is a mixed catchment area. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals (5.3 percent) is below the national average. There are ninety-five pupils on the register of pupils with special educational needs and thirteen of them have statements. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below the national average. There are very few pupils from ethnic minority groups. Pupils' attainment on entry is broadly in line with the national picture, but there are fewer of both the lower ability pupils and those of the highest ability than in a normal distribution. A small number of pupils who had applied for admission to the school go to local grammar schools.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Honywood is a good school, which seeks to, and is mostly successful in, doing the best for the pupils. It has effectively established a good balance for its pupils between a caring supportive ethos and the provision of challenge and the encouragement to achieve. Standards of attainment are generally high and pupils' achievement is good. Pupils achieve very high standards in GCSE at the end of Key Stage 4, at the age of 16. The GCSE results have shown steady improvement over a number of years and the rising trend of success is at a faster rate than the national trend. The aggregate performance of pupils in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science over the period 1996-99 were well above the national averages. There has, however, been a decline in the level of attainment, in that period, and particularly in 1999 when it became more marked. The overall results for the core subjects in 1999 are in line with the national average but well below those for similar schools. In the present Year 9, both in the core subjects and generally across the school, the standards seen and pupils' achievement are good. A strength of the school is the high proportion of good, very good or excellent teaching. The school is well led and managed with a clear focus on the pupils. There is a strong positive ethos and all pupils are valued, and are encouraged and supported to maximise their potential. Taking account of the overall effectiveness of the school, the context in which it works and the expenditure per pupil the school offers good value for money.

What the school does well

- The clear focus of the school on the pupils, their welfare, aspirations and needs.
- The aims and values of the school are clearly reflected in its work, and there is a good balance between a caring supportive ethos and the provision of challenge and the encouragement to achieve.
- High standards are achieved in the GCSE examinations.
- The high proportion of good and very good teaching.
- The quality of learning is enhanced and is well supported by the very good relationships in the school and the very good attitudes of the great majority of pupils to their learning.
- Very good opportunities are provided beyond the classroom for pupils to take responsibility and show initiative, and pupils contribute effectively to the life of the school.
- The quality and range of the learning opportunities provided, including the extra-curricular activities, are very good.
- Provision for pupils' personal, moral and social education is very good.
- Provision for educational and personal support and guidance for the pupils is very good.
- The monitoring of pupils' performance and personal development in Key Stage 4 is very good.
- The induction arrangements for new staff, including newly qualified teachers, are very good.

What could be improved

- The decline in the level of pupils' attainment in the National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 3 should be reversed.
- Curriculum progression from Key Stage 2 and through Key Stage 3 in English, mathematics and science needs to be improved.
- The numerical attainment of pupils should be raised through more clearly focused and better provision for developing numeracy.
- Levels of boys' attainment in English need to be raised, particularly in Key Stage 4.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in November 1995 under Section 9 of the Education (Schools) Act 1992. Overall the school has made sound progress since that time with very good progress in some areas, such as the improvements in the GCSE examination results which in 1999 were well above the national averages and those for similar schools. There has, however, been a decline in the National Curriculum test results in English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 3, and although overall the 1999 results remain above the national average they are well below those for similar schools. Considerable work has been undertaken on developing strategies to improve the performance of boys and there was a significant improvement in their overall performance in the GCSE examinations in 1999. Their level of attainment improved both in absolute terms and in relation to the girls, but their attainment in English remains well below that of the girls. Improvement in the quality of learning and of teaching has been a key focus in the Institutional Development Plan and the quality of both has improved significantly since the last inspection. The length of the taught week has been significantly increased and is now above the recommended minimum time. This has contributed to improvements in the breadth and balance of the curriculum and to standards. The line management of departments has been strengthened and there are now fewer and better focused initiatives, although there is room for further development in this area. There has been very good improvement in history, geography and physical education and the improvement in all other subject areas is at least satisfactory. Progress has been made in the provision for spiritual education, which is now satisfactory, but further development is needed. The school is still not meeting the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils and only limited progress has been made. Progress in a number of other areas was evident such as the significant improvements in the staff handbook.

STANDARDS

The table below shows the standards achieved by 16 year olds based on GCSE examination results.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	B	B	A	A

Key	
Well above average	A
Above average	B
average	C
Below average	D
Well below average	E

Pupils achieve very high standards in GCSE at the end of Key Stage 4, at the age of 16. The GCSE results have shown steady improvement over a number of years and the rising trend of success is at a faster rate than the national trend. The average points score has increased significantly in the last two years. The increase from 1998 to 1999 was due principally to an improvement of eight points in the average score of the boys. This is the equivalent of each boy increasing his attainment by a grade in eight of the subjects taken. The average total points score, for boys and girls combined, in 1999 was 46.2, compared to 37.8 nationally. The GCSE results in 1999 were well above the national averages overall as were the separate results for boys and for girls. The GCSE results are also well above those of similar schools for the percentage of pupils obtaining 5 or more GCSE A*-C grades, 5 or more GCSE A*-G grades and the average total points score. The performance of boys has shown a steady improvement year on year compared to the national picture. These are very good results overall. The school significantly exceeded its GCSE targets in 1999 with 64 percent of pupils gaining five or more passes at grades A*-C compared to the target of 52 percent. The school performed much better than it had anticipated. Governors have reviewed their targets for future years and increased the target for 2001. Achievement is generally good in Key Stage 4 and is very good in history, geography and physical education. Pupils at all levels of attainment show good achievement and pupils with special educational needs often attain high standards in relation to their prior ability.

Taking the four years 1996-99 together, the performance of pupils in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, taken together and individually, are all well above the national averages. Standards were also well above the national averages for both boys and girls. The school achieved some very good results in the period 1996-98 in these core subjects. There has, however, been a decline in the level of attainment in the period 1996-99, and particularly in 1999 when it became more marked. The overall results for the core subjects in 1999 are in line with the national average but well below those for similar schools. Standards in English and mathematics were close to the national average but well below those in similar schools. Despite the school's efforts to address the issue, girls continue to outperform boys in English. The science results were above the national average and in line with those in similar schools. Standards of work of the current Year 9 pupils in English, mathematics and science are good. The standards of work seen in the other subjects in Key Stage 3 are all above those expected for pupils of the same age nationally, except for modern foreign languages and information technology where they are in line with those expected nationally. The standards overall in the last four years, including those seen in the present Year 9, and the pupils' achievement are good in Key Stage 3.

Standards in literacy are good. The numeracy skills that are demonstrated by pupils across the school are variable but generally satisfactory.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils normally display an enthusiastic approach to their studies, take full advantage of what the school has to offer and display very good attitudes to study.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour in lessons is usually very good and the great majority of pupils act sensibly and maturely at breaks and lunchtimes.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships between pupils and between pupils and teachers are very good. There are high levels of mutual respect and pupils willingly accept responsibility.
Attendance	The level of pupils' attendance is above the national average and rates of unauthorised absence are low.

The very good attitudes pupils show to their learning, their willingness to take responsibility and the very good relationships are strengths of the school. A combination of the very good relationships and pupil attitudes is a major factor in the good progress made by pupils in their personal and academic development and in the achievement of high standards.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The high proportion of good, very good or excellent teaching is a strength of the school and the quality of both teaching and learning has improved significantly since the last inspection. Pupils' attitudes are very good and they respond well to the good teaching and make good progress. Both teaching and learning are good or better in just over-two thirds of lessons, and in almost a quarter of lessons they are very good or excellent. Teaching is most consistently of a very high standard in history, art, music and physical education and pupils were benefiting from this in these subject areas. Very good or excellent teaching was seen in most subjects, the exceptions being English and information technology although there was a high proportion of good teaching in both. The proportion of unsatisfactory teaching has fallen since the last inspection but the quality of teaching was still judged to be unsatisfactory in one in twenty of the lessons observed. Pupils did not make satisfactory progress in these lessons and in some of them pupils' attitudes dropped below the high levels normally seen. Less than half of these lessons were taught by teachers with permanent contracts of employment with the school. The quality of both teaching and learning in English, mathematics and science in both Key Stages 3 and 4 is good. The proportion of good or very good lessons is higher in English and science than in mathematics.

There is a good focus on developing pupils' literacy and this is evident in many subject areas, particularly the humanities, and this makes an effective contribution to pupils' progress and the good standards of literacy seen. Numeracy is not as consistently developed although some good work was seen in geography and in science. The inconsistency in attainment in numeracy reflects the absence of a school policy on the development of numeracy.

Teachers' management of pupils is very good in all subject areas and this is a strength of the school, as are the very good attitudes pupils have to their learning. Whilst this is a tribute to the pupils it is brought about in no small measure by the mutual respect between teachers and pupils, the very good relationships that exist in the school and the confidence that pupils have in their teachers. The combination of good teaching and very good pupil attitudes is a major factor in the good progress made and the achievement of high standards. Teachers normally set objectives for the lessons and in many instances, a good example being the lessons in art, they share them clearly with the pupils. This effectively involves the pupils in the learning process and supports progress. This practice needs to be further developed in some subjects, such as English, mathematics, science and religious education.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The range and quality of learning opportunities provided both within and beyond the formal curriculum are good and effectively engage and motivate pupils to achieve high standards.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The provision for pupils with special educational needs is good and they make good progress. They are well integrated into the life of the school, the work is well co-ordinated and both teachers and learning support assistants support them well.
Provision for pupils' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision is good overall, with very good opportunities provided for pupils to show initiative and take responsibility. The provision for moral and social development is very good and the emphasis on these enhances pupils' sense of community and respect for the feelings and beliefs of others. The provision for cultural development is good with opportunities provided in subjects such as music and drama and beyond the taught curriculum. The spiritual provision is sound and has improved since the last inspection. Opportunities are provided for pupils' spiritual development but there are also occasions when they are missed.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Staff at the school are very caring and know and support the pupils well. The school seeks to provide each pupil with a safe, pleasant and productive working environment and is largely successful in this. The procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are very good.

The school works well with parents.

A concern for the individual and seeking ways to meet individual need is a strong feature of the work of the school. Within the overall good learning opportunities provided, the extra-curricular and careers provision and the personal and social education and pre-vocational courses are particular strengths. With the exception of an act of collective worship, the school meets all statutory requirements. The school's curriculum provision is appropriately balanced in most respects but the humanities curriculum does not include enough time for religious education teachers to meet the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. The planning of the teaching programme in English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 3 does not sufficiently recognise pupils' prior learning experiences, particularly their primary school experience. This in some instances is limiting progress. The school is aware of this, and of the significant recent changes in the Key Stage 2 curriculum in English and mathematics, and intends to review the schemes of work.

The school cares very well for its pupils. There is a strong ethos in which all pupils are valued and are encouraged and supported to maximise their potential. Pupils have responded well to this. The school is very successful in its attempts to regulate the personal behaviour of its pupils and to encourage them to reflect on how their actions may affect others. Pupils are offered many opportunities to consider the principles that distinguish right from wrong. Teachers are good role models and lead by example. The ethos of the school strongly reflects care for others and the sense of community from both pupils and staff is always evident and relationships are very good. Information on pupils' potential and progress is used very effectively at Key Stage 4 to improve pupils' attainment, but this information is not yet used systematically and effectively at Key Stage 3. The school is aware of this and is developing its use to improve pupil attainment in this key stage.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The school is well led and managed, with a number of able and effective staff in key management positions across the school. The leadership and management provided by heads of department are generally good.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors fulfil their responsibilities well. All statutory responsibilities are met except for the provision of a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school undertakes a thorough and valuable analysis of the examination results achieved and effectively monitors pupils' progress in Key Stage 4. Assessment and performance data to predict potential is well used to set targets and bring about further improvement at school and pupil level. This has been a contributory factor in the high and improving standards achieved in the GCSE examinations. This work is not as consistently well developed at Key Stage 3 with some variation across subjects. The school is aware of this and is strengthening its use of performance data in this key stage. The monitoring and evaluation of learning and of teaching are very good and provide a strong basis for the school to improve further this aspect of its provision.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are effectively used for the benefit of the pupils.

The match of teachers and support staff to the needs of the curriculum is generally good. The last inspection report noted that there was insufficient accommodation to cater for the number of pupils on roll. The £1.5 million building project has provided additional good quality accommodation and the accommodation is now adequate to allow the curriculum to be taught effectively. Learning resources are adequate to support the curriculum and pupils' learning but the non-fiction book stock in the library is limited.

The school's aims and values are very well reflected in its work. The induction of staff new to the school, including newly qualified teachers, is a strength of the school.

The school is aware of and applies the principles of best value; it provides a good quality service and spends its money wisely. It consults effectively and thoughtfully considers the service it provides. Pupils' performance is thoroughly analysed and it has measures in place to determine whether pupils are achieving at appropriate levels. However, its work on identifying and making comparisons with schools in similar circumstances is limited. It effectively seeks to achieve best value through careful monitoring of its expenditure and processes such as tendering and monitoring the quality and effectiveness of the services it receives.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils are encouraged to work hard and to achieve the highest standards of which they are capable. • Pupils make good progress in the school. • Pupils like the school. • The good teaching. • Behaviour is good. • They feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or problems. • The school is well led and managed. • The positive effect on the pupils of the values and attitudes promoted by the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twenty five percent of the parents who responded to the questionnaire expressed concerns about the amount of work pupils have to do at home. • The information provided on pupils' progress. • The way the school works with parents.

The inspectors' judgements support the parents' generally positive views of the school. Responses to the questionnaire and the pre-inspection meeting with parents indicated that there are three areas where some parents expressed concerns. They were unhappy about homework, the information they received and how well the school worked with parents. In the case of homework there were a number of points made, but two of the most common were contradictory, with some parents feeling there was too much homework whilst others felt there was too little. The inspectors judged that homework of appropriate length and content is normally set and marked regularly in most subjects. The nature of the concerns in the other two areas was not made explicit, except for two individual comments on the parents' evenings held in the school to discuss pupils' progress. The inspection team judged that the information provided for parents is good and that parents generally worked well with the school.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. Pupils' attainment on entry is broadly in line with the national picture, but there are fewer of both the lower ability pupils and those of the highest ability than in a normal distribution.

2. Taking the four years 1996-99 together, the performance of pupils in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, taken together and individually, are all well above the national averages. Standards were also well above the national averages for both boys and girls. The school achieved some very good results in the period 1996-98 in these core subjects. There has, however, been a decline in the level of attainment in the period 1996-99, and particularly in 1999 when it became more marked. The overall results for the core subjects in 1999 are in line with the national average but well below those for similar schools. Standards in English and mathematics were close to the national average but well below those in similar schools. Staffing changes and some staff absences are cited by the school as contributory factors in the recent decline in results in 1999. Despite the school's efforts to address the issue, girls continue to outperform boys in English. The science results were above the national average and in line with those in similar schools. The monitoring of pupil progress and the target setting across all subjects at Key Stage 3 are not as thorough or as effective as in Key Stage 4 and the school is seeking to improve this.

3. Standards of work of the current Year 9 pupils are above average in English and science and pupils' achievement is good. In mathematics the standards currently seen at Key Stage 3 are above average and the achievement of pupils is satisfactory. The standards of work seen in the other subjects in Key Stage 3 are all above those expected for pupils of the same age nationally, except for modern foreign languages and information technology where they are in line with those expected nationally. Pupils' achievement in these subjects is also good except for physical education where it is very good and modern foreign languages where it is satisfactory. No significant differences in achievement were reported between boys and girls.

4. The standards overall in the last four years, including those seen in the present Year 9, and pupils' achievement are good in Key Stage 3.

5. Pupils achieve very high standards in GCSE at the end of Key Stage 4, at the age of 16. The GCSE results have shown steady improvement over a number of years and the rising trend of success is at a faster rate than the national trend. The average points score has increased significantly in the last two years, with the increase from 1998 to 1999 due principally to an improvement of 8 points in the boys' score. This is the equivalent of each boy increasing his attainment by a grade in each of eight of the subjects taken. The average total points score in 1999, for boys and girls combined, was 46.2, compared to 37.8 nationally. The GCSE results in 1999 were well above the national averages overall as were the separate results for boys and for girls. The GCSE results are also well above those of similar schools for the percentage of pupils obtaining 5 or more GCSE A*-C grades, 5 or more GCSE A*-G grades and the average total points score. The performance of boys has shown a steady improvement year on year compared to the national picture. These are very good results overall. The school significantly exceeded its

GCSE targets in 1999 with 64 percent of pupils gaining five or more passes at grades A*-C compared to the target of 52 percent. The school performed better than it had anticipated. In the light of these results, the governors have reviewed their targets for future years and the target for 2001 has been increased.

6. Standards in GCSE examinations are above the national average in English Language and significantly above in English Literature. Nearly two thirds of the year gained grades in the A*- C range. The achievement of many of the lower attaining pupils is good. Overall, however, the difference between boys' attainment and that of girls is marked and is greater than that seen nationally. The attainment of both girls and boys in English Language is significantly below that of some other subjects, such as the humanities, science and mathematics. Standards of work seen in the current Year 11 are good.

7. Throughout the period 1996 to 1999 the proportion of pupils attaining GCSE grades A* -C in mathematics has been consistent and well above national standards. Pupils do relatively well in mathematics, over this period the results of both boys and girls have been significantly above the mean of the results achieved by pupils at GCSE level in all subjects within the school. Standards seen towards the end of Key Stage 4 are good.

8. Achievement at the end of Key Stage 4 in the GCSE double science examination is very good. GCSE results have remained above the national average for the past three years. Both boys and girls do particularly well in science, and perform better than in most of the other subjects they take. Standards seen in science towards the end of the key stage remain well above the national average.

9. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 in GCSE in integrated humanities, geography and history is well above national averages and in religious education it is above. Over the past three years, there has been a rising trend in attainment in these subject areas. Boys' performance has improved markedly in humanities so that the gap between the attainment of boys and girls has narrowed considerably. Attainment in the humanities subjects is better than in most other subjects in the school. Standards seen at the end of the key stage are generally well above that expected nationally.

10. Pupils achieve well in art. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C in GCSE examinations in 1999 was above the national averages. These results show an improving trend from previous years. Standards seen by the end of Key Stage 4 in Year 11 are good with the majority of pupils achieving standards that are at or above the level expected of pupils nationally.

11. At the end of Key Stage 4 pupils' attainment in design and technology is mainly good and their results in GCSE subjects are above the national average.

12. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is at least satisfactory in IT with a significant number of pupils making sound progress in a range of IT applications. Overall attainment is mainly in line with national expectations.

13. GCSE French results for boys and girls are well above the national average, with girls, as nationally achieving a higher percentage of A*-C passes than boys. German GCSE results are currently below the national average for boys and girls and have some way to go to meet the average points score for all subjects in the school.

14. Pupils attain high standards in music in Key Stage 4 and this is reflected in the

GCSE results, which have been consistently above the national averages for the past few years.

15. In physical education the proportion of pupils attaining the higher grades A*-C in the 1999 GCSE examination was above the national average. Both boys and girls performed above their respective national averages achieving higher levels than in many other subjects. In lessons, towards the end of the key stage, attainment is above national expectations.

16. Achievement is generally good in Key Stage 4 and is very good in history, geography and physical education. Pupils at all levels of attainment show good achievement and pupils with special educational needs often attain high standards in relation to their prior ability and make good progress against their targets.

17. Overall the standards achieved by pupils in listening are good. Standards in speaking are more variable but some aspects such as discussion and informal responses are good. Standards of reading of class texts are good. Standards in writing are good. The numeracy skills that are demonstrated by pupils across the school are variable but generally satisfactory.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

18. Pupils are very enthusiastic about what the school has to offer and display very good attitudes to study. They show real interest in all aspects of school life and the take-up of the wide variety of extra-curricular activities is extensive. Pupils generally move around school calmly. They arrive eagerly to lessons and respond positively to the teaching and to the many opportunities in all subject areas to work collaboratively with their peers. Pupils celebrate the successes of their classmates willingly and enjoy class discussion and debate.

19. Standards of behaviour are good in lessons and around school at breaks and at lunchtimes. The incidence of exclusions is very low. Teachers trust their charges to behave sensibly at lunchtime when the majority of classrooms are open to pupils. This trust is not misplaced and on the rare occasions when problems arise, teachers handle the situation well. Pupils are well aware of the code of conduct and its various stages. They are polite and courteous to their teachers, to their classmates and to visitors. The high standards of behaviour management are augmented by the caring approach adopted by the school and by the strong pastoral system. This is made up of many talented and committed form tutors and a very cohesive heads of school team, which includes the head of pupil progression and the special educational needs co-ordinator. These teachers work long and hard to counsel and mentor their pupils and to ensure that, when challenging behaviour emerges, the procedures for checking it are applied consistently and sensitively.

20. Relationships between pupils and between pupils and teachers are very good; mutual respect is a strong feature. Both pupils and teachers speak very highly of each other. There is no evidence of sexism or of racism and pupils are willing to celebrate the positive aspects of their own and of other cultures. The issue of bullying is taken seriously and every classroom displays the school's policy in this regard: "Tell, tell, tell." Pupils interviewed said that bullying is rare, but that when it occurs, teachers and prefects are approachable, respect confidences and are normally very effective in dealing with it.

21. Teachers are good role models and encourage their pupils to have respect for the values, feelings and opinions of others. Pupils are aware that they can have a positive

effect on the lives of their colleagues and that if they approach others in a positive and supportive way it benefits all in the school community. During the inspection there were many examples in class and in assemblies of pupils displaying a willingness to celebrate the successes of all. Moreover, pupils displayed their high levels of social conscience by organising their own charity appeal in an attempt to relieve the suffering of Mozambican flood victims. The personal and social education programme (PSE), including the health and drugs education modules in the upper school, are most effective in enhancing pupils' awareness of the needs and of the successes of others. The visit of a representative of Colchester Night Shelter to an upper school assembly is a good example of this.

22. The opportunities the school provides for pupils in all years to show initiative and to take on responsibility are very good. The formal school prefect system operates well, is open to pupils of all attainments and is complemented by the subject prefect and monitor initiatives. For example, upper school pupils assist the new Year 7 intake to settle in and to take full advantage of what the school has to offer. There are lower and upper school councils, comprising elected form representatives, who meet regularly with teachers to discuss a variety of school issues. Pupils are actively involved in charity work and in 1999, 42 pupils in Year 11 gained community service certificates. In addition, 43 pupils achieved the Trident gold award and 51 received personal challenge certificates. At present there are some 100 pupils in the upper school following activities for the Trident gold award. Furthermore, the school's emphasis on pupils' self-assessment of their progress assists in the formulation of positive self-esteem. This is seen, in particular, in science, music and humanities.

23. Pupils with special educational needs are integrated very well into school life and in lessons. In a drama lesson, for example, pupils displayed a maturity and sensitivity in the way they worked with particular pupils and the learning support assistant.

24. Attendance at both key stages is above average and levels of unauthorised absence are very low. Registers are completed both morning and afternoon and the school has good relations with the educational welfare officer. All procedures for encouraging good attendance and monitoring trends in attendance are good and are applied with rigour.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

25. There is a high proportion of good, very good or excellent teaching, which is a strength of the school. The quality of both teaching and of learning has improved significantly since the last inspection. Pupils' attitudes are very good and they respond well to the good teaching and make good progress. Both teaching and learning are good or better in just over two thirds of lessons, and in almost a quarter of lessons they are very good or excellent. Teaching is most consistently of a very high standard in history, art, music and physical education and pupils were benefiting from this in these subject areas. Very good or excellent teaching was seen in most subjects, the exceptions being English and information technology although there was a high proportion of good teaching in both. The proportion of unsatisfactory teaching has dropped since the last inspection but the quality of teaching was still judged to be unsatisfactory in one in twenty of the lessons observed. Pupils did not make satisfactory progress in these lessons and in some of them pupils' attitudes dropped below the high levels normally seen. Less than half of these lessons were taught by teachers with permanent contracts of employment with the school.

26. Teachers' management of pupils is very good in all subject areas and this is a strength of the school. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and this is used effectively to motivate pupils and support learning. In the best lessons the enthusiasm of the teachers

for their subject increases the pupils' motivation and sense of purpose and brings out the best in them. Examples of this were seen in most subjects but especially in drama, history, music and physical education. Another strength of the school is the very good attitudes pupils have to their learning. Whilst this is a tribute to the pupils it is brought about in no small measure by the mutual respect between teachers and pupils, the very good relationships that exist in the school and the confidence that pupils have in their teachers. The combination of good teaching and very good pupil attitudes is a major factor in the good progress made and the achievement of high standards.

27. There is a good focus on developing pupils' literacy in many subjects, particularly the humanities subjects, and this makes an effective contribution to pupils' progress and the good standards of literacy seen. Numeracy is not as consistently developed although some good work was seen in geography and in science. The inconsistency in attainment in numeracy reflects the absence of a school policy on the development of numeracy.

28. The use of IT to support learning is variable. It is used effectively in the humanities, science and design and technology but its use in modern foreign languages, music and art is unsatisfactory. The development of teacher competence in the use of IT and improved access to IT in lessons are a key priority in the school's development planning.

29. Learning is particularly effective where the teaching is purposeful, expectations are high and the work moves along at a brisk pace. A number of such lessons were seen, for example in science lessons, where pupils were being encouraged to think for themselves, and in many humanities and music lessons. Good examples were seen of the use of questioning to test pupils understanding but also to extend and develop their learning particularly in drama, history, geography and some lessons in modern foreign languages. Lessons were not as effective where the pace and expectations were moderate and questioning was not used sufficiently, for example in some of the lessons in mathematics.

30. Teachers normally set objectives for the lessons and in many instances, a good example being the lessons in art, they share them clearly with the pupils. This effectively involves the pupils in the learning process and supports progress. This practice needs to be further developed in some subjects, such as English, mathematics, science and religious education.

31. Homework of appropriate length and content is normally set and marked regularly in most subjects. The use of homework is good in most subjects and satisfactory in mathematics, design and technology and music. On occasions, the homework set in mathematics requires pupils to finish work started in the class and as a result the amount of work to be done at home can vary between pupils. Both homework and work in class are effectively assessed but comments in books on how to improve are rare in some subjects, although there were examples in the lessons observed of this being done effectively with class groups.

32. The last report identified the match of work to meet pupils' needs as an area for development. Progress has been made in this area, the provision now made in history being a good example. In science the 'learning experience grids' provide objectives at three different levels, and where they are used effectively to vary teaching strategies there is an improvement in learning. They are, however, not yet consistently used. A good example of the use of differentiated worksheets was seen in one Key Stage 3 lesson in modern foreign languages. Teachers provide good support to pupils with special educational needs. They are made very aware of individual particular needs and targets through regular and detailed information. In the main these targets are supported well in

lessons. The school has undertaken considerable work in a range of departments in effectively developing work matched to the demands of higher attaining pupils. Higher attaining pupils are also engaged in a separate programme of withdrawal. In one class for example they worked in groups discussing the criteria for a difficult ethical and moral problem. The school feels that these sessions help pupils', particularly the girls, to express their ideas in a more confident and mature manner.

33. Learning support assistants make a good contribution in supporting pupils with special educational needs. They have a detailed knowledge of the pupils' particular needs and provide effective support in class. They are particularly effective in cases where there is an obvious partnership developing with the individual teacher and they have a good understanding and rapport with the work being tackled. Where learning support assistants work regularly within a specific department and have a more detailed knowledge of the work and the expectations of particular units of work their efficiency is increased.

34. When pupils are withdrawn for specific skills work they are well supported. The teacher has a very good knowledge of the individual pupils and the particular skills-based software package. Relationships are very good and support the development of confidence.

35. The planning of the teaching programme in English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 3 does not sufficiently recognise pupils' prior learning experiences, particularly their primary school experience. This in some instances is limiting progress. The school is aware of this and of the significant recent changes in the Key Stage 2 curriculum in English and mathematics and will review the schemes of work.

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

Learning opportunities

36. Overall, the quality and range of learning opportunities provided for the pupils are very good: extra-curricular provision, personal and social education (PSE), careers and pre-vocational courses are particular strengths. With the exception of an act of collective worship, the school meets all statutory requirements. The school has improved curriculum provision since the last inspection and now offers a broad curriculum, which is appropriately balanced in most respects. However, the humanities curriculum does not include enough time for religious education teachers to meet the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. In addition, the two populations in Key Stage 4 are determined principally by the pupils' ability in Mathematics. This results in a higher and a lower ability band in English, which has an effect on boys' behaviour and can limit the opportunity for entry to higher level examination papers for a few pupils. Apart from this, there are equal opportunities for the pupils to participate fully in all areas of school life and in all areas of the curriculum. The curriculum is continuously under review and members of staff are consulted at various points during the year in relation to the timetable for the coming year.

37. Since the previous inspection, the taught week has been increased to 25 hours 50 minutes and there is a two-week timetable cycle. The balance of this two-week cycle has an adverse impact on continuity in modern foreign languages, humanities, science and physical education. In Key Stage 3, pupils are taught mainly in mixed-ability form groups and some setting occurs in modern languages, physical education, mathematics and science. In Key Stage 4, all pupils follow an extensive compulsory programme of subjects comprising English, mathematics, double award science, GCSE integrated humanities,

physical education, PSE, careers and information technology. There are six choices within technology and a variety of elective courses in three option groups. Pupils must choose at least one modern foreign language, and two from the following: the expressive arts subjects, a humanities subject, business studies and GCSE physical education. There are several short courses on offer and pupils can choose to follow the impressive pre-vocational programme, certificated under the Asdan silver and bronze award.

38. The overall provision for special educational needs is good. A strength of the school is its concern for the individual and how it seeks ways to meet individual need. This warmth of support is matched by a concern to develop individual skills.

39. The school's provision for extra-curricular activity is very good and take-up is extensive. In addition to the wide range of sporting activities, pupils take part in drama and musical productions, community initiatives in the village and benefit from field visits, study tours, and school holidays both at home and abroad. Pupils are able to receive school colours for taking part in extra-curricular activities.

40. All pupils follow a PSE course as part of the tutorial programme. In addition, pupils in Years 10 and 11 have a further PSE lesson in which greater emphasis is placed on careers, preparation for work experience, health education, sex and drugs education. The provision promotes high standards and teaching is normally good. In Key Stage 3 pupils consider induction into school, changes in emotions and feelings, self-evaluation and preparation for options choices. Study skills and dates for the production of coursework are particular modules in Year 10 and, in Year 11, pupils prepare for work experience and receive application advice from representatives of local colleges. At present, the head of pupil progression, who is responsible for the tutorial PSE programme is making an application to the Central Bureau for a European education project with partner schools in Sweden and Italy.

41. The school's careers education programme is also very good. Careers education begins in Year 7 with pupils receiving information from some of the non-teaching staff on aspects of their work. In Year 8 they consider the advantages and disadvantages of shift and day work. The careers officer visits Year 9 pupils before they make their option choices. In Year 10, pupils begin to research possible work experience placements and also attend meetings with local colleges when they are offered advice on courses, applications and interview technique. In Year 11, pupils complete a three-week work experience placement.

42. The contribution of the community to pupils' learning is good. Local employers visit the school regularly and conduct mock interviews with pupils in Years 10 and 11. The PSE programme comprises visits from a variety of community groups including the Rotary Club, Colchester Nightshelter and also the Police. There are community awards for the best work experience report and, in turn, the school awards colours to pupils who have given freely of their time to assist in community initiatives for the elderly and for those less fortunate.

43. The school's pastoral staff spend considerable time visiting feeder primary schools and attempting to elicit a picture of each individual pupil before the start of secondary schooling. In addition, there are regular strategic meetings between local primary headteachers and co-ordinators of the core subjects. However, there is a lack of curricular continuity between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 in English, mathematics and science. The

school is now looking to rectify this situation. There are good relations with local colleges, including the sixth-form college, and upper-school pupils have the opportunity to discuss their career and academic aspirations with representatives who visit the school.

Personal development

44. The school's provision for pupils' personal development is good overall, with very good opportunities for pupils to show initiative and to take on responsibility.

45. Spiritual development is satisfactory and has improved since the last inspection. There are opportunities for pupils to develop their self-awareness and their curiosity and a sense of awe and wonder is evident during investigative work in science and humanities. The school's emphasis on pupil self-evaluation is impressive; the assemblies observed, for example, gave pupils opportunities to reflect on their own experiences and on those of others. However, there are also missed opportunities to develop pupils' spiritual awareness and teachers should now consider completing a whole-school audit to investigate this issue further.

46. The school is very successful in its attempts to regulate the personal behaviour of its pupils and to encourage them to reflect on how their actions may affect others. Pupils are offered many opportunities to consider the principles that distinguish right from wrong. Teachers are good role models and lead by example. The ethos of the school strongly reflects care for others, and both the assemblies and the PSE programme support what the school does in this regard. The fact that the idea for the Mozambique appeal came from the pupils themselves is a testimony to the positive effects of the values of the school.

47. The school's provision for pupils' social development is also very good and the sense of community from both pupils and staff is always evident. Moreover, pupils are actively encouraged to view themselves as part of a wider community, and the charity appeals are very often the result of this realisation. Pupils are given many opportunities to work in pairs in all areas of the curriculum, and they are trusted to behave responsibly at lunchtime when they are allowed into the majority of classrooms. This trust is not misplaced and the mature way in which pupils generally behave is evidence that relationships in the school between pupils and between pupils and staff are very good. The whole-school visit to the Millennium Dome, when over 850 members of the school community enjoyed a successful day in London shows the good level of trust members of the school community have in each other.

48. Provision for pupils' cultural development is good. The humanities department offers pupils many opportunities to attend faith communities and to visit foreign countries. There are regular drama and musical productions and the music department in particular is proud of its multi-cultural curriculum. Displays on the corridors celebrate the features and the successes of other cultures.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

49. The last inspection found that the school set out to provide each pupil with a safe, pleasant and productive working environment. This continues to be the case.

50. Attendance at the school is above the national average, with low levels of unauthorised absence. The school's procedures for monitoring and improving attendance

also continue to be good. Registers are monitored well and issues of concern raised with the appropriate head of year. The school is supported by the education welfare service, which monitors the registers, and an education welfare officer will visit families if requested. Punctuality is monitored closely. Registers are well maintained and marked at the beginning of both the morning and afternoon sessions. During the day lessons begin and end promptly.

51. Procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour are very good. Good behaviour is promoted through the award of merits and certificates. Pupils know the difference between right and wrong. Monitoring of behaviour is carried out by all staff who complete an incident slip when they have concerns. These slips are discussed at the weekly pastoral heads meetings and relevant action is taken and noted. Procedures for eliminating oppressive behaviour are good; the school takes a serious view of any such problems. One of the pupils interviewed indicated that incidents of bullying were not always dealt with as quickly as pupils would like, but they were happy that there were many members of staff to whom they could turn for help and advice, and that incidents were dealt with effectively.

52. Members of staff are very caring; they know and support the pupils well. Form tutors are assigned when pupils arrive at the school in Year 7 and follow their tutor group through the school, thus building good relationships between staff and pupils. A student mentoring system operates for pupils in Year 11.

53. The school's management of health and safety is good, with appropriate procedures in place for checking grounds, buildings and equipment. Risk assessment procedures are in place and there are other systems for monitoring health and safety. There are appropriate arrangements for the provision of first aid with a number of staff trained. There is an unmanned medical room, but members of staff are readily available to monitor the room at all times. The lack of clean shower facilities seen during the week of inspection for pupils in physical education is a health hazard.

54. The school follows the locally agreed procedures for child protection and good procedures are in place. The designated staff is known, and other members of staff are aware of the need to inform them immediately if they have concerns.

55. The school has a clear and precise school assessment policy that provides departments with a framework for assessment and within each department arrangements for the assessment of pupils' work are in place. The procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are very good. The use of assessment to guide planning within the school is, however, variable between departments.

56. Across the school pupils' work is marked diligently and the criteria used for marking are clear and in most departments referenced to National Curriculum levels. In science for example the department uses a range of end of unit tests to monitor and assess pupils' progress and investigations are assessed against a common set of criteria. In religious education the performance of all pupils is monitored carefully through tests and other forms of regular assessment linked to levels which both teachers and pupils record. In history marking to support progress and celebrate achievement is very extensive.

57. A priority for the school is the monitoring of pupils' progress in order to maximise achievement. To achieve this the school has an impressive amount of data and information on all pupils in the school. It provides the school with a detailed picture of the performance of pupils in relation to prior attainment, the potential for achievement and local

and national results. The school's analysis of this information is also impressive. For example, the school monitors the achievement of different cohorts of pupils grouped by ability as well as monitoring differences in the performance of girls and boys.

58. In Key Stage 4 this data is used effectively to set target grades for individual pupils in all the subjects they are studying. This information is used by teachers to monitor progress regularly and the school has a system of mentoring for pupils who, it is felt, are not achieving their full potential or who need further guidance to attain the results that prior assessment indicates they could achieve. In some subjects the target grades are translated into specific curriculum targets for individual pupils. In Key Stage 3, however, the information on pupils' progress and attainment is not yet used consistently and systematically to set targets for pupils. The school is aware of this and is developing its use to improve pupil attainment.

59. In some subjects, for example geography, teachers use information from the assessment procedures to set individual targets for pupils in all year groups. However, the translation of targets into learning paths for individual pupils is not yet secure in all departments.

60. Self-assessment is well established within the school. In physical education, for example, self-assessment booklets provide comments and targets for the reports. In history pupils are required to evaluate their own work. In IT pupils self assess and set targets for their own development from the information gathered on their assessment sheets. Pupils complete a self-evaluation of their progress and achievements for each annual report.

61. Pupils' overall progress and achievements are monitored regularly. In addition to annual reports the teaching staff of each year group meet together to review the progress of each of the pupils in the year group and to produce interim reports. Reports are extensive and fully meet statutory requirements. However, in some subject areas the balance between the commentary on curriculum achievement and the targets to meet future objectives needs further consideration. A comprehensive Record of Achievement that is partly word-processed by the pupils themselves is compiled for each pupil in Year 11.

62. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory. A whole school marking policy is now in place and the extent and use of information to track pupils' progress and attainment have increased. Strategies for target setting and for monitoring and supporting pupils to achieve those targets have been refined and extended. However, in some subjects the use of assessment to inform planning needs further development.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

63. The effectiveness of the schools' links with parents is good. Parents' views of the school are generally good, although responses to the questionnaire and the pre-inspection meeting with parents indicated that there are three areas where some parents expressed concerns. They were unhappy about homework, the information they received and how well the school worked with parents. In the case of homework there were a number of points made, but two of the most common were contradictory, with some parents feeling there was too much homework whilst others felt there was too little. The inspectors judged that homework of appropriate length and content is normally set and marked regularly in most subjects. The nature of the concerns in the other two areas was not made explicit, except for two individual comments on the parents' evenings held in the school to discuss

pupils' progress. The inspection team judged that the information provided for parents is good and that parents generally worked well with the school. An example of this is the appropriate involvement of parents in discussions about how to support pupils with special educational needs. This occurs informally as well as through more formal reviews.

64. The school provides information evenings for parents as their children move through the school and the Parent Teacher Association supports the school well by raising funds for the school's benefit. A home school agreement is in place and the majority of parents have supported the school by signing and returning the agreements. The school is pursuing those, which have not been returned. The school arranges formal consultation evenings for parents, and members of staff are always available for informal discussion. The school provides detailed information on a range of topics as well as a regular newsletter for parents, which gives details of events and what is happening in school. Written annual reports for parents are very good and give parents information about the course being followed, how well pupils are progressing and guidance on how to make further improvement. There is also an opportunity for pupils to undertake a self-assessment.

65. Both the school prospectus, linked to the primary school supplement booklet, and the governors' annual report for parents meet statutory requirements and contain the relevant information.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

66. The school is well led and managed. The headteacher and many of the other senior staff have been at the school for some time and have developed a strong ethos in which each pupil is valued and is encouraged and supported to maximise their potential. This is articulated clearly in the mission statement and is seen in the way all staff and others associated with the school focus on the pupils, their welfare, aspirations and needs. A good balance has been achieved between a caring supportive ethos and the provision of challenge and the encouragement to achieve and take responsibility. Pupils have responded well to this. High and improving standards have been achieved in the GCSE examinations. Expectations are high and pupils generally make good progress. There is a strong emphasis on improving the quality of learning and of teaching. The quality of teaching shows significant improvement since the last inspection and just over two-thirds of lessons are taught well or very well. The quality of learning has improved and is well supported by the very good relationships in the school and the very good attitudes of the great majority of pupils to their learning.

67. The key priorities for inclusion in the next development plan are appropriate and continue to focus on the pupils, their development and improving their achievement. The number of initiatives in the existing institutional development plan has been reduced since the last inspection and their implementation is being effectively managed. The large number of initiatives and the lack of management focus on them were a key issue in the last inspection report. The alignment of departmental plans with the main development thrust still requires further attention as does the need to differentiate between maintenance and development issues. There is a clear and shared commitment to bring about further improvement and the capacity to achieve it.

68. The governors share the aspirations of the headteacher and other senior staff and exhibit a good knowledge of the strengths of the school and the areas that need further development. Information is obtained in a variety of ways, many of which are informal, and through more formal reports from senior staff. Appropriate priorities and targets for the school have been identified and progress towards achieving the priorities in the institutional

development plan is monitored effectively. There is a high level of mutual respect between the senior staff and the governors and the existing informal processes are effective at present. However, the introduction of a more formal and systematic approach to governors accounting for the performance of the school would ensure that this function is not too dependent on personal knowledge and relationships. The formal recognition in the governing body minutes of reports from staff with management responsibilities in the school would be one step in this direction. Governors meet their statutory responsibilities, except for the provision of a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

69. The school undertakes a thorough and valuable analysis of the examination results achieved and effectively monitors pupils' progress in Key Stage 4. Assessment and performance data to predict potential is well used to set targets and bring about further improvement at school and pupil level. Very good use is made of information from standardised tests. This has been a contributory factor in the high and improving standards achieved in the GCSE examinations. The school targets set for GCSE have recently been reviewed and raised to reflect the good progress made in this area. This work is not as consistently well developed at Key Stage 3 with some variation across subjects, and may well be a contributory factor in the decline in the National Curriculum test results in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The school is aware of this and is strengthening its analysis in this area. The monitoring and evaluation of learning and of teaching are very good and provide a strong basis for the school to improve further this aspect of its provision. The evaluation process itself has raised awareness of the characteristics of teaching which bring about effective learning, and this appears to have contributed to improvements in the quality of teaching. The outcomes of the recent programme of lesson observations have not yet impacted on the provision for professional development but there are clear plans for taking this forward, particularly in using the information to improve further the quality of teaching.

70. There is a shared sense of purpose in the school and staff are well focused on bringing about improvements which they feel will benefit the pupils. There is a number of able staff in key management positions across the school and tasks and responsibilities are clearly delegated, and progress is monitored. However, due to illness some key staff were absent for periods in the last year and the school attributes some of the decline in the Key Stage 3 results to this. The leadership and management provided by heads of department are generally good, it is particularly strong in the humanities area and in physical education and is at least satisfactory in all subjects. The line management for departments has been strengthened, a key issue in the last inspection, and the systems are in place to both monitor and support the work of heads of department. The day-to-day organisation of the school is undertaken efficiently and the administrative and office staff make good contributions to this. Staff morale is high and all staff work effectively together.

71. The provision for special educational needs is effectively co-ordinated. There is a strong informal communication system in the school, which underpins the formal procedures. The Code of Practice is in place. There is good liaison and links with professional support agencies. Within the standing committee structure there is now an opportunity to raise and discuss issues relating to learning support across departments.

72. The staff development programme is well planned and the induction arrangements for new staff and newly qualified teachers are very good. The school is linked to Cambridge Institute and effectively supports teachers undergoing initial training. The systems for supporting an effective performance management programme are largely in place and work in this area has begun. The school is, however, waiting for further guidance on the precise way in which this should operate and on the criteria to be used.

73. The finances are effectively and efficiently managed and the school budgets systematically for all expenditure and seeks value for money. The carry forward has reduced significantly since the last inspection and is now very small for a school of this size. The school states that this is due to the small intake in 1996, presently in Year 10, and to the additional expenditure incurred to support the building programmes.

74. Resources are effectively used for the benefit of the pupils. The staff contact ratio is relatively low but this has allowed the programme of lesson observation to proceed, a key priority in the school's development plans. The match of teachers and support staff to the needs of the curriculum is generally good. The last inspection report noted that there was insufficient accommodation to cater for the number of pupils on roll. The £1.5 million building project has provided additional good quality accommodation, and the accommodation overall is now adequate to allow the curriculum to be taught effectively. However, the level of sound from the music department, which is sited next to the languages suite is detrimental to the development of listening and speaking skills in modern foreign languages. The school currently lacks a base other than the special educational needs co-ordinator's office to act as a professional focus for the range of learning support so that staffs' awareness of how other departments have set about the production of differentiated materials can be raised. Learning resources are adequate to support the curriculum and pupils' learning; however, the non-fiction book stock in the library is limited. Some departments make effective use of the library, for example to support course work. The library, as a focal point for the school's reading initiatives, is beginning to show its age. The fabric of the library and the book stock need significant investment.

75. The school is aware of and applies the principles of best value; it provides a good quality service and generally spends its money wisely. It consults effectively and thoughtfully considers the service it provides. Pupils' performance is thoroughly analysed and it has measures in place to determine whether pupils are achieving at appropriate levels. However, its work on identifying and making comparisons with schools in similar circumstances is limited. It effectively seeks to achieve best value for expenditure through careful monitoring of what it spends and processes such as tendering and monitoring the quality and effectiveness of the services it receives.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

76. Sound progress has generally been made since the last inspection, with very good progress in some areas, such as the improvements in the GCSE examination results. There has, however, been a decline in the National Curriculum test results in English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 3. Considerable work has been undertaken on developing strategies to improve the performance of boys and there was a significant improvement in their overall performance in the GCSE examinations in 1999. Their general level of attainment improved both in absolute terms and in relation to the girls, but their attainment in English remains well below that of the girls. The provision for literacy has been a focus in the school over a period of time and a similar sharp focus on numeracy is now required.

77. Below are listed three key issues for action, which should be included in the governors' action plan. These are listed in order of their importance in raising standards in the school. A reference to the main paragraphs in the report where the areas for improvement are discussed is included for each issue.

- (1) Reverse the decline in the levels of attainment in English, mathematics and

science in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 through: (2,93,110)

- strengthening the monitoring of pupils' progress and improving the use of the individual pupil targets set on the basis of predicted potential; (2,58,69,103)
 - ensuring that all lesson planning identifies clear learning objectives to meet the needs of all pupils and that these are shared with the pupils; (30,91,102,120)
 - ensuring curriculum progression from Key Stage 2 and through Key Stage 3. (35,43,92,100,120,121)
- (2) Improve attainment in numeracy by producing a numeracy policy and effectively implementing it across the curriculum. (17,27,101,104)
- (3) Continue to work on raising the levels of attainment of boys in English, particularly at Key Stage 4, through applying the strategies that proved successful in other subjects. (26,79,84,92)

78. In addition to the above the school should consider the following areas of weakness in the report when drawing up their action plan. The need to:

- provide of an Act of Collective Worship for all pupils every day; (36,68)
- ensure the cleanliness of and encourage the use of the showers in physical education; (53,203)
- consider the criteria and the process adopted for identifying pupils for the two ability bands for English and mathematics in Key Stage 4; (36,84)
- provide additional time for religious education to ensure that the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus are met; (36,152,178)
- improve the use of IT to support learning in music, art and modern foreign languages; (28,127,130,181,191,198)
- increase the non-fiction book stock in the library; (74,82)
- continue to work on aligning departmental development plans with the main development thrust in the school; (67)
- continue to improve the provision for spiritual development; (45)
- develop further the use of assessment to inform planning; (55)
- reduce the detrimental effects on the languages department of sounds from the music department. (74,192,198)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

[165]

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

[65]

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
[2.4]	[20.6]	[45.4]	[26.1]	[5.4]	[0]	[0]

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	828	
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	44	

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	13	
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	93	

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	5

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	16
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	21

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.3
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
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	79	64	143

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	46	49	55
	Girls	50	45	48
	Total	96	94	103
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	67(83)	67(71)	73(74)
	National	63(65)	62(60)	55(56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	24(62)	44(54)	29(37)
	National	28(35)	38(36)	23(27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	45	45	45
	Girls	51	46	38
	Total	96	91	83
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	69(74)	65(79)	69(73)
	National	64(61)	64(64)	60(61)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	41(39)	43(66)	27(34)
	National	31(30)	37(37)	28(30)

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	87	73	160

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	50	86	87
	Girls	52	71	71
	Total	102	157	158
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	64(59)	98(96)	99(98)
	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	46(42)
	National	37.8(36.8)

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

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	0
Indian	1
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	2
Chinese	2
White	818
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	1	
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)	48.49
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	26
Total aggregate hours worked per week	393.5

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	71.1
---	------

Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	27.8
Key Stage 4	19.5

Financial information

Financial year	Apr 98 – Mar 99
----------------	-----------------

	£
Total income	1969539
Total expenditure	1956754
Expenditure per pupil	2380
Balance brought forward from previous year	-8044
Balance carried forward to next year	4741

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	829
Number of questionnaires returned	204

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	31	59	9	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	36	57	3	2	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	25	63	4	1	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	18	55	22	4	0
The teaching is good.	23	68	4	1	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	28	55	12	4	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	44	46	7	2	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	48	46	4	1	0
The school works closely with parents.	23	57	14	3	2
The school is well led and managed.	29	60	2	1	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	28	57	7	3	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	27	54	6	1	12

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

ENGLISH

79. In the 1999 National Curriculum tests, standards in English were close to the national average with about two-thirds of pupils achieving Level 5 or above and a quarter of pupils reaching Level 6 and above. The results were well below average when compared to similar schools. Staffing changes and difficulties are a possible reason why results showed a drop from their previous high levels the year before. When considered over a four-year period, standards are well above the national average for both boys and girls. Despite the school's efforts to address the issue, girls continue to outperform boys. Standards of work of the current Year 9 pupils are good.

80. Standards in listening are good. Pupils listen attentively to their teacher and each other and take into account what others are saying. Standards in speaking can also be good. Pupils are confident to put forward their ideas, make an extended response to questions and can take an active part in discussion. They are less confident when asked to present their ideas in a more formal manner. Boys, in particular, tend to use casual informal language in response to a question. For example, one boy described Romeo as 'a user' and it took skilled questioning on the part of the teacher to develop that idea into a more formal response. Speaking and listening are developed well across departments in the school and are an important element in many lessons. Pupils are encouraged to undertake group and co-operative work and to give presentations in many subject areas. Higher attaining pupils were, for example, challenged in one lesson to draw up the criteria for a health trust for treatment that could be provided only for a very limited number of patients.

81. Standards of reading of class texts are good. Pupils read a range of texts including looking at aspects of the media and Shakespeare. They are developing the skill of referring to the text to explain why a particular character acted in a specific way and respond critically, examining in detail the way the author uses language. For example in their analysis of a poem such as 'The Jaguar' pupils are able to identify the poet's imagery and use of, say, alliteration in 'stink of sleepers from breathing straw.' Their skills in identifying layers of meaning are developing well. The school is addressing the development of higher order reading skills across the curriculum and in many subjects pupils are asked to extract information from a variety of sources, including the Internet. The English department has introduced a short silent reading period at the start of every lesson and members of staff encourage pupils to talk about the book they are reading or to explain its cover, for example. Pupils are expected to keep a record of their personal reading but the use of this reading diary and reading time to intervene and suggest pupils move on in their personal reading to more demanding texts is variable and less satisfactory. Consequently some pupils in their personal reading stay at a plateau of familiar authors and, sometimes, relatively undemanding texts.

82. The department is aware of the need to review the range of texts read in Key Stage 3 as a result of the National Literacy strategy in primary schools. The current range of texts is limited in Key Stage 3 and current resources offer very little opportunity to provide additional texts on the same theme or in the same genre to extend the core text being studied. The department is actively considering approaches to encourage reading amongst boys. Lower attaining pupils have school-produced modified texts of an appropriate difficulty available to allow them to access the novel being studied. The department makes

effective use of the library, particularly the fiction stock. Books are grouped on the shelves according to type, as an experiment to encouraging browsing. However, the non-fiction stock in the library is limited. Some departments make effective use of the library, for example to support course work. The library, as a focal point for the school's reading initiatives, is beginning to show its age and looks less welcoming. The fabric of the library and the book stock need significant investment.

83. Standards in writing are good. Drafted work is presented well and pupils are given good opportunities to write for a range of purposes and audiences. Complex punctuation is used to clarify meaning and spelling is generally accurate. Dictionaries and thesauri are not evident in each room. Technical language is displayed well throughout the department along with words commonly misspelled. Throughout the school the use of appropriate technical language is encouraged well.

84. Standards in GCSE examinations are above the national average in English Language and significantly above in English Literature. Nearly two-thirds of the year gained grades in the A*-C range. Almost all pupils in the year group are entered for both examinations and they achieve a grade. For many of the lower attaining pupils this represents a significant achievement. However, the difference between boys' achievement and that of girls is marked. In English Language 75 percent of the girls gained an A*-C grade as against 52 percent of the boys. In English Literature 76 percent of girls scored a grade in the range A*-C as compared to 52 percent of boys. Nationally girls outperform boys in English by approximately 16 percent and in both 1998 and 1999 the difference exceeded this. The picture is further complicated because the attainment of both girls and boys in English Language is significantly below that of some other subjects, such as the humanities, science and mathematics. The top set in English has approximately equal numbers of boys and girls. Pupils are allocated to two ability bands principally on the basis of their ability in mathematics. The school needs to review whether the banding and setting in English reflects pupils ability in that subject, as this may be a contributory factor in the element of under-achievement of girls in English compared to their performance elsewhere in the school.

85. Standards of work seen in the current Year 11 are good. Listening skills are good in English and across the school. Speaking skills, in discussion and informal responses are good. Pupils take an active part in discussions. They are able, for example, to give a presentation about a character in 'To Kill a Mockingbird' or to discuss the morality within the poem and the implications of 'sometimes he did this and sometimes he did that.' Even very able boys, however, tend to disguise their ability by using a casual style.

86. Standards in reading of the set texts are good. Pupils are able to analyse a poem effectively although the sensitivity and depth of response and indeed the affection towards the work vary with ability. There is little indication of pupils reading texts beyond the examination requirements. Across the school, reading is encouraged and the ability to synthesise information from a variety of sources is actively encouraged in many, but not all, subjects.

87. Standards of drafted written work are generally good. Pupils write with fluency and accuracy. Work is effectively presented, often word-processed. Pupils are able to argue a case and present their ideas lucidly. The work includes a range of writing styles. The writing is specifically directed to fulfilling the examination requirements.

88. Since the previous inspection the department has worked on the particular areas identified for improvement. The department is making better use of National Curriculum

test information and work is moderated across the department. Members of staff have a good awareness of the specific needs of individuals with special educational needs. Differentiation of work is mainly addressed through the level of support and by setting tasks that can be undertaken at a variety of levels. Some units of work do provide for explicit differentiation.

89. Behaviour is generally very good. Pupils work well in groups. Their attitudes are generally good, and often very good throughout the school. They enjoy the subject and want to do well and there is a genuine concern about meeting course work deadlines. In classes, particularly in the higher attaining band, a rigorous work ethic has developed or is developing. However, in one class, for example, a significant number of pupils had forgotten to bring their anthology to the lesson. Course work places significant demands on pupils in Year 11, which is a particularly busy year.

90. There is a difference of attitude in the two ability bands in Key Stage 4, particularly in the attitude of the boys. Whilst attitudes are almost never less than satisfactory, in a few of the classes containing lower attaining pupils there is a sub-culture, particularly in Year 10, where amongst the boys it is 'not cool to be clever.' If a boy gives a good response to a question there is an undercurrent of a sneer. Whilst this is never malicious and often humorous, it fuels the climate where pupils do not want to be seen to achieve in public. In private the same boys are often working hard at their course work but are not willing to reveal this in public. In some cases this culture can lead to girls also being subject to comment, for example, as they are about to make a presentation. It is seldom so overt that the teacher can make an appropriate intervention but it is there, and some of the girls seem somewhat resigned to the inevitability of it.

91. The quality of learning is good in English throughout all years. Pupils make good progress. The oldest pupils bring their maturity to the lesson. The main reason why pupils are making good progress in developing their English skills and the confidence to express their views or opinions is the consistent challenging nature of the work, the high expectations and the progressive nature of the courses. Teachers have good subject knowledge and good management skills. They are well prepared and in the main have clear objectives. They know what they want the pupils to learn from the session, not just what the pupil is going to do. These objectives, however, along with the key vocabulary, often a feature of the targets for pupils with special educational needs, are not always shared with the pupils. Many older pupils have developed the attitudes associated with mature students. Often it is the skill of the teacher, which has made them complicit partners in the learning process, engaging in the work and developing the self-motivation and the self-discipline to want to do well. Teachers' relationships with the pupils, upon which much of this depends, are always good and support learning. Teachers listen particularly well to pupils, valuing their contribution and enhancing their sense of self-esteem. The marking of pupils' work provides clear targets on how to improve. Underlying the work of the staff is a deep and shared commitment to the pupils and their success. In the main pupils understand and value this so that the inter-relationship is built on genuine mutual respect.

92. The department is aware that because of the National Literacy strategy in primary schools there is a need to review the units of work in Key Stage 3 in order to prevent overlap. This will have resource implications. The department would also benefit from visiting the primary schools to observe the work on literacy, particularly in Year 6, to ensure that expectations remain appropriately challenging. The development of the work in Key Stage 3 and working towards ensuring consistency of standards in the National Curriculum tests is a clear focus for the department along with raising boys' achievement at Key Stage

4. In addressing boys' attainment in the lower school, the department should consider timetable arrangements that allow for different forms of grouping including setting.

MATHEMATICS

93. At the end of Key Stage 3 results in the National Curriculum tests in 1999 were close to the national average for those pupils attaining Level 5 or above and above the national average for those pupils attaining Level 6 or above. Over the period 1996 to 1999 the average attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 of boys and girls was similar, with both well above the national averages. However, over this period there has been a decline in the level of attainment in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 3. The average points score attained in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 was above the national average but well below that in similar schools and below that attained in the school in the previous two years.

94. Standards in the classroom at Key Stage 3 are good. By the end of Key Stage 3 most pupils understand inverse and direct proportions. They can draw appropriate graphs to illustrate these relationships and they are able to draw graphs using the four quadrants. More able pupils can recognise non-linear relationships by inspecting tables of values and explain why the relationship is non-linear.

95. Standards by the end of Key Stage 4 are good. The proportion of pupils achieving GCSE grades A* -C in mathematics in 1999 was well above the national averages, with boys achieving slightly better results than girls. However, in the previous year girls had achieved better results than boys and over the two years there is no significant difference between the results of boys and girls. Throughout the period 1996 to 1999 the proportion of pupils attaining GCSE grades A* -C in mathematics has been consistent and well above national standards. Over this period the results of both boys and girls were also significantly above the mean of the results achieved by pupils at GCSE level in all subjects within the school.

96. By the end of Year 11 most pupils are able to factorise quadratic expressions. The more able pupils are able to simplify complicated algebraic fractions that include quadratic expressions. These pupils are able to use the cosine rule correctly and use trigonometry to work out unknown angles and sides in three-dimensional solids.

97. Overall pupils' attitudes to mathematics are very good. In Key Stage 4 the pupils show good work habits, so that learning is good even where teaching is satisfactory. In general behaviour is very good. In most lessons pupils quickly settle down and show good interest. Pupils listen carefully to the teacher. When required pupils work collaboratively, supporting each other's learning.

98. Pupils make particularly good progress through Key Stage 4 and the quality of learning is good. In class, for example, more able pupils in Year 10 are able to solve simultaneous equations both algebraically and using graphs, less able pupils in this year group can work out the value of sines and cosines given the lengths of the sides in a right angled triangle.

99. Learning in Key Stage 3 is also good. Evidence from commercial tests and Key Stage 2 results indicate that on entry the spread of ability is in line with expectations in a normal population. In Year 7 pupils have opportunities to develop good learning skills through working independently and through working at a pace, which is challenging and appropriately linked to their ability. Pupils in Year 7 know the names of regular polyhedra and they recognise acute, obtuse and reflex angles.

100. In Year 8 more able pupils can draw conversion graphs and they use them to answer questions. Other pupils understand the connection between the lengths of sides in a right-angled triangle. However, teaching in Year 8, particularly for middle ability pupils, does not take sufficient account of the work covered in Year 7, and this impacts on expectations and progress through Key Stage 3. In one class in Year 8 that was dealing with simple fractions, there was an imbalance between the need to consolidate work already covered in both Year 7 and in the primary sector and the need to move on to new knowledge and skills.

101. The numeracy skills that are demonstrated by pupils are variable. Pupils in a middle ability mathematics group in Year 10, for example, felt they needed to use their calculator to work out 3×36 . Pupils of similar ability in Year 7 were insecure when asked to estimate the lengths of the sides of the room in which they were sitting, but were more secure when asked to multiply numbers up to 10. In mathematics the policy to develop and consolidate pupils' numeracy skills is not sufficiently structured to ensure regular consolidation or appropriate and progressive development. The implications for the mathematics department and for the school of the introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy have not yet been fully considered. In other subjects pupils' numeracy skills are variable. In geography pupils use their skills to draw graphs appropriately. In science pupils can manipulate formulae but some members of a higher ability group could not multiply and divide simple numbers without a calculator. The school has undertaken an audit of mathematics across the curriculum but there is currently no whole school strategy for developing pupils' numeracy skills. The work done by the school in developing pupils' literacy skills provides a model for the school to develop strategies for raising achievement in numeracy.

102. The quality of teaching in most lessons seen was satisfactory or better, three lessons were very good and two lessons were less than satisfactory. All teachers have very good subject knowledge. Almost all teachers manage pupils well and insist on high standards and good behaviour. Where teaching is good or very good teachers have high expectations of the pupils and they plan and use methods that both challenge and stimulate the learning of the pupils. On the other hand where teaching is satisfactory, although strengths outweigh weaknesses lessons have only moderate pace and expectation. In these lessons teachers are often not using questioning sufficiently to support learning or to check pupils' understanding. Pupils are grouped on the basis of their attainment from the end of Year 8. In some lessons, particularly those in Year 8 and Year 9, planning for the range of ability within the group is underdeveloped. In many lessons the teacher's lesson plan contained a clear statement of the learning objectives. However, these objectives were not usually used to explain to pupils the purpose of the lesson or to review and evaluate with pupils their learning at the end of the lesson.

103. Teachers diligently set and mark homework and classwork. On occasions, the homework set requires pupils to finish work started in the class and as a result the amount of work to be done at home can vary between pupils. Teachers maintain comprehensive records of pupils' performance in tests and other assessments, and of the work completed. This information is used to encourage and to support pupils to achieve their potential, particularly at the end of Key Stage 4. However, evidence from, for example, reports indicates that targets, based on the data available, are not consistently set to provide pupils with subject specific learning objectives aimed at raising individual achievement. The use of information on attainment to set targets for individual pupils in Key Stage 3 is at an early stage of development.

104. Learning support assistants work effectively in the classroom supporting both individual pupils with special educational needs and other pupils according to their

immediate need. However, their work lacks specific focus since the individual pupils whom they are supporting do not have targets within their Educational Development Plan which relate to numeracy.

105. The displays in the rooms provide an environment that is conducive to learning mathematics. The department is currently reviewing its schemes of work. All aspects of mathematics are planned for and covered in the teaching programme, and there is a structured programme of investigative work throughout both key stages that prepares pupils for the coursework element of the GCSE examination. Some pupils in Year 10, for example, had researched the connection between matrices and transformations in two-dimensional space. Pupils in Year 7 had undertaken surveys, presenting their findings in a variety of ways and interpreting the results with explanations.

106. Some classrooms have a computer and there is a range of programmes available that can be used to consolidate pupils' learning. One pupil, for example, was working on the computer to consolidate his numeracy skills. Pupils had used computers in a variety of ways in their GCSE coursework or to help complete investigations.

107. The head of department monitors teaching within the department but strategies for monitoring pupils' learning and progress are underdeveloped. There is, for example, currently no central departmental record of pupils' progress. Currently the head of department has a bigger teaching load than the heads of department of the other core subjects as well as having duties beyond the department.

108. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory. During this period the department has had to cope with a number of staffing difficulties. Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are high compared to other subjects and to national expectations. Standards at Key Stage 3 although showing a decline over the past three years remain above national averages. Learning is good and the attitudes of pupils to mathematics are very good. Most teaching is satisfactory or better. The timetable ensures an appropriate spread of mathematics lessons through the week for all pupils. The marking of pupils' work is consistent. There has been some progress in relation to planning for different ability groups within classes, particularly in Year 7 and Key Stage 4, but further work is required in this area.

SCIENCE

109. Attainment in science, particularly in terms of the results in GCSE, is a strength of the school, and this is recognised by both parents and pupils.

110. Results in the 1999 end of Key Stage 3 assessments show that a significant proportion of pupils performed well above the national average at Level 5 and above, whilst at Level 6 they are above the national average. Attainment has remained above the national average for a number of years. However, pupils' level of attainment in the National Curriculum tests has declined at a greater rate than is the case nationally. Even so, the average National Curriculum points score in 1999 was still above the national average and broadly in line with that of pupils from similar schools. Pupils' attainment in science in the end of Key Stage 3 tests in 1999 was better than that for English or mathematics.

111. Achievement at the end of Key Stage 4 in the GCSE double science examination is very good. GCSE results have remained above the national average for the past three years. Both boys and girls do particularly well in science, and perform better than in the other subjects they take. There is clear evidence that boys have improved their performance in science, closing the gap between them and the girls. Previously girls had

out-performed boys by a significant margin. Standards in science by the end of the key stage remain well above both the national average and those of pupils from similar schools.

112. Pupils' levels of attainment in the work seen and in lessons in Key Stage 3, particularly for those pupils in Year 9 close to the end of the key stage, are above average. In half of the lessons seen, the majority of pupils are working to levels above expectations. This is exemplified by a Year 9 problem-solving lesson, where pupils were able to calculate the densities of a number of solutions from measuring the mass and volume and use this information to calibrate a straw float acting as a hydrometer. From the information obtained they were able to find the density and concentration of salt in seawater.

113. *"The teacher builds on pupils' previous experiences and learning; his expectations of pupils and their ability to manipulate apparatus and solutions are high. By the end of the lesson, the majority of pupils had found out sufficient information to plot a graph and to interpret this to find the concentration of the seawater.....A significant number of pupils are working at Level 6 and many had show good gains in their levels of attainment since Key Stage 2."*

114. Pupils' attainment is equally good by the end of Key Stage 4 across the range of knowledge based attainment targets. This was particularly the case in areas where there are good quality demonstrations as in the work on electrolysis and also in a Year 11 biology class on genetics, which built on prior work on natural selection and selective breeding.

115. *"Pupils responded well and were making good progress in working out genotypes and phenotypes from given data. Work was appropriately matched to their ability levels and provided a reasonable level of challenge for the great majority. All showed good achievement, and were working at levels that should lead to the attainment of the higher GCSE grades'.*

116. The high levels of attainment seen in most pupils' work at Key Stage 4 are consistent with the high attainment seen in the GCSE examinations in the past. The department stresses the importance of literacy and numeracy and the use of information technology within lessons. Pupils make good progress in using formulae and statistical information to consolidate scientific understanding. Pupils of all abilities and across all year groups are encouraged to research, and some pupils provide good quality reports on various topics from a wide variety of data sources. However, the development of pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are not explicitly planned for within all the topics in the current schemes of work. In Key Stage 3 the introduction of thinking skills, the changes made to end-of-unit tests and the focus on target setting are beginning to have a marked effect on improving attainment, most notably in the test scores. An example from a lesson focusing on observations and explanations of chemical reactions supports this.

117. *"A significant proportion of pupils are able to respond to the teacher's questioning and provide explanations as to what happens to the wax on a lighted candle. They can make accurate observations and describe the reactions of heating copper and sulphur and mixing magnesium with sulphuric acid. Very good learning is taking place through a range of well-structured practical activities and focused questioning. Attainment is above expectations for the majority."*

118. However, in many lessons and in end-of-unit tests, there are limited opportunities for pupils to explain their answers through open-ended questioning or by providing extended written responses. This is particularly evident in pupils' investigative work where the weakest area is their ability to evaluate experimental findings using appropriate

scientific knowledge and terms.

119. High standards are also evident in pupils' attitudes to science. In three-quarters of lessons seen, pupils have good, very good or excellent attitudes to work, shown for example by the way in which they set up apparatus and clear away at the end of each practical session. From Year 7 onwards, pupils are gaining in confidence in setting up and using apparatus. They work safely and very effectively in small groups, supporting each other. Most pupils show initiative and enjoyment in science supported by the very good relationships that exist both between staff and pupils and amongst the pupils themselves.

120. In over half the lessons seen the quality of teaching in both key stages was good or better. This has a positive impact on promoting pupils' learning of both scientific skills and knowledge. The good relationships teachers have with pupils, coupled with their good subject knowledge and effective planning and preparation, provide good support for pupils' learning. Intervention and support for pupils, including those with special educational needs, are good and enable pupils to apply their knowledge to solve problems and make good progress. One of the improvements since the last inspection is the inclusion of the focused 'learning experience grids' that provide objectives at three different levels. Where these are applied effectively to vary the teaching strategies, so that the activities focus on meeting individual pupils' needs, there is an improvement in the overall learning. However, there is inconsistency both in the application of these objectives in lessons, and in the focus in units of work given to the planning of experiences for pupils of differing ability. In some cases objectives are shared with pupils but pupils do not always know why they are undertaking a task or what is expected of them. Most lessons have a common focus, and in some classes that contain pupils from a wide range of abilities there are sometimes limited opportunities for pupils to extend or consolidate their learning. In the science lessons with a focus on developing the ability to think, there are some very good examples of teachers providing support and encouragement, which promotes learning at a good pace. However, in Key Stage 3 as a whole, insufficient use is made of pupils' Key Stage 2 learning experiences, although there is very effective tracking of pupils on-going performance in science tests. By contrast in Key Stage 4 teachers very effectively build on the work in Key Stage 3 taking account of both pupils' prior attainment and the nature of their experiences.

121. Departmental management is generally good. The practical work is well organised and a credit to the technician and to the effectiveness of the current systems. The key areas that need to be managed are effectively delegated, although there is at present an imbalance in the workloads of some staff. The change of syllabus in Key Stage 4 has enabled teachers' subject knowledge to be used to good effect. Communication through the weekly notices is good and the regular department meetings are clearly focused on pupils' learning. During these meetings there is good quality discussion about pupils' progress and opportunities for staff to standardise and moderate assessments. The department makes good use of information and communication technology in both supporting pupils' learning and in mapping their progress. There has been a good focus on teaching and learning with a programme of regular monitoring and evaluation of pupils' progress. However, the findings of the evaluations are not consistently translated into action for improvement. This is particularly the case in Key Stage 3 where some planned topics do not always take account of pupils' learning experiences in Key Stage 2. Overall the science department is effective in providing good quality science education for the pupils.

ART

122. The overall standards that pupils achieve at the end of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 at ages 14 and 16 are at or above the level expected for pupils of the same age nationally. Pupils achieve well in art in both key stages.

123. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C in GCSE examinations in 1999 was above the national averages. These results show an improving trend from previous years. The attainment of girls, however, is higher than that of boys. The department is aware of this and continues to investigate ways of raising boys' achievement.

124. Standards seen at the end of Key Stage 3 in Year 9 are in line with or above the level for pupils of the same age nationally. Pupils frequently use vocabulary specific to the subject, for example in discussions with their teachers and fellow pupils when reviewing their work and relating it to the work of other artists and designers. Sketchbooks are used to good advantage to reinforce and support the work undertaken in class. They are regularly marked and show progress over time through the varied nature of media used and increasingly adventurous experimentation. Pupils' skills in three-dimensional work are less well developed.

125. Standards seen by the end of Key Stage 4 in Year 11 are good with the majority of pupils achieving standards that are at or above the level expected of pupils nationally. Sketchbooks continue to be used well and support pupils' examination work. Pupils are very willing to discuss their work using the subject specialist vocabulary. This was seen, for example, in a whole class discussion on reviewing approaches to solving an examination question, where pupils related their ideas to the work of surrealist and pop art painters such as Magritte and Andy Warhol.

126. Pupils in both key stages with special educational needs are achieving satisfactory standards, but the department needs to ensure that pupils of all abilities can understand the sheets of information it provides to help pupils with their projects.

127. The quality of the specialist teaching in both key stages is always good and in some cases it is very good. Teachers have good relationships with pupils, which encourages learning within an ordered environment. Lesson plans are clear and the objectives of the lessons and the ongoing project are made clear to pupils both at the beginning and end of lessons. Good use is made of the work of artists, for example in a study of the Expressionists as part of a portrait project, and the displays within the art rooms reinforce this. Although examples of the use of computers to support home research were evident, particularly in sketchbooks, there was no evidence of them being used to support in-class learning. When non-specialist supply teachers cover for absences the quality of teaching is less effective. Although there is no formal art club, the art rooms are open for pupils to work in at lunchtimes and after school. The department needs to ensure adequate supervision so that health and safety considerations are taken fully into account at lunchtimes.

128. The attitudes and behaviour of pupils are consistently good. Pupils show an enthusiasm for and pride in their work and are considerate to others. This behaviour makes a positive contribution to their learning.

129. The subject is well managed. Regular departmental meetings celebrate success and identify areas for growth. The department maintains a visiting artist programme and links with local primary schools. It has worked hard at implementing a consistent marking

policy with criteria that are understood by pupils. Work is marked regularly using these criteria but pupils should be given more guidance on how to improve their work. The department is investigating ways in which the information gained from marking projects and sketchbooks can be used to monitor, evaluate and improve pupils' performance. Display in the art rooms is good and helps celebrate pupils' achievements; it supports the teaching and informs pupils' understanding. For example, many displays also contain subject specific vocabulary such as tone, texture or the names of artists and designers.

130. The subject has made sound progress since the last inspection. Pupils GCSE results have improved considerably and the department continues to evaluate strategies to address the underachievement of boys at GCSE. However, it needs to ensure that computers are used to enhance learning and that support materials are produced in a form that can be understood by all learners.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

131. Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is mainly good. From Year 7 pupils make good progress in resistant materials, food and textiles in both the designing and making aspects of the subject. They are able to describe their tasks and the processes used with clarity and understanding. Pupils experience a suitable balance of design and make activities throughout the key stage. They use a range of common tools, utensils, equipment and machines with competence in a safe and responsible way and are confident in choosing and using these resources. Their technical language and communication skills are also developing in line with the breadth of experience they gain.

132. Throughout Key Stage 3 pupils develop a practical approach to problem solving in the implementation of designing and making for different purposes and in different contexts. These include designing and making a kite using construction techniques with fabrics, a new food product and a nightlight using electrical circuits and box construction in wood and plastic. Pupils showed sound skills and understanding in selecting and using tools for wood, metal and plastics, food preparation equipment and in the basic use of sewing machines. Pupils showed the ability to use resources effectively, make choices and investigate and use a range of communication techniques, and this is integral to the learning process in design and technology.

133. At the end of Key Stage 4 pupils' attainment is mainly good and their results in GCSE subjects are above the national average. Throughout the key stage pupils develop a sound understanding of the basic design and make processes and can communicate their ideas well both graphically and through discussion and written description. Pupils design and make with a clear understanding of the technical processes involved. They are able to apply their knowledge and skills productively and show high levels of competence in investigating and implementing their ideas for designs. In some cases their practical making skills are very strong.

134. Pupils throughout both the key stages make good progress overall. Where they are suitably challenged by the task and clearly understand the objectives of the lesson, then pace and purpose are more consistently of good quality. Pupils show sound, and often good, levels of skill in research and investigation activities in relation to design.

135. The design and technology curriculum is carefully planned, and the well-prepared schemes of work ensure a suitably broad and balanced programme for pupils. Assessment and record keeping are well managed and teachers develop a clear knowledge of pupils' ability and attainment. Pupils' progress is carefully tracked and the information and data available from the system are used to inform teaching and planning and to identify strengths and weaknesses. Teachers provide ongoing assessment as pupils make progress through their practical work.

136. The quality of teaching in the lessons seen was rarely less than satisfactory with well over half of the lessons being good or very good. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subject are mainly good and where development needs are identified they are suitably addressed.

137. Where teaching is strongest a good balance of interaction with pupils is maintained, the lessons are not over-directive and pupils are encouraged to take an appropriate level of responsibility for their own learning. Throughout all aspects of the subject, nearly all lessons are consistently well structured and organised and pupil management is good. A range of teaching approaches is used. These were largely suitable for the context of the lessons although on the few occasions where the teacher was too dominant, pupils became more passive in their response and the pace of their work was reduced.

138. The overall response of pupils is very good. They behave well, are interested in their designs and show positive interest in their practical work. Pupils with special educational needs are suitably integrated into the classroom activities and play a full and active part in lessons.

139. The department is well led and the overall management and co-ordination of learning and teaching in design and technology are good, and take appropriate account of progression and continuity within the carefully planned curriculum. Significant progress has been made since the last inspection. There is a clearly defined development plan, assessment procedures have been strengthened and they now form a very strong feature in the teaching and learning programme.

DRAMA

140. A small sample of lessons, representative of the work across the school, was seen.

141. In the 1999 GCSE examinations in drama, the first year the school took them, 48 percent of pupils gained an A* to C pass as against 67 percent nationally. However about double the national average was entered for the examination. Staffing difficulties experienced by the school in the subject at this time may have depressed the results.

142. Standards in drama by the end of Year 9 are good. Pupils are developing their skill with the medium and are able to shape, refine and present their ideas well, for example, in their presentation work on Lowry. They are developing their ability to sustain a role for example, and build tension and atmosphere. A Year 8 class explored the plot and motivation of the characters in Macbeth using a variety of techniques. The work in Year 11 is good and appropriate to the higher grades in GCSE. Pupils are disciplined in their approach and have a respect for the subject. They are able to improvise and respond to the teacher in role, making suggestions, which might improve the performance.

143. Across the school attitudes in the subject are very good. Pupils respond well to the various exercises; they relate to the characters and sustain their concentration and focus

on the work. They listen carefully to the teacher as they are reminded of the criteria for their performance. With the older pupils there is a mature teacher-pupil relationship, which is supportive of learning. Pupils are enthusiastic and engaged by the activities and work well within groups in a disciplined fashion, often creating order out of a jumble of ideas. Pupils are inclusive, they accept the responsibility that they are a group and that they have to work together if they are to succeed. They work with maturity alongside an adult learning support assistant. Their positive attitudes to the subject have clearly been shaped over time by teaching, which sets high standards and appropriate challenge and which ensures that all pupils make good progress. Pupils gain an evident sense of success from the subject and from the opportunities presented to create original ideas and to refine these within a group structure.

144. The quality of teaching is good and often very good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and present the work with flair, imagination and enthusiasm, which motivates the pupils. Class management skills are very good. Pupils respond to the challenge of the work well. Expectations are high but appropriate. Questioning skills are good, challenging pupils to think about the task and encouraging them to develop a deeper response or a richer idea or to clarify the purpose of a scene. Specific skills and techniques are used effectively to broaden the pupils' range of dramatic experience and these later emerge in the pupils' own work. Teachers make good interventions in group work, engaging with the quality and creative ideas inherent in the piece. Teachers also show a good awareness of the range of ability in the classes and provide support or challenge as appropriate. They have a good knowledge of the individual education plans of the pupils with special educational needs and this knowledge is reflected in the planning.

145. The teacher in charge of the subject has only been at the school a relatively short time and has a clear awareness of what needs to be done with regard to reviewing the units of work and developing resources to support them. There is a strong sense of shared values and teamwork amongst those teaching the subject.

HUMANITIES

146. The humanities department seeks to investigate and analyse the human world, its relationship with the natural world and the past. The department includes geography, history and religious education. In addition, there are elements of sociology in Key Stage 4.

147. Pupils are taught in mixed-attainment form groups in Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 4 there is a compulsory GCSE course in integrated humanities and, again, groups comprise pupils of all attainment levels. In addition, pupils are able to opt for a GCSE examination course in history, geography or religious education.

148. At the end of Key Stage 3, pupil's attainment is above national expectations in history, geography and religious education. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 in GCSE Integrated Humanities is well above national norms, with 70 percent of pupils achieving grades A*-C grades compared to 42 percent nationally. Over the past three years, there has been a gradual rise in the percentage of pupils gaining the higher grades and boys' performance has improved markedly.

149. Standards of behaviour and the attitudes displayed by pupils at both key stages are overall very good and, in some cases, excellent. One of the objectives of the humanities department is to fascinate their pupils in the subject matter. The department is certainly succeeding and most pupils thoroughly enjoy the work. In addition, very good relationships exist. Pupils display very mature approaches to study. They have real confidence in and respect for their teachers and they work together very well.

150. The quality of teaching is a major strength of the humanities department. In Key Stage 3 teaching is satisfactory or better in 95 percent of lessons and in almost two-thirds it is good, very good or excellent. In Key Stage 4, teaching is never less than good, and in three-quarters of lessons it is very good. Lessons are a constant dialogue between teachers and pupils. Class control is of a high order and teacher support for all pupils is most impressive. Teachers seek to ensure that pupils make progress both academically and socially, and they employ relevant teaching methodologies, sometimes with breathtaking pace, to ensure that all pupils are challenged, sensitively and realistically, to achieve the highest standards.

151. The quality of pupils' learning experiences is, therefore, very high. Pupils are able to assimilate information very quickly and apply it to good effect in new situations. They are also skilled in the accurate use of terminology related to all component parts of the course. In Year 10, pupils are able to give accurate information, supported by evidence and illustrated with sophisticated historical and geographical language about the division of Germany at the end of the Second World War. They can discuss different political ideologies and challenge each other's views on communism and democracy. In Year 11, they can define ageism, give concrete examples of its excesses and present relevant information confidently and effectively to their classmates. Also in Year 11, they can make moving comments about environmental pollution. One female pupil described the North Sea as "beautiful, delicate and irreplaceable" prior to wholesale dumping of effluent. She went on to say that it was now "a dustbin of horrors." It is hardly surprising that pupils' personal studies in Year 11 are of the highest calibre.

152. The humanities curriculum at both key stages is generally broad and balanced, and meets the needs of all pupils. However, the department is now looking at ways to increase time for religious education in order to fulfil the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. In all three subjects at Key Stage 3 and in the elements of the integrated scheme at Key Stage 4, teachers place emphasis on pupils thinking for themselves and sharing their ideas, supported by evidence, with each other. The department takes literacy very seriously and is also doing much to develop pupils' skills in information technology. Departmental documentation is used effectively to guide the work of the department. The department puts into practice what it believes; the accessibility to all of the humanities curriculum is ensured by teaching methods which meet the learning needs of every pupil and also by the dignity and care with which each individual, pupil and teacher, is treated.

153. The humanities department makes a profound contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural developments of the pupils in its care. Pupils are engaged and motivated by the subject matter and they are encouraged to act in a mature and sensible way by teachers who lead by example.

154. The department has made very good progress since the last inspection. Examination results are now well above national expectations. Schemes of work have been updated and teachers are now much more aware of strategies to enhance the learning opportunities of their pupils.

155. The head of the humanities department leads and manages the area with skill and verve. She and her department fully support the ethos of the school and all teachers care deeply for their pupils and for their colleagues. Teachers share ideas, support each other and speak highly of the industry and commitment of their colleagues. They also give freely of their time to advise pupils on how they may make further progress. The learning resources are barely adequate, but are augmented by the industry of all teachers who work

long and hard to prepare materials in order to enhance teaching and learning. Accommodation is very good and the display in classrooms and around the humanities area is excellent. The department is well placed for the future development of humanities at the school.

GEOGRAPHY

156. In Key Stage 3 geography is studied within the humanities faculty. In Key Stage 4 the humanities course is part of the core curriculum and pupils may also opt to study geography as a separate subject.

157. In the 1999 teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3, the proportion of pupils attaining the national benchmark of Level 5 was above that expected nationally. The proportion of pupils achieving higher levels was also above that found nationally. In 1999 the percentage of pupils gaining passes at grades A*-C in the GCSE examinations was high in comparison to the national average. All pupils entered achieved passes in the A*-G range. Because geography is included in the humanities curriculum, the number of pupils opting to study the subject separately is relatively small and they tend to be higher attaining pupils. Attainment is high in comparison to schools with pupils from similar backgrounds and in 1999 was above that of all other subjects in the school.

158. Inspection evidence indicates that attainment is above that expected for pupils of the same age by the end of Key Stage 3, and it is well above the national average by the end of Key Stage 4. There are no significant differences in attainment between boys and girls. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress and attain high standards in relation to their prior ability. Attainment has risen over time.

159. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils have a good factual knowledge of the topics they have covered and competently use a wide range of geographical vocabulary. The strategies used by the teachers strongly encourage the development in pupils of the skills of investigation, enquiry and independent learning that are crucial to their success at GCSE. Pupils in Year 8, for example, are able to investigate and understand the reasons for the decline in farmers' incomes in some parts of Britain. They can understand the need for diversification and the methods by which it may be achieved as well as the changes that diversification brings to the local economy and environment. In their work on rivers, pupils in Year 9 can explain not only the physical processes at work in river valleys, but also how those processes affect the physical nature of the landscape and the environment as well as the subsequent land use in the area by people today.

160. By the end of Key Stage 4, the good basic skills and vocabulary learnt in Key Stage 3 have been further developed. Pupils have a wide and detailed factual knowledge of the topics they study for GCSE. They are able to work well independently and pupils in Year 11, for instance, produce high quality examples of carefully researched extended writing resulting from their field course trip to Berlin. Pupils are able to use their factual knowledge to draw on examples from all over the world to illustrate the results of industrial and economic developments. Year 10 pupils, for example, can use examples of hydro electric power schemes from a number of countries to show the economic and environmental benefits and the disadvantages that result from such schemes.

161. The subject makes a good contribution to literacy in the school. Pupils develop their speaking skills well, often making group presentations of their work to the rest of the class. They are encouraged to produce high quality written work with a good standard of

presentation. Geography also makes a good contribution to the development of numeracy. Pupils routinely use a number of different types of graph and different styles of presentation when handling the data they have obtained on trips and field courses. There are a number of computers and printers readily available and pupils of all ages make use of them to word-process some of their work and to produce diagrams and graphs especially in their case studies and field course work.

162. Overall, the quality of teaching in both key stages is good. There is good, very good or excellent teaching in nearly half of the lessons. There was unsatisfactory teaching in only one of the lessons seen during the inspection. In this lesson the teacher failed to check thoroughly that pupils had actually understood what they were supposed to learn. Conversations with the pupils during the lesson indicated substantial gaps in their knowledge and understanding. In a subsequent lesson the teacher's techniques were adjusted to ensure that pupils understood the concepts being taught. Where teaching is at its best, the lessons are carefully planned to ensure that pupils have a good body of factual knowledge, and they are also encouraged to think about and investigate the issues involved. Teachers are particularly skilled in the use of question and answer strategies to draw out pupils' ideas and increase their knowledge. All the teachers have very good class control that is achieved without fuss. There are very good relationships between pupils and with their teachers and this combination provides a secure working atmosphere where pupils feel confident in both their work and the very good subject knowledge of their teachers. This has a positive effect on attainment. Relevant homework is set regularly. Behaviour in lessons is very good and pupils have positive attitudes to work. The good teaching and pupils' mature and sensible approach to their work are strong contributory factors to the high standards achieved in geography.

163. The subject makes a very good contribution to both pupils' personal development and to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In most lessons pupils have opportunities to reflect on their environment and in many lessons they are able to appreciate the wonders of nature and of the world. This was seen in Year 7 lessons, for example, where pupils were studying the causes and distribution of volcanoes and were able to appreciate the power of volcanic activity through watching videos. A strong moral dimension is found in many lessons and pupils are taught not only right from wrong but also care and consideration for one another. All of the adults provide good role models and show genuine care for both the academic and personal development of the pupils. This is a great strength of the subject. In lessons pupils have opportunities to work in groups and to take part in discussions and presentations. These contribute to their social development. There are a number of field courses during the year and an educational visit to Berlin. These make a substantial contribution, also, to pupils' social development and to their cultural education.

164. The scheme of work and the departmental handbook are comprehensive and provide a detailed and progressive programme for the pupils. There are highly developed procedures in place for assessment, and very good use is made of the data provided to track pupils' attainment and progress, set targets for the subject and for individual pupils, and to identify aspects of the curriculum which may need development. The classrooms and corridors are enhanced by high quality displays of pupils' work, which help to enrich the educational experience. Resources for the subject are adequate, overall, but more up-to-date textbooks are needed in sufficient quantity to avoid pupils having to share on some occasions. The subject head of department and the head of humanities have shown excellent joint leadership in further raising the already high standards indicated in the previous report. The issues raised in the previous report concerning presentation of work, marking and assessment procedures have been fully addressed, and the subject has made

very good progress since that time.

HISTORY

165. Attainment on entry to the school is in line with national expectations but at the end of Key Stage 3 it is above national expectations, and, in work seen, there are examples of where it is well above. Pupils can make accurate comments on the quality and usefulness of historical evidence and are able also to appreciate how change in the nineteenth century affected different groups of people with different aspirations. At the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' attainment is well above that expected nationally. In 1999, for example, 81 percent of pupils achieved GCSE grades in the A*-C range, compared with 61 percent nationally. Pupils in this key stage can define and use subject-specific vocabulary on developments in medicine accurately and in context. They are also adept at using a variety of source material in order to research aspects of the Stockton cholera epidemic and, after a relatively short time for preparation, present very accurate and well-argued findings to the whole class. By the end of this key stage most pupils are very articulate and demonstrate a flair for historical debate.

166. The very high standards of attainment in history are matched by the pupils' behaviour, by their attitudes to the subject and also by the values they display. Pupils are invariably pleasant, engaging, polite and forthcoming; they smile a lot. They have very good relationships with their classmates and with their teachers, of whom they speak highly. They are often desperate to answer questions in class and work well individually, in pairs and in groups. They are not afraid to take part in class presentations and are always keen to celebrate the successes of their colleagues. Pupils enjoy the study of history and they are opting for the subject in increasing numbers at Key Stage 4.

167. The quality of teaching is a major strength of this subject. Teaching is always at least satisfactory and in two-thirds of lessons it is good, very good or excellent. Teachers treat their pupils with respect and dignity, and foster the very highest standards of behaviour, effort and attainment. They are aware that their pupils have different learning needs and they modify their teaching methods and their resources accordingly. They encourage pupils to learn from each other and provide a plethora of opportunities for collaborative work. Teachers maintain a brisk pace during lessons, have high expectations of what their pupils can achieve, and employ very challenging questioning techniques. There is great emphasis on literacy and also on pride in presentation. The assessment of pupils' work, including the marking of exercise books, and the opportunities which teachers provide for self and peer assessment are of a very high order and ensure that pupils' progress is always under review. Moreover, teachers spend considerable time advising pupils on revision methods and examination technique. Resources produced for revision are of very high quality.

168. The high standards of teaching allow pupils to learn very effectively and to elicit information accurately from a wide variety of sources and use it to present work in many different ways. Good examples of impressive teaching and its positive effect were seen in Key Stage 3. These included consideration of the quality of evidence in Year 7, the completion of mind maps after the perusal of pictorial sources in Year 8 and the role play activities on change in the nineteenth century in Year 9. Particularly effective in Key Stage 4 are the group presentations on public health in Year 10 and also the emphasis on correct historical terminology when pupils are considering the work of Robert Koch and how he was able to build upon the work of Louis Pasteur.

169. The history curriculum is broad, balanced and delivered through such a variety of

methodologies, with such enthusiasm and yet with such sensitivity that it is accessible to all. Every pupil, irrespective of prior attainment, has the opportunity to benefit from what is on offer. It follows that all pupils, including those who find some of the work difficult, make good progress. Teachers place great emphasis on the acquisition of historical skills, yet motivate and fascinate their pupils by anecdotes, which are always relevant and often amusing. Through this pupils are introduced to the ways in which historians operate, yet are always aware that history, in the final analysis, is a story about people. The key strengths of the history curriculum are the emphasis which teachers place upon the use of information technology, the insistence on high standards of literacy and the many opportunities which pupils have for educational visits, field trips, study tours and conferences.

170. The subject makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Awe and wonder are evident in most lessons, and when teachers play musical instruments to illustrate a point or when they encourage pupils to draw conclusions from pictures and cartoons, pupils are fully engaged and quite fascinated. Furthermore, teachers are good role models who practise what they preach and they ensure that pupils treat everyone with the utmost respect; discussion, debate and co-operative work are strong features of the work in this subject. The opportunities for pupils' cultural development are many and varied and enhanced by cross-curricular work with a number of other subject departments. For example, modules on music in history are currently being prepared and pupils complete assignments for English coursework after having watched *Schindler's List* and also after their visit to Sachsenhausen concentration camp as part of the humanities study tour to Berlin.

171. The accommodation is very good. Classrooms and corridors are adorned by pupils' work and this display is excellent. Learning resources are adequate and teachers work long and hard to supplement textbooks with relevant and thought-provoking materials.

172. The department has made very good progress since the last inspection. History is now a discrete examination subject at Key Stage 4 and external examination results are well above national averages; take up is increasing. The quality of teaching and learning is now good overall and all schemes of work are fully up to date. Assessment procedures are very good and the humanities department marking policy is followed consistently.

173. The teacher in charge of history supports fully the philosophy and practice of the humanities department in particular and of the school in general. He leads the area with skill, with high levels of industry and with great sensitivity; he supports non-specialists most effectively. All teachers in this area care deeply for the well-being of their pupils and also for their colleagues. They share, too, a real vision for the future development of history in the school.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

174. Religious education is taught within a very well led and managed humanities curriculum area on a rotational basis in both key stages. GCSE religious studies, however, is taught regularly each week. Due to the rotation within humanities and the two-week timetable it was not possible to observe all those who teach the subject or all year groups during the inspection.

175. Attainment by age 14 is just above the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of religions are better developed than their ability to

explain and evaluate religious and moral issues; this is because there is insufficient focus on this aspect of religious education in the units studied in Years 7 and 8. By age 16 attainment in the core humanities GCSE, in which religious education is a significant component, is well above national averages and the trend has been rising with boys' attainment especially showing marked improvement. In 1999 there was a significant improvement with the gap between the attainment of boys and girls narrowing considerably. In religious studies GCSE, attainment has been rising over the last three years with results always above national averages. In 1999 pupils attained nearly one grade higher than the overall attainment in their other subjects. Attainment in lessons is well above national averages with pupils being able to talk confidently about their work; for instance in a Year 11 revision lesson on Judaism pupils applied earlier knowledge of Judaism to a range of questions on issues facing a Jewish family in Britain.

176. The quality of teaching and of learning in religious education is good overall. Teaching includes clear exposition generally based on sufficient subject knowledge to ensure pupils gain new knowledge quickly. Detailed unit and lesson plans with clear objectives help pupils understand what they need to do in order to learn at a quick pace. Strategies to ensure that all pupils, whatever their abilities, are able to make progress via careful individual teacher support, differentiated materials and pupils supporting one another are very effective. Each unit of work has formal unit assessment tasks, which provide challenge and allow pupils to gauge at what level they are working. There is good attention to basic literacy in all lessons through the use of key words and writing frameworks, which help pupils to learn for themselves. Areas of teaching and learning that need further development include ensuring that:

- more of the marking in pupils' books provides ongoing targets to help improve learning in the subject;
- the teacher's objectives are shared with pupils on a more regular basis so that pupils are more involved in the process of learning;
- more tasks throughout Key Stage 3 are linked to the attainment levels and provide sufficient challenge.

177. Pupils' attitude to religious education is very good. They settle quickly in most lessons and this contributes to the effective use of time for learning. Relationships in classrooms are warm and constructive with pupils having a high degree of autonomy in some lessons, such as in the research project in Year 9 on Buddhism.

178. The faculty has worked hard to implement the new locally agreed syllabus. However, there is still insufficient time in both key stages to meet its requirements and to provide balance within the humanities courses. There has been an improvement since the last inspection in attainment in Key Stage 3, in the quality of teaching and of learning and in aspects of curriculum planning. Responsibility for religious education is now clarified but it is undertaken on a voluntary basis and there is only one specialist in the humanities team.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

179. Attainment in Key Stage 3 is mainly satisfactory or better and broadly in line with the national expectation. Pupils make sound progress as they move through the information technology (IT) programme in each year of the key stage. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is at least satisfactory with a significant number of pupils making sound progress in a range of IT applications. Overall attainment is mainly in line with or above national expectations.

180. Pupils throughout both key stages show clear strengths in the progress they make

in word processing, desktop publishing, handling data and using spreadsheets. By the time pupils reach Year 11 the majority are able to apply their skills in most curriculum areas. In the IT National Curriculum areas of modelling, measurement and control, many pupils make sound progress generally but not all pupils achieve a balance of experience across the different aspects of the subject.

181. The IT curriculum in Year 7 is part of a regularly timetabled programme that ensures a good basis for the rest of the key stage. Pupils on entry to the school come with a wide range of IT skills and experience and by the end of the key stage have developed and progressed with some consistency. They demonstrate an ability to use and apply IT for a range of purposes relevant to the needs of different subjects and to support their own learning and understanding. In Years 8 and 9, the responsibility for IT provision is placed mainly on the subjects in the curriculum. This is effectively achieved in most subjects, although members of staff in many subjects are still developing their own IT skills. Pupils' progress and the standard of work in IT are more consistently satisfactory or good in humanities, science, design and technology, and PSE. Less progress has been made in modern foreign languages, music and art. At the beginning of Key Stage 4 pupils receive a discrete programme of IT that is effectively delivered in two ten-week modules during Year 10. Pupils gain further competence in communication, handling information, modelling and control; they make good progress and their attainment is satisfactory or better. Some pupils show high levels of attainment in areas of IT for which they have a particular interest.

182. Throughout the key stages pupils increasingly use the Internet to access information and data and show good skill in accessing and using sites for subject focused research. Pupils make constructive use of IT for a range of interests and curriculum related purposes during lunchtimes. They work responsibly, both independently and in groups.

183. Pupils' knowledge and understanding are enhanced through the programme of cross-curricular IT that is planned and provided by the subject departments. Improvement in pupils' progress and attainment is supported by the ongoing focus on staff development and the responsibility and expectations of departments to ensure IT is used effectively to support pupils' learning. Overall, teacher assessment data confirms the evidence gained from looking at pupils' work and from discussions with them that progress in IT year on year is continuing to improve. In some lessons, however, pupils were working to a subject-specific brief that placed only limited challenge on their IT skills. Pupils' opportunities to achieve at higher levels are therefore limited in some circumstances and this reduces their rate of progress. The quality of pupils' work in desktop publishing, in presenting the findings of research and in the interrogation of data is often of high quality.

184. Pupils' attitude and response to learning are mainly very good and sometimes excellent. Pupils show enthusiasm for IT and enjoy using computers. Many have access to computers at home and produce work of good quality. In lessons, pupils sustain their concentration, work well with each other when required and show responsible approaches to their tasks. They are keen to succeed and take a pride in their work.

185. The quality of teaching is mainly good. Training and support continues to be a high priority and the head of department is committed to ensuring access to further development for both staff and pupils. Good levels of support are provided for staff and improved access is planned to IT resources in lessons. The department is well led with a clear purpose and direction. Pupils' progress is carefully tracked and their experience of and attainment in IT are systematically recorded. Pupils' records are properly maintained and co-ordinated by the head of department.

186. The provision of resources and curriculum development in IT is an ongoing process and is regularly reviewed. More recently there has been a significant commitment by the school to upgrade its computer resources. Much of this has been achieved. It has required considerable attention from the head of department to ensure the effectiveness of the provision within the curriculum structure. In addition to the head of department, two technicians work hard to ensure there is support for subject teachers when delivering IT.

187. The provision for IT meets statutory requirements. A broad and balanced curriculum is planned for pupils throughout both key stages. The significant enhancement of hardware provision, specialist accommodation and staffing over the last year has increased the school's capacity to ensure much improved curriculum provision.

188. The school has responded positively to the last inspection, pupil progress and attainment continues to improve, the subject is adequately provided for within the curriculum and resources are sufficient to meet the curricular demands. Technical support in IT is very good and the network system is skilfully managed. The ratio of pupils to computers is in line with the national average for secondary schools.

189. The quality of education provided in IT is good overall. In order to improve its quality further, the school should develop its strategies for providing for the more able pupils and continue to develop staff skills in IT, as stated in its development plan.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

190. Standards at Key Stage 3 are in line with national expectations for both boys and girls. Progression to Key Stage 4 is sound and GCSE French results for boys and girls are well above the national average, with girls as nationally achieving a higher percentage of A*-C passes than boys. French compares well with GCSE results for other subjects across the school. German GCSE results are currently below the national average for boys and girls and have some way to go to meet the average points score for all subjects in the school. Whilst statutory requirements regarding provision at Key Stage 4 are being met, the current 'short course' alternative to GCSE should be reviewed to see whether pupils might not benefit more from following a basic level GCSE course.

191. The quality of teaching is satisfactory or better in three-quarters of lessons at Key Stage 3 and in all lessons at Key Stage 4. It is good or better in over three-fifths of all lessons. Teaching is particularly effective where objectives for the lesson are clearly stated to the pupils, and where a brisk pace is encouraged through the use of skilful questioning techniques and other imaginative uses of lesson time. A valuable approach observed was the raising of awareness of similarity of spelling and meaning in English and French at Key Stage 3, coupled with rapid class repetition of French words, which the pupils clearly found amusing. This helped them to remember both vocabulary and pronunciation. There were also some good examples of dictionary skills taught at Key Stage 3 and put into practice at Key Stage 4. Good use of the overhead projector was also made, including a 'Blockbusters' game at Key Stage 4 that practised vocabulary and numbers. Teaching has less impact in lessons where the target language is not used to full effect from the beginning as the norm, and where the pupils are not expected to be comfortable with new forms of the spoken language before moving on to consolidate it in writing. Strategies for extending the use of the target language should be considered. Few examples of information and communication technology were seen in pupils' work. Homework of appropriate content and length is set and marked regularly, but comments giving advice on strengths and weaknesses are rare.

192. The quality of learning is satisfactory or better in almost all lessons at Key Stages 3 and 4; it is good or better in three-quarters of lessons at Key Stage 3 and in almost three-fifths at KS4. In virtually all lessons, pupils are very attentive and responsive, working purposefully and sharing a good rapport with the teacher. Learning is noticeably effective in both key stages where pupils have pre-printed vocabulary lists, giving correct models for reference and learning, and where good pronunciation is encouraged and praised. It is less effective where the pace is slow, often owing to pupils lacking a basic foundation of vocabulary upon which to build their skills. The sound levels from the music department, which is next to the languages suite, is detrimental to the development of listening and speaking skills in particular. Resources are generally adequate where pupils have sufficient reference material to complement other sources of information. There is 'bunching' of lessons in the timetable, particularly in Years 7 and 11, and further efforts should be made to distribute languages lessons more evenly to underpin cumulative learning. Extra-curricular links and visits abroad are currently underdeveloped.

193. Pupils with special educational needs are helped in some classes in Key Stage 3 by a learning support assistant and whilst the quality of this support is good, it is not sufficient to make a real impact on the progress of pupils who have difficulties in basic literacy. A good example of the use of differentiated worksheets was seen in one Key Stage 3 lesson; this practice needs to be extended.

194. The teachers are well qualified, competent linguists and the department is well managed. Schemes of work and assessment tasks have been reviewed and are complete for Key Stage 3. Pupils' progress against National Curriculum targets is tracked, though the use of school-level data to inform planning needs further development. The much improved examination results over the last three years testify to the hard work of all concerned. The GCSE results in German have not improved to the same extent as those in French.

MUSIC

195. Pupils attain high standards in music in each year group from Year 7 to 11. GCSE results have been consistently above the national averages for the past few years. There is a systematic approach to the development of key musical skills resulting from a comprehensively planned curriculum. For instance, good examples were seen of compositions produced by Year 11 pupils to recreate the style of an 18th century waltz and a 17th century Sarabande, which demonstrated an excellent command of structure and harmony. Pupils' appraising skills are particularly strong. They have a very good command of technical language and use it effectively when listening to recorded music and compositions by other pupils. A written description by a Year 8 pupil of her reaction to a recording identified a number of technical points and she related these to the effect that the music made upon her. She then described how she later employed some of these techniques in a group composition.

196. The behaviour of pupils is very good. They work well together in groups, listening to and appreciating the contribution of others and as a result they make fast progress. Many Key Stage 3 pupils have gained good performing skills on percussion and keyboard instruments and they use these to create sensitive and expressive pieces of music. For instance, in their response to the theme of 'War' in a topic on 'The Planets', a group explored the sounds of a drum 'heart-beat', mixing this idea with other percussive sounds, effectively creating a rising feeling of tension. Pupils also develop good music-reading skills in both key stages.

197. Teaching is effective. There is good pace and timing in lessons. The variety of activities keeps pupils motivated and interested. These include a range of extra-mural bands and choirs. The curriculum has very good breadth and balance, particularly in relation to developing pupils' cultural understanding, although more opportunities should be given to creating a sense of spirituality when listening to music. Planning to link music with other arts subjects is underdeveloped at present. High expectations are set and largely achieved. Occasionally some pupils took time in settling to work when in groups, and could have been set interim targets. Teachers have a good grasp and understanding of the subject, but some development in historical knowledge is needed. Teachers keep comprehensive assessment records. Pupils' work is assessed and marked regularly. A review is needed of the set of comments used by teachers to report to parents. These can result in superficial and unrelated statements.

198. Good progress has been made on most of the issues raised in the last inspection, but a systematic approach to developing vocal technique is still not evident and the school has been slow to respond to criticisms about the use of information technology within the music curriculum. The subject enjoys very good leadership. There is a sense of purpose in the department and in teachers' work. Visiting instrumental teachers are fully integrated into music activities and make an important contribution. Accommodation is used well. A new music suite is enhanced by attractive and informative wall displays, but the lack of soundproofing inhibits the progress pupils make in some practical activities. There is a good stock of classroom instruments but arrangements for replacing and maintaining these are unclear.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

199. Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with expectations. Standards in sports such as football are good. Pupils were seen discussing tactical play and analysing their performance in a previous football lesson whilst the teacher regularly reinforced learning with clear explanation, and allowed pupils to reflect on their own evaluations. Both boys and girls control, pass and dribble the ball with increasing accuracy. Girls attain good levels of fitness where skills are developed at a good pace and teachers' expectations in terms of work rate are high. In Year 8 gymnastics, pupils are attaining above national expectations. Higher attaining pupils learn how to refine a head and pike spring and how to develop body control at different heights on the apparatus. In the same lesson, most of the class was inspired by the performance of the most talented pupils and as a result all achieved some success, particularly the lower attaining pupils who in the process gained in confidence. Pupils learn about safe support in gymnastics and most organise apparatus efficiently and safely. Pupils' individual and group evaluations of each other help them succeed in their planning and performance.

200. This is the first year that pupils have taken GCSE examinations in physical education sports studies. The proportion of pupils attaining the higher grades A*-C in the 1999 GCSE examination was above the national average and that for similar schools, and the proportion attaining grades A*-G was broadly in line. Both boys and girls performed above their respective national averages and often achieved higher levels than in many of their other subjects. In lessons, towards the end of the key stage, attainment is above national expectations. Standards in sports such as football, rugby, hockey, and badminton

are above average. In a Year 11 higher hockey set, boys show good co-ordination, speed and ball control and most pass with accuracy and attention to safety. They flick, scoop and use one touch passing with increasing skill and agility. In a mixed rugby group, Year 10 pupils understand the techniques of passing and the importance of sprinting. They systematically build up skills of attack and defence and the majority are familiar with rugby terms and defence strategies. Lower attaining pupils are successfully encouraged to reach for the ball though a few showed a lack of confidence in calling for a pass. In theory lessons, pupils develop knowledge about bones, muscles and blood flow and most show an understanding of the long and short-term effects of exercise on the body systems. The standard of literacy skills is good, however, there are inconsistent standards in the development of essay writing in many of the average and lower attaining pupils' folders. The use of information communication technology is underdeveloped in coursework.

201. Standards in pupils' attitudes, values and personal development are very good overall. Most work with sustained effort and concentration in all activities. Pupils are co-operative and pleasant and their commitment to learning through individual, pair and group work in gymnastics and games activities is positive. Behaviour is very good overall due to the commendable relationships between teachers and pupils. Pupils take responsibility and umpire, coach and evaluate each other in lessons, which improves their overall performance. Many develop initiative and enthusiasm in the extensive range of competitive sporting activities provided. Pupils enjoy physical education and their interest is reflected in the good standards of dress, in their participation and their respect for the teachers.

202. The quality of teaching and learning is good and often very good at both key stages. Teachers' subject expertise and enthusiasm are very good and are communicated effectively to pupils at all levels. Good use is made of questioning techniques to revise, reinforce and extend learning. Pupils are managed very well and considerable attention is given to groupings, organisation and content. The command method of teaching is used effectively in many lessons, particularly in games and skills based activities. Lessons move at a good pace and pupils' skills are progressively and systematically developed through well planned, enjoyable and worthwhile activities. In the best lessons teachers have high expectations of pupils' involvement and challenge individuals and groups to improve their performance through demonstration and constructive feedback which ensure that pupils know how well they are achieving. Where pupils are given responsibility to umpire, as in a Year 10 netball lesson, pupils of average attainment quickly learn the need to obey both the rules of the game and the umpire. Pupils' understanding of the rules and their footwork, ball handling and use of space improves significantly. Where teaching is less inspiring, the pace of work is slower and pupils are insufficiently engaged in oral evaluation to reinforce new learning at the end of the lesson. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. They receive very good support to improve their performance through teachers' effective explanation and demonstration.

203. The department is led with considerable skill, expertise and sensitivity. Assessment procedures are very good and effective strategies for developing literacy skills are in place. Improvements have been managed well with the extension of a GCSE course, which has raised the attainment of boys and has enhanced the provision of sports studies for an increasing range of pupils. There is an excellent range of sporting activities that enhance the curriculum for many pupils, in particular the gifted and talented pupils who excel in many competitive events in school and in the wider community. There is a lack of information communication technology resources in the department. Shower facilities were in a poor state during the inspection, they were not clean or well maintained and were a health hazard. Few pupils showered after vigorous activity. Many girls were not tying their trainers during games activities. This breaches health and safety requirements and

endangers their safety, particularly on wet court surfaces. The school has addressed this issue. The fencing around the hardcourt area is in need of repair and limits provision for netball and tennis.

204. Good progress has been made since the last inspection in addressing the issues raised which were to increase responsibility for pupils to coach and umpire activities, extend pair and group work and give pupils more opportunity for independent learning. In addition, action planning and review to measure pupils' success have been introduced. The department has not yet been able to offer dance due to a lack of staff expertise.