

INSPECTION REPORT

RICHARD HALE SCHOOL

Hertford

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117501

Headteacher: Mr M James

Reporting inspector: Mr Philip O'Neill
3162

Dates of inspection: 26 – 30 March 2001

Inspection number: 186169

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11-18

Gender of pupils: Boys

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr S Henning

Date of previous inspection: 20 November 1995

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Richard Hale School is a comprehensive community school catering for boys between the ages of 11-18 years. The school also accepts girls in the sixth form and there are at present four girls in Year 12. There are 910 pupils on roll: this is about the average size of secondary schools nationally. The percentage of pupils identified as having special educational needs, at 15 per cent, is below the national average. The percentage of pupils with a statement of special educational need, at one per cent, is also below the national average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, at three per cent, is well below the national average. There are very few pupils of ethnic minority origin and few speak English as an additional language. Pupils enter the school with levels of attainment that are above average overall, but represent the full range of attainment. Most pupils come from relatively advantaged social backgrounds. The school is the first choice for most pupils and is over-subscribed.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Richard Hale School is a good school that generally does well by its pupils, achieving high standards in many subjects. The school is well led in providing the pupils with a good education. Pupils experience a high proportion of good and very good teaching and respond well to it. It provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- Good standards are achieved in English, mathematics, science, art, geography, history, music, physical education and business education
- There is much good teaching and a significant proportion of very good teaching
- Pupils' attitudes are very good overall, as are relationships
- There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities, particularly in music, drama and sport
- The school takes great care to ensure the welfare of its pupils
- There are very good links with parents and they support their children's learning very well
- The school is well led
- The governors have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

What could be improved

- Standards achieved in design and technology are too low at Key Stage 4, as are overall standards in Spanish
- The school does not meet fully the National Curriculum requirements for design and technology at Key Stage 4 nor does it provide the full range of the National Curriculum for information and communication technology at both key stages, or religious education in the sixth form
- There is too much unsatisfactory teaching in Years 8 and 9
- The responsibilities of some staff for the monitoring of teaching are unclear
- There are insufficient resources to support learning in science, and information and communication technology
- Accommodation for physical education is unsatisfactory

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. Since that time the school has improved well. The quality of teaching in modern foreign languages and the standards reached have improved considerably, apart from Spanish where there are some residual difficulties. The teaching of information and communication technology has improved significantly. However, not all teachers have the skills or confidence to use computers effectively in their subjects. There is now more carefully managed support for pupils with special educational needs. There is greater emphasis on teaching more formal uses of English. There is also an increased emphasis on the continued improvement of teaching and learning through well managed monitoring and support. The induction to the school and the support provided for teachers in training is much improved. There is greater use of assessment data in the analysis of pupils' progress. Under the new headteacher, the school is set to improve further on all fronts.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 and 18-year-olds based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	A	B	B	D
A-levels/AS-levels	C	A	B	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

The above table shows that standards are above average in the GCSE examinations in relation to the national results, but below average in relation to the attainment levels in similar schools. A-level results, too, have been above average. Standards have been steadily improving at GCSE and A level, though there was a relative decline in the standards achieved in the GCSE examinations between 1998 and 1999. In the standards reached in the GCSE examinations in 2000, there were particular strengths in English, mathematics, art, history and music where pupils reached well above average standards. Above average standards were achieved in electronics, geography and German. Standards in science, French, physical education, religious education and business studies were average. Poor standards were reached in engineering, food technology and Spanish.

Attainment at A level was very high in mathematics, well above average in art and design, above average in English and science. It was average in history and below average in geography. There were too few pupils entered for other subjects to make meaningful national comparisons.

In the 2000 National Curriculum tests for 14-year-olds in English, mathematics and science, standards were well above the national average and the average for similar schools. Attainment in science was very high for similar schools. There has been a steady improvement in the standards reached over the last four years, in line with the rate of improvement nationally. Fourteen-year-olds exceed the national expectation in all subjects other than modern foreign languages and design and technology, where pupils reach the national standard.

The achievements of most pupils at all levels of attainment are good as a result of good teaching. Pupils' achievements are unsatisfactory in religious education in Key Stage 4, and in design and technology in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils have very good attitudes to their work, arriving at school ready and willing to learn. They openly express their pride in belonging to the school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Overall, behaviour is good. There is too much distracting behaviour in some lessons, particularly in Year 9. Behaviour between lessons and around the school is orderly and boys behave in a courteous and friendly manner to adults.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils take responsibilities wherever they are offered, and engage in activities with interest and enthusiasm. Pupils relate well to their peers and to teachers.
Attendance	Average. Punctuality is satisfactory, with some lateness to school; pupils come on time to lessons.

Pupils, in the main, want to learn. They have good concentration spans and often participate enthusiastically in activities. They are good at taking responsibility in group work. They sustain a good rate of work in lessons and are eager to refine and improve their work and take pride in their best efforts.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Satisfactory	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 overall quality of teaching is good in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Teaching is satisfactory in Key Stage 3. Of the lessons seen, two per cent were outstanding, 22 per cent very good, 41 per cent good, 27 per cent satisfactory and 8 per cent unsatisfactory. The unsatisfactory teaching is mainly in Years 8 and 9. All the teaching in the sixth form is at least satisfactory. The quality of teaching varies from subject to subject. It is very good in history across the school, in mathematics in the sixth form, in music in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form and in business studies in Key Stage 4. Teaching is good in all stages in English, art, modern foreign languages and physical education. It is good, too, in mathematics in Key Stages 3 and 4, in science and information and communication technology in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, in music and religious education in Key Stage 3 and in design and technology and business education in the sixth form. Teaching is satisfactory in geography in all stages, in design and technology in Key Stages 3 and 4 and in science and information and communication technology at Key Stage 3 and in religious education in Key Stage 4.

The knowledge teachers have of what they teach and of their pupils is a key strength of much teaching. This encourages pupils to ask searching questions. Weaknesses occur when the

teachers are not good at managing pupils' behaviour and allow the pace of lessons to slow down. This encourages pupils to settle for a modest pace to their work. These weaknesses arise mainly in Years 8 and 9. They are spread across subjects and are offset to a considerable extent by the high proportion of good and very good teaching. Literacy is well taught in English and at least satisfactorily in other subjects. Numeracy is taught well across the school. The school is good at meeting the needs of all pupils. Overall, pupils are good learners and show a good level of sustained concentration in their work. A few pupils who tend to be inattentive in lessons distract their more hard-working peers.

Overall, pupils are good learners and seek to reach standards they deserve in their work. They appreciate the challenge provided by good teaching and value a real intellectual challenge. Learning is least good in Years 8 and 9, where a few teachers have difficulties managing behaviour.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory overall. The school does not meet the National Curriculum requirements for design and technology in Key Stage 4; nor for the provision of the full range of information and communication technology at both key stages, nor for the provision of religious education in the sixth form. It does not meet the requirement for the provision of a daily act of collective worship. The school offers a very good range of extra-curricular opportunities, especially in music, drama and sport.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. Such pupils are supported well and make progress at the same rates as their peers.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The few pupils for whom English is an additional language are supported well in achieving fluency.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school provides well for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils. It teaches pupils to take responsibility for their work and their lives, and provides many good opportunities for them to do so.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school cares very well for its pupils and is particularly good at monitoring behaviour and ensuring that pupils feel secure at the school.

The school works very well with parents: they, in turn, have a strong impact on the work of the school. Communications with parents are very clear, particularly the reports provided on their children's progress.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher, who is new to the post, is already giving clear educational direction to the school. There is a lack of clarity in the way that the management responsibilities of some members of staff have been defined, particularly in the responsibilities relating to the monitoring of teaching.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are well placed to take the school forward in its development. They have formed themselves into a supportive group and work well with the headteacher.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. There are weaknesses in the monitoring of teaching.
The strategic use of resources	Under the headteacher, planning for the use of resources is now clearly directed to the school's long-term needs.

There is an adequate number of qualified and experienced teachers and support staff to meet the needs of the curriculum, apart from information and communication technology, where teachers do not all have the expertise or confidence to develop and apply the pupils' skills within every subject. Accommodation is generally satisfactory, though it is unsatisfactory in physical education and information and communication technology. Although there is an adequate supply of resources overall, resources for teaching science and information and communication technology are insufficient. Clear and effective leadership is injecting new life into the school. It is now set to make considerable advances on all fronts. The school makes every effort to ensure that appropriate consideration is given to cost and value in major items of expenditure. It compares its performance to that of similar schools in the county in order to improve efficiency.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the progress their children are making the quality of teaching the school expects their children to work hard and do their best the leadership and management of the school the school is easy to approach with questions of concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the amount and consistency of homework the amount of disruptive behaviour in some lessons

The inspection findings broadly support the parents' positive views of the school. While some parents think there is insufficient homework, others think there is too much. The inspection looked very hard at the amount and use of homework and finds that, in general, homework is set and marked consistently and is used well to support the pupils' learning. The inspection findings support the parents' view that there is an unacceptable level of distracting behaviour in some lessons, particularly in Year 9. A number of parents expressed concern about the high turnover in staffing and the use of supply teachers. This was not found to be a problem apart from in modern languages, where there is a rapid turnover of staff.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Overall standards of attainment are above average. Standards in the sixth form are average.
2. In the 2000 National Curriculum tests for 14-year-olds, the proportion of pupils achieving the standard expected at this age in English, mathematics and science was well above average. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher Level 6 was also well above average in these three subjects. This level of attainment represents good progress from above average levels of attainment demonstrated by pupils joining the school at the age of 11. Compared to schools in similar circumstances, that is with similar proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals, the standards attained by 14-year-olds in the tests were well above average in English and mathematics and even higher in science, where the attainment places the school in the top five per cent nationally. There has been a steady improvement in the standards reached over the last four years, in line with the rate of improvement nationally. In lessons and in work seen, 14-year-old pupils exceed the national expectation in all subjects, except in design and technology and modern foreign languages where attainment is at the level expected. In science, standards are well above the national standard. The key to the high standards achieved by 14-year-olds is the quality of teaching, particularly the support provided for pupils who experience difficulties. Another factor is the teachers' skill in engaging the pupils' interests and enthusiasm through skilful questioning.
3. In the 2000 GCSE examinations, taking the average points scored, 16-year-old pupils achieved above average standards. The upwards trend in attainment, however, has been below the national trend. The proportions of pupils achieving five or more A*-C grades, five or more A*-G grades and one or more A*-G grades have all been well above the national averages. In relation to the achievements of similar schools these proportions were average. Taking the average points scored, attainment was above average in comparison with all schools and below average for similar schools. The rate at which pupils progressed from their attainment at Key Stage 3 to GCSE has been below the national rate for schools with similar attainment for 14-year-olds.
4. In the standards reached in the GCSE examinations there were particular strengths in English, mathematics, art, history and music where pupils reached well above average standards. Above average standards were achieved in electronics, geography and German. Standards in science, French, physical education, religious education and business studies were average. Poor standards were reached in engineering, food technology and Spanish. The standards reached by 16-year-olds in lessons exceed the expected level in English, mathematics, art, geography, history, music and physical education. In science, information and communication technology and modern foreign languages; pupils aged 16 reach the expected levels. Standards in business studies are average. In design and technology and religious education, 16-year-olds fall below the standards expected at this age.
5. Candidates entered for A level achieved above-average standards. The overall pass rate was above the national average. Attainment at A level was very high in mathematics, well above average in art and design, above average in English and science. It was average in history and below average in geography. There were too few pupils entered for other subjects to make meaningful national comparisons.

Overall, standards have improved steadily over the last four years. In lessons and in work seen in the sixth form, standards are well above average in business studies, above average in mathematics, science, art, history and physical education. Average standards are reached in English, design and technology, geography, information and communication technology, modern foreign languages, music and religious education.

6. Standards of literacy across the curriculum are satisfactory and often good because pupils' standards in English are above average. There is considerable variation in the development of the skills of speaking, reading and writing across subjects as a result of a lack of a clearly implemented strategy for the development of literacy. Pupils show a good range of appropriate language in history; in modern foreign languages they initiate questions in discussion. In music, many pupils discuss and analyse music using the appropriate technical language. In physical education, there is accurate writing in theoretical studies. Standards of numeracy are good. Number and measuring skills are taught well in mathematics and developed well by many departments. Number skills are used well in business studies. In geography and history pupils use statistics well to analyse data. Pupils use mental calculation accurately in science.
7. From above average levels of attainment on entry, pupils acquire knowledge, understanding and skill at a good rate as they move through the school. There are differences across the subjects. Pupils make rapid advances in their work in all subjects apart from design and technology where achievement is satisfactory, and in history and music, where it is very good. Pupils are slow to extend their skills in design and technology in Key Stage 3 and in religious education in Key Stage 4. As pupils with special educational needs are taught well, they make rapid advances in their learning in relation to the targets set for them. The few pupils who experience English as an additional language in their homes are supported effectively in the development of the level of fluency required to participate fully in lessons.
8. The school sets and meets satisfactorily challenging targets in most subjects. Work in the analysis of pupils' advances towards the targets set for them or towards their predicted grades is developing steadily.
9. There has been a steady improvement in the standards of attainment since the previous inspection but it has proceeded more slowly than the national rate of improvement in Key Stage 4.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

10. Pupils display very positive attitudes to the school. They are generally enthusiastic in lessons and participate well in other activities. They take pride in the school and its traditions.
11. Behaviour in most lessons is at least good and around the school it is very good. Pupils are orderly, friendly and polite. Occasionally, in Years 8 and 9, some pupils are too talkative and do not remain sufficiently attentive to their work. In about one in ten lessons with this age group, behaviour was unsatisfactory and, in others, though just satisfactory, it did limit the amount of learning. Most unsatisfactory behaviour was linked to ineffective classroom management.
12. Permanent exclusions are rare, being well below the national average for boys. Fixed term exclusions are around the national average. Bullying is also rare and there is no evidence of oppressive behaviour. Pupils respect each other's feeling and beliefs and work well together. Relationships are very good, both among pupils and between teachers and pupils.

13. Pupils readily accept responsibility. For example, members of the sixth form manage some after-school clubs and act as cashiers in the dining hall. They show initiative and the ability to work on their own.
14. Most parents expressed satisfaction with overall behaviour at the school. A few voiced specific concern at behaviour in Year 9. Inspection evidence supports both views.
15. Attendance, at around the national average, is satisfactory. Unauthorised absence is low. Pupils are punctual to lessons. Punctuality to school is satisfactory.
16. The school maintains the high standards of behaviour and attitudes reported upon in the previous inspection.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

17. The overall quality of teaching is good in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Teaching is satisfactory in Key Stage 3. Of the lessons seen, two per cent were excellent, 22 per cent very good, 41 per cent good, 27 per cent satisfactory and 8 per cent unsatisfactory. The unsatisfactory teaching is mainly in Years 8 and 9. This is spread across the subjects and is compensated for to some extent by the pupils' experience of a high proportion of good and very good teaching. All the teaching in the sixth form is at least satisfactory.
18. The quality of teaching varies from subject to subject. It is very good in history across the school, in mathematics in the sixth form, in music in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form and in business studies in Key Stage 4. Teaching is good in all stages in English, art and design, modern foreign languages and physical education. It is good, too, in mathematics in Key Stages 3 and 4, in science and information and communication technology in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, in music and religious education in Key Stage 3 and in design and technology and business education in the sixth form. Teaching is satisfactory in geography in all stages, in design and technology in Key Stages 3 and 4 and in science and information and communication technology at Key Stage 3, and in religious education in Key Stage 4.
19. A recurring feature of the best teaching is the teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subject and of the pupils they teach. This ensures that pupils experience a wide-ranging experience in lessons: they are increasingly challenged intellectually and creatively. Pupils, in turn, respond with interest and enthusiasm, meeting the high expectations set for them. A further significant feature of much teaching is the quality of planning, including planning for the use of resources. A striking feature is the clarity of introductions to lessons: explanations and instructions are crisp and to the point. Challenging questioning encourages questions and stimulates curiosity. These and many other key strengths were evident, for instance, in an outstanding lesson in art for Year 12. Skilful and subtle questioning led the pupils to some very intelligent analysis of their own work in relation to that of Howard Hodgkin, the English painter. Through increasingly demanding questions, they extended their understanding and appreciation of the decorative features of Hodgkin's compositions and his preference for working on a small scale. This was teaching of art at its best. The encouragement given to pupils to be responsible for their own learning improves their learning skills, particularly their knowledge of their attainment levels and of how to refine and improve their work. In the best lessons, pupils volunteer questions and challenge the views expressed by the teacher. The combination of firm discipline and lightness of touch preserve a convivial working environment. Lessons are often strengthened by the good use of discussion,

when ideas are exchanged and evaluated. Homework is used satisfactorily overall, and there are cases where it is very well used to support and extend pupils' learning. This is clearly the case, for instance, in history where homework plays a significant part in the pupils' learning.

20. Weaknesses in teaching arise when the pace of lessons is uneven and the content does not develop progressively. In these lessons, the pupils settle for a quiet life and set their own modest pace. The failure to set deadlines for the completion of tasks results occasionally in higher-attaining pupils waiting for more to do. The most telling weakness arises, particularly in Years 8 and 9, from a few teachers' inability to manage behaviour and establish clear classroom routines and expectations. This leads to a failure to settle the class from the beginning of the lesson and a tendency to talk across the pupils or plead for silence.
21. The pupils with special educational needs are taught well. These pupils are sometimes taught within the usual lessons, while others are given more specialist teaching. Planning for pupils' learning is good. Work set in lessons for pupils withdrawn for special help, and work provided for those supported within the classroom, relates closely to the pupils' individual targets. Classroom support assistants give good support to their individual charges and, where possible, to others who are experiencing difficulties. Teachers create an atmosphere of trust and encouragement and set high standards. There is close teamwork between the special needs co-ordinator, class teachers and support assistants. The pupils respond by acquiring a strong sense of achievement and eagerness to improve. They show real interest and curiosity in their work and take pride in work where they know they have given their best efforts. The few pupils for whom English is an additional language are supported effectively in lessons. They receive sufficient attention to ensure that they participate fully in lessons. The particularly gifted and talented pupils are well known: they are invariably challenged fully.
22. Literacy is well taught in English. The co-ordination of the teaching of literacy across the curriculum is in its infancy. Though there is some good and even very good practice, for example in history, the teaching of reading, writing and discussion skills is at least satisfactory in all subjects. Numeracy is well taught, mainly through mathematics; however, many other subjects use opportunities to apply and develop number and measuring skills to good effect.
23. Pupils are good learners and make effective use of the opportunities provided to build on their knowledge and skill. They sustain good advances in learning as they move through the school. Learning is slowed somewhat in Year 9 as a result of some unsatisfactory teaching. The school has done much to address these difficulties and is having some success through the provision of additional support for teachers who experience difficulties.
24. The pupils often show considerable maturity in the way they apply themselves to their work, persevering when they experience considerable difficulties. They sustain a good pace, providing the task is progressively challenging. They are eager to find out how well they are progressing and work hard towards the targets set for them.
25. The last inspection judged teaching in most subjects to be sound. Teaching is now predominantly good. This represents a considerable improvement.

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

26. The curriculum is predominantly relevant and challenging and overall satisfactory. The most striking feature is the very good range of extra-curricular activities. The school meets the needs of pupils at all levels of attainment, including the pupils with special educational needs, the gifted and talented pupils and those for whom English is an additional language. This it does by carefully monitoring the progress of individual pupils and responding to their needs.
27. National Curriculum requirements are met except in the case of information and communication technology in Key Stages 3 and 4, where the aspect dealing with developing ideas and making things happen is not provided. Additionally, the school does not meet the requirements for the provision of design and technology in Years 10 and 11. Religious education does not fully meet statutory requirements in the sixth form. What the school offers by way of careers education is satisfactory.
28. The curriculum provided for pupils in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. There are ample opportunities for pupils to gain a range of knowledge, skills and values. All National Curriculum subjects are offered, together with religious education and personal, social, and health education. There is no provision for the teaching of textiles in design and technology. French for all pupils is enhanced by a choice of either German or Spanish from Year 8. Further enhancement is provided by Latin for more gifted pupils, which is taught after school and during lunchtime.
29. In English, pupils are successfully exposed to a wide range of prose, plays and writing. Using and applying mathematics is well integrated into other aspects of mathematics, such as data handling. Very good use of media, including three-dimensional material, contributes to high standards in art. The emphasis on practical work in music contributes significantly to the high standards achieved. Arrangements for the setting of pupils to best meet their needs have improved since the last inspection. In science, pupils are set from Year 9 upward and in modern foreign languages from Year 8. These arrangements work well. However, mixed attainment grouping in some subjects, such as mathematics in Year 7, does not always work to the advantage of all pupils.
30. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. Along with English, mathematics, science, a modern foreign language, physical education, religious education and social education, there is a sound range of additional option subjects offered at GCSE. These include business studies, food studies and religious education. Parents and pupils appreciate the opportunity to study three separate sciences, although this does narrow the curriculum for the pupils who take this option. About one-third of their time is taken up studying science. The option system narrows the range of technology choices open to pupils in a way that makes it difficult to meet statutory requirements for this subject.
31. A good range of AS and A-level examinations is available in the sixth form, including further mathematics, Spanish, music and theatre studies. GNVQ provision is limited to business studies. However, the school plans to extend GNVQ courses in the academic year 2001. Appropriate units of personal and social education and general studies are also provided in addition to compulsory physical education.
32. The quality of extra-curricular provision is very good in drama and physical education and excellent in music. A good programme of competitive sport, often taking place on Saturdays, is well established. The majority of pupils are involved in inter-house sport in rugby, football and basketball, and in inter-house music and drama competitions. Opportunities to sing and play in numerous music groups such as the jazz ensemble and the ceilidh band greatly enrich pupils' experience. Over 240 pupils receive

instrumental lessons. Apart from school productions, an annual arts festival is held jointly by the music, art and drama departments. This provides a very good opportunity for pupils to celebrate their talents. Many departments hold very helpful revision clubs. The homework club is highly valued by the pupils.

33. All pupils follow a relevant programme of personal and social education, including the teaching of health and sex education, and drugs awareness. It provides well for the development of a range of inter-personal skills and deals effectively with bullying.
34. The school has successfully forged useful links with the business community, mainly related to Year 11 work experience. Pupils benefit from a wide range of visitors and speakers on topics such as health and safety. Provision for careers education is satisfactory. Careers guidance is adequate for those pupils who intend to remain at school after the age of 16, and the programme is well planned. However, pupils do not have sufficient access to computerised careers information. All Year 12 pupils make a helpful visit to the University of Hertfordshire. There are good pastoral links with primary school. Links within the sixth form schools' consortium are good. They are set to support a significant enrichment of the range of courses available to pupils in the sixth form.
35. Since the last inspection, good progress has been made in providing for pupils with special educational needs. All subject areas have relevant information and some departments plan effectively to meet pupils' needs. In response to the issue raised in the last inspection concerning lack of awareness of equal opportunities, a school working party has looked at resources in relation to cultural content and identified possible areas for development. It also monitors pupils' involvement in extra-curricular activities. Pupils have equal access and opportunity to the curriculum. Although the teaching of information and communication technology still does not meet statutory requirements in Years 10 and 11, the extensive provision of new computers has secured considerable improvements. The over-emphasis on skills in physical education raised in the last report has been partly addressed by the extension of a module of gymnastics in Years 7, 8 and 9.
36. Overall, the school's provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. It is a strong feature of the school and is consistent with the school's aim to provide a disciplined and caring environment, based on mutual respect, where each boy is valued as an individual and his moral and spiritual development encouraged.
37. The spiritual development of pupils is well catered for, as is evident in the weekly Christian union run by sixth form pupils. Well-organised lessons on meditation at Key Stage 3 in religious education make a further good contribution. The history department makes a significant and impressive contribution through reflection on war and death in the First World War battlefield trip. In music, art, mathematics and English, there are good opportunities for pupils to reflect on issues of deep personal concern to them.
38. The school does not meet the statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship. Pupils attend a fortnightly house assembly and a weekly year assembly where there are occasional contributions to spirituality. However, there are missed opportunities for quiet reflection in most assemblies, which are usually moral in tone. The programme suggesting a 'thought for the day' in tutor time is an effort to move closer to achieving the statutory requirements, but there is little monitoring of what is offered, with the consequence that there is inconsistency in the quality of what is provided.

39. The school provides well for the moral development of pupils: there is a strong moral code throughout the school. Teachers and pupils in the sixth form give a clear lead in encouraging good inter-personal relationships. Pupils are taught to distinguish between right and wrong. Most departments encourage pupils to reflect on moral issues. For example, in history pupils are encouraged to reflect on war and the holocaust. In religious education, the ethical implications of religious beliefs are discussed; in physical education, there is a strong emphasis on abiding by rules of sport in fair play and on taking responsibility for the safety and welfare of others. Sensitivity to environmental issues is stressed in geography. In information and communication technology pupils are provided with some good opportunities to consider ethical issues, such as the place of technology in today's society.
40. The provision for social development is good with several long-standing traditions, such as links with old boys and the Remembrance Day service. There is good collaborative work in mathematics, science, modern foreign languages, geography, physical education, music, religious education, personal and social education and in competitive sports. Within the five houses music, drama and sports competitions take place regularly. Valuable opportunities to take responsibility are offered to pupils, including acting as librarians, prefects and members of the school council. The sixth formers play an important part in supporting younger pupils and are good role models, for instance when acting as cashiers on tills in the dining room. They are also involved in service to the local community. Events organised to raise money for charities give many pupils practical opportunities to help others. Residential opportunities are available, such as the team building Year 7 week in Bude.
41. The overall provision for cultural development is good. Through the religious education curriculum, pupils are taught to appreciate their own cultural traditions and the richness and diversity of other cultures. In geography, cultures such as the Masai warriors of Kenya are studied. The school's enrichment policy emphasises ways in which mathematics can contribute to an understanding of cultural differences in the understanding of mathematics. In art, awareness of other cultures is revealed in pupils' Rangoli patterns. Through its exchanges with pupils in Spain, Germany and France, the modern foreign language department makes a very good contribution to the cultural development of pupils, as do the school ski trips to the USA and Italy. Art displays around the school provide evidence of a good level of multi-cultural awareness. Some design and technology projects require the investigation of multi-cultural backgrounds. The Year 12 boy whose work experience has involved travelling to a sports shop in Normandy is an interesting example of good provision for the cultural development of pupils.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

42. The school has good and well-understood child protection procedures. Pupils are well cared for by a pastoral system by which form tutors know the boys well. Facilities to deal with minor accidents and illness are good and there is an adequate number of qualified first-aiders. Health education is good and pupils work in a safe environment.
43. Procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are satisfactory, although several registers are not completed in accordance with requirements. There are very good procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour. Strengths lie in the regular assessment of behaviour, progress checks and the role models provided by teachers, all underpinned by high expectations for mature behaviour.

44. The school has satisfactory procedures for assessing attainment and progress. Extensive data is generated from external and internal tests. Less data is available for pupils in Years 7 and 8, but the school has clear plans to introduce national tests for these years. Assessment data is used primarily for the prediction of future attainment. Assessment information is not yet used well enough for curriculum planning or for helping individual pupils to improve, except in the case of pupils with special educational needs. The school is working towards the integration of assessment into a single system in order to make better use of the wealth of assessment data available.
45. The support provided for pupils to help them improve is satisfactory overall. Good features include the identification of under-achieving pupils and mentoring of 15 and 16-year-old pupils. Monitoring of progress in pupils' personal development is good. Review and reporting arrangements, together with good links with parents, provide good support for pupils. The support received by pupils with special educational needs is good and helps them to make good progress.
46. Since the last inspection, the school has produced a clear policy for assessment. It has made some improvement in assessment practice, but recognises that it has not yet made enough progress in the development of a fully effective system to provide individual pupils with the support needed.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

47. The school's partnership with parents is a real strength of the school. Parents' views of the school are overwhelmingly positive. To eight of the 12 questions in the pre-inspection questionnaire, more than 90 per cent of parents responded positively. Only one area, the amount of homework given, attracted a significant minority of critical responses. Within this very positive overall picture, a few parents expressed concern over the quality of teaching, the management of behaviour, and behaviour itself, all in Year 9. Inspection evidence supported the positive opinions of parents but not the views regarding homework, which was judged to be appropriate. Inspectors also found there was some justification for the concerns regarding Year 9.
48. Parents receive a great deal of valuable information about the school, about the curriculum and about their children's progress. Particularly good examples are the many evening meetings arranged by the school when parents learn about specific curriculum matters. A further strength is the school's brochure, which is excellent in quality, readability and content. The combination of progress checks, annual reports and consultation evenings gives very good information on pupils' academic and personal progress.
49. The school's links with parents are very strong. There is good communication regarding attendance, behaviour, school activities and events. The home-school journal represents another useful means of two-way communication. Additionally, the school seeks to discover parents' views by means of surveys. Pastoral, academic and senior staff are all easily accessible. Parents feel comfortable about approaching the school with concerns.
50. Partly because of the school's efforts and partly due to their own degree of interest, parental involvement is high. For example, meetings and consultation evenings are very well attended. Many parents attend voluntary interviews on option choices for Year 9. The parents' association is flourishing, though with a limited number of direct helpers. Parents show considerable interest in homework and coursework.

51. The school has sustained the very good links with parents noted at the last inspection. It has maintained a high standard of communication whilst seeking successfully to make continuous improvements, for example in the reporting of progress and the provision of specific information at parents' meetings.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

52. The overall leadership and management of the school are good. However, this judgement has to be set in the context of recent changes. The headteacher has just been appointed, having been acting headteacher for the previous year. The governing body has been radically reshaped through the appointment of six new governors, four of whom are parents of the school. There is also a new chair of governors who has begun to rethink radically the way the headteacher and governors exercise their respective responsibilities. All these changes have sharpened thinking about the management of the school, which is now set to move forward on many fronts.
53. The headteacher, his deputy and other senior managers seek to create and secure a commitment to the further raising of standards and the improvement of teaching. It is to their credit that already they have had some significant success. For instance, the introduction of a system of self-evaluation across departments is increasing awareness of where the school's further development should take root. There is a growing acknowledgement of the need to adapt more radically to current thinking and effective practice in education. This is particularly evident in the determination to address weaknesses in the management of behaviour in lessons, where a few teachers experience difficulties. The new headteacher has already been decisive in initiating appropriate changes, and is doing so at a pace that teachers find manageable.
54. The leadership and management of subjects are good overall. English, modern foreign languages, history and religious education are very well led and managed. The leadership and management of mathematics, art, music, business education and special educational needs are good. Science, geography, information and communication technology and physical education are led and managed satisfactorily. In design and technology, leadership and management are unsatisfactory. The management of subjects has been held back by a lack of clarity in the roles of heads of department, particularly their monitoring role. This is improving through the programme of self-evaluation.
55. The governors work well with the senior managers. They are steadily building up a relationship with the school that puts them in a strong position to exercise their distinctive responsibilities. They know the school's strengths and weaknesses very well and have the right level of expertise to work productively with the headteacher. The high proportion of parents on the governing body is a strength, in that it assures that parental concerns receive a high level of attention. The governors have ensured that the school meets its statutory obligations, except in the case of design and technology for pupils aged 14 to 16 and some aspects of information and communication technology, for pupils aged 11 to 16. Though the school comes closer than at the time of the last inspection to meeting the statutory requirement for the provision of a daily act of collective worship for all pupils, it remains non-compliant. Religious education is not provided as required by the locally agreed syllabus in the sixth form.
56. The school, through its aims and values, places great stress on the raising of standards of attainment and the inclusion of all pupils to the full extent of their competence. This

commitment shines through all its work, particularly in the care taken to support pupils with special educational needs. The school seeks diligently to extend pupils' cultural horizons and provide opportunities for the boys to mix socially with girls. The commitment to high standards and to sustaining the quality of teaching shows itself in the recent increased emphasis on the rigorous monitoring of the work of departments. Appraisal and performance management are conducted to very good effect under the leadership of the new headteacher. This has led to a shared commitment to improvement. The drive and enthusiasm of the teachers is a key factor in the school's clear capacity to succeed. Teachers are well supported in their work and receive a very good induction programme when they come to the school. Great care is taken to ensure that newly-qualified teachers are supported carefully. The school provides very well for teachers in training who come to the school for classroom experience.

57. The new governors inherited a surplus representing 16 per cent of the previous year's budget. This had built up over three years. This inefficient use of funding is now being radically addressed by the development of more carefully organised budgeting. Financial planning now reflects clearly agreed priorities for development. The governors have the expertise to monitor the management of the budget and do so effectively through regular visits to the school. Grants received for specific purposes are spent appropriately. The funding set aside for the support of pupils with special educational needs is well spent in supporting their needs. The good use of information and communication technology in managing the budget ensures that the governors are provided with readily available financial statements: this enables them to ensure that expenditure is directed appropriately. The most recent auditors' report found the school's financial systems to be in good order, apart from a few minor procedural matters that have since been addressed appropriately. The governors help the school to make good judgements about cost and value when it comes to major items of expenditure, including the appointment of new members of staff. With the support of the local education authority, the school compares its costs and achievements to that of similar schools in the area.
58. There are enough appropriately qualified and experienced teachers and support staff to teach the full range of the curriculum, apart from information and communication technology. Not all teachers have the confidence or expertise to make effective use of computers in their subject. This is particularly true of art and geography. Accommodation is satisfactory overall. However, the accommodation for information and communication technology and physical education is inadequate. There are insufficient resources in science and in information and communication technology: otherwise resources are adequate, apart from art where they are good.
59. Weaknesses in the management of the school developed since the last inspection, but these are steadily being addressed. They relate particularly to unclear delegation of responsibilities beyond senior management level. Though roles and responsibilities are now clearer, there remain some residual weaknesses in some subjects. The governing body works more effectively than at the time of the last inspection as a critical friend and is more effective in holding the school to account for the standards it achieves and for the management of the budget.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

60. In order to take the school further forward in its development the following actions should be taken:

- (1) Raise standards of attainment in design and technology and in Spanish by:
- ensuring that the full range of the National Curriculum for design and technology is provided for all pupils to whom it applies;
 - tracking pupils' progress in the subject more carefully.
(paragraphs 4, 27, 105)
 - addressing weaknesses in teaching of Spanish.
(paragraphs 133, 135)
- (2) Improve the curriculum so that it meets statutory requirements by:
- meeting fully the requirement for the provision of information and communication technology and for design and technology;.
(paragraphs 55, 128)
 - providing a programme of religious education in the sixth form that is consistent with the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus for the provision of religious education.
(paragraphs 55, 158)

- (3) Address weaknesses in teaching, particularly in Years 8 and 9 by:
- identifying and disseminating the good practice that already exists in the school;
 - providing teachers who experience difficulties with training in the management of behaviour.
(paragraph 20)
- (4) Clarify the responsibilities of staff with management roles, particularly their role in the monitoring and support of teaching.
(paragraph 54)
- (5) Improve learning resources in science and in information and communication technology.
(paragraph 58, 99, 130, 136)
- (6) Continue to press for improvements in accommodation in physical education, which is unsatisfactory.
(paragraph 150)

The following are further matters for the attention of the school and the governors:

- Mixed attainment grouping in some subjects, such as mathematics in Year 7, does not always work to the advantage of all pupils;
(paragraph 29)
- Registers of attendance are not always completed in accordance with requirements;
(paragraph 43)
- The school does not meet fully the requirement for the provision of a daily act of collective worship for all pupils;
(paragraph 37)
- The school has not made enough progress in the development of a fully effective assessment system.
(paragraph 46)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	173
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	54

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	22	41	27	8	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	757	153
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	30	na

Special educational needs	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	9	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	137	0

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

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	9
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	10

Attendance

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
	%		%
School data	6.0	School data	0.1
National comparative data	7.7	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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2000	152	0	152

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	142	136	137
	Girls	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Total	142	136	137
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	93 (80)	89 (83)	90 (86)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	61 (44)	71 (57)	69 (48)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	122	144	140
	Girls	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Total	122	144	140
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	80 (76)	95 (86)	92 (94)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	47 (45)	73 (59)	70 (76)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	2000	131	0	131

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	84	127	129
	Girls	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Total	84	127	129
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	64 (59)	97 (95)	98 (98)
	National	47.4 (46.4)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	43 (43.4)
	National	38.4 (38)

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

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	2000	55	1	56

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	18.3	6.0	18.0 (18.9)	3.0	N/A	3.0 (4.5)
National	17.7	18.6	18.2 (18)	2.6	2.9	2.7 (4)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	1
Indian	1
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	3
Chinese	3
White	902
Any other minority ethnic group	

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other	1	
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi	1	
Chinese		
White	10	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 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	52.7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	5
Total aggregate hours worked per week	67

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.8
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	27.7
Key Stage 4	22.0

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	2222442
Total expenditure	2005455
Expenditure per pupil	2279
Balance brought forward from previous year	62313
Balance carried forward to next year	279300

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

910

Number of questionnaires returned

302

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	43	49	6	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	49	45	4	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	36	56	4	1	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	25	54	19	2	0
The teaching is good.	41	56	1	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	46	42	10	1	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	65	30	4	0	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	68	31	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	44	46	9	1	0
The school is well led and managed.	56	40	2	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	49	44	4	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	46	38	8	1	7

Other issues raised by parents

There were no other issues raised.

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

ENGLISH

61. Overall standards of attainment in English are good. Results in the National Curriculum tests for 14 year-olds and the GCSE examinations for 16-year-olds are well above the national averages. These results reflect pupils' attainment on entry to the school at Year 7, which is above national expectations. Pupils make good progress through the lower school and most pupils obtain the expected Level 5 in the national tests at the end of Year 9. A significant proportion obtain Level 6, Level 7 and even Level 8, which is well above the national average. Pupils do as well as in the other core subjects of mathematics and science. Following a fall in standards in English in 1997, pupils' results have improved, with a sharp rise in 2000, indicating good improvement since the last inspection. Attainment seen in written work analysed and lessons observed is reflected in the pupils' achievements in the tests.
62. The standards reached by 14-year-olds in speaking and listening are good. For example, in a Year 8 lesson, pupils prepared formal presentations on topics related to their earlier studies of horror stories. Pupils used information and communication technology equipment skilfully to present their research into the authenticity of ghost stories and stories concerned with the paranormal.
63. Most pupils in the lower school read a good range of stories, plays, poems and informative matter with good understanding. However, not all read aloud expressively or vary their intonation to convey the exact meaning of the text. The rich diet of reading provided raises pupils' awareness of different styles of writing, which they develop in their own written work for a range of purposes and a variety of readers. Pupils select key passages that are significant for their understanding of the text. For example, Year 9 pupils studying George Orwell's 'Animal Farm' brought the text vividly to life by recording the main events in the story through a journal kept by Napoleon, the leader of the pigs.
64. Pupils prepare for Year 9 national tests by developing their responses to central themes in Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night'. They write well about the effects of Shakespeare's use of twelfth-night revelry to turn every situation 'topsy-turvy'. Pupils analyse informative material to enhance their understanding of the techniques writers use to express feelings and emotions. For example, they gain first-hand experience of persuasive language by writing their own advertising articles.
65. Pupils in Year 9 research the qualities that make a good story by exploring, with considerable insight, styles of presentation intended to build atmosphere and sustain interest. As a result, pupils' imaginative writing shows an emerging maturity of style. For example, a pupil built tension into his horror story with the opening line, referring to 'a single light flickering at the end of the alley'.
66. Standards of attainment at the age of 16 years are good. The proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades in the year 2000 GCSE examinations was well above the national average for all schools. Pupils' results were about the same as those obtained by pupils in similar schools. On the evidence of lessons seen and written work analysed, a significant proportion of pupils in the upper bands reach standards above national expectations. The attainment of pupils in the middle bands is sound overall. Attainment in the foundation tier varies according to the amount of effort made by the pupils

themselves. All pupils follow the same programmes of study and have equal opportunities to make progress and achieve well. The rate of progress depends on pupils' motivation, concentration and will to succeed.

67. Standards in speaking and listening for 16-year-olds are good overall and sometimes very good. Pupils discuss confidently a range of topics, exploring their ideas and responding thoughtfully to the views of others. For example, in a Year 11 class a lively discussion developed about an onion given as a Valentine present. Layers of meaning were explored, providing pupils with good arguments to use in their GCSE examinations.
68. Pupils read a good range of texts, perceptively selecting key passages to illustrate their understanding of the text. For example, lower-attaining pupils in a Year 11 class explored the relationship between the two main characters in the novel 'Of Mice and Men'. They selected significant quotations to provide evidence of the impact of this relationship on the development of the plot. Pupils sift sensitively through themes in plays and poems to find those that make a universal appeal to the finer emotions. For example, in an essay about Arthur Miller's 'The Crucible', pupils wrote about the central character's need for forgiveness for human frailty. As a result of this detailed analysis of texts most pupils enter examinations confidently and achieve well.
69. Results at A level in 2000 were in line with the national average in English language and English literature. Such standards have been sustained over the last four years. In lessons and in work seen, attainment in Years 12 and 13 is sound overall. Pupils in both year groups develop mature discussion skills, sustaining an argument through the exchange of ideas. For example, in a Year 12 lesson pupils compared the reactions of society to the rape of the central character in Margaret Atwood's 'The Handmaid's Tale' and the reaction of our own society to a similar incident today. Pupils in Year 13 develop their own individual style of writing to inform, discuss, entertain or persuade. This is the result of pupils exploring, through a wide range of reading, how authors use language and structure to shape meaning. In their poetry studies, they explain how Wilfred Owen uses language economically to create startling images that impact upon the reader's sensibilities. Pupils' writing is interesting to read because opinions are supported by well-researched arguments that have been developed through discussions in lessons.
70. Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language achieve well in relation to their prior attainment. In every English lesson seen, teachers were aware which pupils had special needs and what help they needed to make steady progress. In several lessons seen, learning support assistants were working effectively alongside pupils with needs, although a more integral approach towards structured provision for pupils' improved learning was not observed.
71. Behaviour in lessons is good overall. Most pupils have positive attitudes to their learning and enjoy their English classes. Pupils develop a mature approach and handle difficulties that occur with presence of mind and an easy confidence. For example, when the display screen failed to show the results of a pupil's survey, he recouped the situation, referring to the 'technical hitch' with a nice touch of humour. Some patches of disruptive behaviour arise in Years 8 and 9. They occur when pupils lose interest because of the lack of challenge in the lesson or are unclear about what is required of them. However, where teachers set a brisk pace for the activities and share the purpose of the lesson with their pupils, then good progress is made and pupils settle quickly to their work. The good relationships between teachers and pupils are a strength of the school. Touches of humour enliven many lessons. In all lessons,

teachers are alert to the problems of those with special needs. Pupils respond well to the special support provided. Overall, the sensitivity of teachers and their caring attitude towards the learning of all pupils is the reason that pupils respond well and make good progress.

72. Overall, the quality of learning is good. This is reflected in the above-average results obtained by 14-year-olds in the National Curriculum tests and by 16-year-olds in the GCSE examinations. Pupils learn well in response to the well-planned teaching provided for them. They take an active part in class discussions, sharing their ideas and planning for written tasks based on the texts studied. Several examples of good learning were seen in Year 9 classes exploring the text of 'Twelfth Night'. Pupils respond well to the humorous elements of the play. In a particularly entertaining lesson, pupils brought a key scene vividly to life, extracting every ounce of comedy to the great delight of their classmates. As a result, all the pupils shared a colourful experience that provided them with a good understanding of the text.
73. Pupils in Year 11 learn how to make a more complex analysis of plays, poems, prose and non-fiction material. For example, they compare the arrogance of Tybalt and the taunting of Mercutio, as the dramatic tension builds up between the rival gangs in 'Romeo and Juliet'. Pupils learn how this feud affects the outcome of the play. In response to the rigorous teaching, pupils in Year 12 learn to work independently. By Year 13 they show an increased confidence in taking the initiative in their learning. Some potent and muscular writing emerges as a result. For example, pupils write appreciatively about the honest, sometimes bawdy, characteristics of the Wife of Bath and the triumph of instinct over intellect in Chaucer's tale.
74. The quality of teaching is good overall. In the lessons seen, teaching ranged from unsatisfactory to very good. There was a very small measure of unsatisfactory teaching. More than half the lessons were good or better and a quarter were very good. As a result of this good teaching, pupils learn well and reach well above average attainment. The strength of the teaching is the enthusiasm of teachers for their subject, their pleasure in the sharing of knowledge and their joy in pupils' contributions to their own learning.
75. All lessons seen were planned well. The only difficulties occurred when teachers were inflexible and stuck unduly firmly to their lesson plan without ensuring that pupils were in touch with the point of the lesson. The best lessons engaged pupils' attention from the start through a series of incisive, demanding questions that built on prior learning. For example, in a Year 11 class pupils explored the structure of Ted Hughes' poem 'Hawk Roosting', defining the characteristics of the bird as self-centred and arrogant. In response to the teacher's probing questions, pupils referred intelligently to the text to support their views. Teachers' insistence that pupils' opinions are backed by references to the text ensures that pupils consolidate their learning. This is especially well established in Year 13, where the teaching is of high quality. For example, pupils discussing the effect upon an Elizabethan audience of the language used in 'King Lear', quoted Cordelia's response, 'No cause, no cause', to good effect, to support their argument. In the best lessons, pupils are encouraged to judge how well they are achieving, with the result that they understand what they have learned and make it their own.
76. Helpful marking is a strength: teachers indicate clearly what pupils need to do to improve their writing and obtain better grades. This detailed marking is particularly evident in the most recent work submitted by pupils. A good start has been made in

using data from assessment to track pupils' progress and plan for improvement in performance.

77. There is a good stock of books and ample space for pupils to work independently. The library is used well to support pupils' learning. The use of books is further complemented by the popular library club, which meets every day before and after school.
78. A key factor in the quality of teaching and the good standards reached is the sensitive management and lively encouragement provided by the new head of department. The management of the subject is driven by innovative ideas, sympathetic understanding of problems that beset less experienced teachers and awareness of the need for systematic management of pupils' learning needs. Overall, the department is set for even further improvement.
79. Since the last inspection standards have improved in the national tests and in the GCSE examinations; there is greater emphasis on the formal uses of language; there is now a good range of resources and support for pupils with special educational needs has improved very significantly.

Literacy

80. Pupils' use of literacy skills across the curriculum is satisfactory and often good because pupils' standards in English are above average. There is considerable variation in the development of the skills of speaking, reading and writing across subjects. The very good emphasis on literacy in history has brought about clear improvements in the use of historical language and in the quality of writing. Pupils read beyond the minimum requirements of their courses. There are marked improvements in the accuracy of the pupils' writing and in the clarity of presentation of written work. In modern foreign languages, there is a good emphasis on discussion and on encouraging pupils to initiate questions. Good oral work in music extends the range of language which pupils bring to bear on the appraisal of pieces of music. In the theoretical component of physical education, pupils are encouraged to use language well and invoke the appropriate technical vocabulary. Apart from the work of the very highest-attaining pupils, the standard of pupils' written communication in science is lower than expected, for example, in the quality of explanation, analysis and evaluation.

Drama

81. Since the last inspection, a drama department has been established and a drama studio converted from a former dining area. This represents an improvement on what was noted in the last inspection. Drama lessons for Years 7, 8 and 9 are established as a weekly event and are popular with the pupils. Drama is an optional subject for pupils in Years 10 and 11. The pupils entered for the GCSE examination achieved satisfactory results. The small group due to take A-level or AS theatre studies in the sixth form reach satisfactory standards.
82. In the drama lessons seen, pupils concentrate on physical theatre, reproducing a series of good 'freeze frame' images based on the story of 'The Fall of Usher'. Pupils enjoy their lessons, relishing the precision and control they must master to establish and hold the shapes created. Pupils learn about using space in a confined area by working as a team and responding to a countdown in seconds. Pupils repeat the activities several times so that they become proficient in the performance of their sequence of movements. In Year 13, pupils prepare their polished improvisations carefully for

presentation as part of their A-level examination. Some of the best creative drama was seen in the English lessons where pupils were exploring the text of 'Twelfth Night' through practical performance.

83. Extra-curricular activities support pupils' creative development through the highly successful school productions presented each year and the popular house play competition.

MATHEMATICS

84. Standards in mathematics are well above the national averages at ages 14 and 16, and above-average in the sixth form. Pupils enter the school with above national average levels and achievement is good by age 14, although in lessons it varies with teacher, topic, year group and attitude and motivation of pupils. Since the previous inspection, results have risen throughout the school and, overall, show an improving trend.
85. The results of National Curriculum tests at age 14 in 2000 were well above national averages and well above the results of similar schools. At age 16, the GCSE results in 2000 were well above the national average for the proportion of A*-C and A*-G grades. When the measure of average points score is used, which takes into account the performance of all pupils taking the tests, the school's results were above average when compared to all nationally and in comparison with similar schools. A-level results in 2000 were very high.
86. The standards achieved throughout Year 7 are satisfactory, but improve when setting across years is organised from Year 8 onwards. The higher-attaining pupils in Year 8 attain good standards. For example, they substitute values into formulae, and relate what they discover to mathematical problems encountered in everyday life. Lower-attaining pupils achieve well at their own level with sympathetic, but firm, approaches from teachers and the use of stimulating resources. There is some good work using computers in Years 8 and 9, when pupils, for example, use spreadsheets to find the maximum volume of a cuboid made from a set surface area.
87. In Key Stage 4, the two highest sets reach standards well above national expectations. This results from the pupils' interest and enthusiasm for their work. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 10, when dealing with quadratic equations, make rapid advances in their work as a result of stimulating teaching. Middle-attaining pupils find patterns of numbers, which they express algebraically as quadratic equations. Pupils in the small Year 10 lower-attaining set demonstrate a sound level of skill in using protractors and measuring angles, drawing polygons and finding the pattern in exterior and interior angles. Pupils in Year 11, working on GCSE coursework, produce some excellent results.
88. Pupils in the higher-attaining group in Year 13 are obviously well on the way to good A-level results, whilst the lower-attaining group, taking a mixture of A and A/S-levels, are progressing well in their work, although the recent mock examinations produced disappointing results.
89. Pupils have generally good attitudes to their work. They show a desire to succeed and work consistently in lessons to achieve accuracy in their solutions to mathematical problems. They usually behave well in lessons, working well in groups and taking responsibility for their own learning when provided with suitable opportunities to do so. The negative attitudes of a few pupils in Year 9 greatly affected their own achievement and sometimes that of other pupils in the lessons. This arises mainly from inadequate

management of behaviour and inconsistencies in preserving secure classroom routines.

90. The quality of teaching is good overall and has improved since the last inspection. There is a significant proportion of very good teaching. Teaching is very good in the sixth form. There is a very small measure of unsatisfactory teaching. Lessons are planned very thoroughly; they are characterised by clear exposition and explanation, well-produced worksheets and helpful demonstrations. The best teaching is marked by good relationships with pupils and firm discipline, allied to a lightness of touch. Pupils generally respond well, trying hard to refine and improve their work. However, there are exceptions: a few Year 9 pupils are negative, unfocused and distracting to other pupils. A few teachers have difficulty managing these pupils' behaviour. There is also a tendency for some pupils, even with good teachers, to chatter and waste time. Homework is set regularly: it is marked and monitored well, though it is sometimes not well matched to pupils' attainment levels, especially in Key Stage 3. Though work is usually well matched to pupils' levels of attainment, occasionally higher-attaining pupils are given work that is too easy. The pupils who are particularly gifted and talented are given work that is sufficiently challenging. Clear explanations are a feature of much teaching in the sixth form. For example, in a very stimulating lesson in Year 12, the teacher clearly stressed the difference between solving and proving, explaining what it is to think mathematically. The pupils responded by engaging in problem solving with greater confidence and accuracy. Assessment procedures are good: they have developed well since the last inspection. Much data is collected, recorded and analysed, but, as yet, it is not used sufficiently to set targets for improvement for individual pupils. Pupils with special educational needs are identified early, and are effectively supported by the teachers and by learning support assistants when appropriate.
91. The leadership and management of mathematics are good, with clearly written aims and policies. The schemes of work are well structured and developing to incorporate the National Numeracy Strategy for September 2001. Improvements since the previous inspection are the emphasis on investigation skills and the integration of the uses and applications of mathematics in the teaching and learning of all topics. Information and communication technology is now integrated into the schemes of work, teachers are improving their skills and some good work is developing. The display of pupils' work is now good in most classrooms, with key words prominent. Discussion and structured group work, the absence of which was noted in the last inspection, remain under-used.

Numeracy

92. Standards of numeracy are good; number skills are taught well by the mathematics department and used effectively by many departments. Graphical skills in particular are used well, for example, in Year 13 lessons in business studies, to illustrate key concepts in the supply and demand of currency. In Year 10 history and geography lessons, statistics are used appropriately, showing that pupils invoke a good range of techniques to collect and present data. Pupils calculate accurately in science, and in information and communication technology lessons.

SCIENCE

93. Overall, the attainment in science is above the national average. However, standards vary quite widely, both in the work seen and in test and examination results. Attainment in the work of the current Year 9 pupils is well above average. The latest assessments conducted by the teachers confirm this standard. Given that the prior level of attainment

of boys in science on entry to the school is above average, they achieve well during their first three years in school. The proportion of pupils reaching National Curriculum Levels 5 to 8 in the most recent national science tests, taken at age 14, is an improvement on previously recorded performance and matches achievements in English and mathematics, where attainment was well above the national averages. Eight out of ten pupils now achieve at least Level 6 in science. The average points score in science, which takes into account the performance of all pupils taking the tests, is even higher than in English and mathematics, and is in the top five per cent nationally. A contributory factor to this high achievement is the above-average time allocation for science in Years 7 to 9, so that pupils build on the high standards they achieve prior to entry. For example, higher-attaining pupils in Year 7, with a little guidance, draw on their prior learning about plant nutrition to produce the chemical equation for photosynthesis. A significant amount of noisy and distracting behaviour in Year 9 science classes is not well managed and hampers the progress of the 14-year-olds. Highest-attaining 14-year-olds, however, are given extra science lessons to help them advance to the full extent of their competence.

94. At Key Stage 4, where half the pupils study double science and half take GCSE examinations in biology, chemistry and physics, standards overall are around the level expected nationally. Standards in science are set to rise in the forthcoming GCSE examinations after a period where achievement, based on the proportion attaining GCSE grades A*-C, has declined over the last three years, when compared with the standard achieved nationally by boys in maintained schools. In the most recent GCSE results, attainment in science subjects overall was lower than in English and mathematics. However, based on average points scored, attainment in biology, chemistry and physics was bettered only by art and design and geography. In contrast, of 16 subjects examined, standards based on average points scored in double science were low, and only in design and technology and Spanish were the scores lower. A number of factors have contributed to the lower standards in science for 16-year-olds when compared with those at 14 years. The monitoring of neither learning nor behaviour in lessons sufficiently ensures that all pupils make the full effort needed to fulfil their potential. Apart from the work of the very highest-attaining pupils, the standard of pupils' written communication is lower than expected, for example, in the quality of explanation, analysis and evaluation. These skills are in greater demand in GCSE examinations than in national tests at 14, and the department is aware of the problem. It has sought to improve pupils' writing skills, but has yet to find a solution.
95. Attainment in the sixth form is above average in biology, chemistry and physics at advanced level. This is an improvement, because the proportion of pupils attaining the higher grades had been declining over the previous three years. Achievements in chemistry are significantly higher than last year. Year 13 chemists are now making very good progress in the development of their practical skills, for example, when investigating the miscibility curve for phenol, following a very recent emphasis on practical work brought in by the new head of chemistry. In biology, standards were slightly above average last year, based on average points scores, and are set to rise further this year. In physics, standards were well above average last year, based on average points scores, and are set to remain so this year. Excellent opportunities are provided in physics for pupils to develop their understanding of ideas and processes, for example, the work of Albert Einstein and the photo-electric effect, because pupils research topics independently and make excellent, computer-assisted, presentations of their findings. Communicating their understanding of physics in this way is also highly effective in promoting pupils' self-esteem and confidence. In physics, very good use is also made of practical demonstrations to promote understanding of projectile motion, for example. There are some missed opportunities to promote learning through oral

explanation in biology, chemistry and physics. In biology, chemistry and physics, pupils are not always given sufficient encouragement to communicate their understanding of science orally.

96. Behaviour is frequently very good. Pupils bring a mainly positive attitude to their studies. They enjoy carrying out experiments and do so safely. Pupils with special educational needs play a full part in lessons because teachers and learning support assistants recognise and meet these needs. Pupils watch high-quality demonstrations with great interest. They have a well-developed capacity to think about the subject, and the confidence to ask many pertinent questions because of the very good relationships established with staff. Playing an active part in lessons is a key factor in the good progress that pupils make. Pupils collaborate effectively during practical investigations. They make good use of the many homework opportunities and the extra lessons that teachers provide to extend their learning. The 75-minute lessons are too long for some pupils and their concentration often fades in the closing minutes. Teachers often miscalculate the amount of time needed to draw the lesson to an effective conclusion, to monitor what progress has been made and to explain clearly what is required for homework. In a few lessons, attitudes and behaviour are unsatisfactory. Here, pupils waste time and slow the pace of learning. The level of working noise is often excessive. It gets in the way of good quality thinking and slows the development of the more advanced skills of application, analysis, interpretation and evaluation. In the sixth form, older pupils take considerable responsibility for their own learning, but, in Year 12, many pupils are too reliant on their teachers.
97. The quality of teaching is good overall, but, in the lessons seen, ranged from excellent to unsatisfactory. All teachers show a very good command of their specialist subjects and prepare their lessons very well, ably supported by the laboratory technicians. Teaching of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy is mainly good but there are some missed opportunities to engage pupils in discussion about their work. Access to computers in laboratories is difficult and consequently there are few opportunities for pupils to make use of information and communication technology in science lessons. The widest disparity in the quality of teaching is found in the management of pupils, especially of pupils who are easily distracted, in the quality of teachers' questioning skills and in the quality of marking. Except in the very thorough annotation and assessment of pupils' investigations for GCSE coursework, the marking of pupils' other work, whilst regular, does not include detailed comments and helpful suggestions for improvement.
98. The department has made sound improvements since the last inspection, particularly in the attainment of pupils by the age of 14 years and in the sixth form, and in developing the curriculum. Following very recent staffing changes, the department is at an early stage of transition in forming new procedures to lead and manage science provision. Early indications point to a firm commitment by the heads of biology, chemistry and physics and their staff to work as a team to improve provision even further. A number of aspects have already been identified by staff for improvement, and inspection evidence confirms their appropriateness.
99. There are insufficient books and equipment, including computers, in the laboratories. The accommodation creates problems in the deployment and safe handling of resources, currently between two buildings and three floors.

ART AND DESIGN

100. Standards by the end of Year 9 are well above the national expectation and correspond with the results of assessments conducted by the teachers. Pupils aged 14 relate the

work of pop artists to present-day consumer society and produce their own contemporary versions of popular art, for example, using the style of Roy Lichtenstein to interpret 'The Simpsons' cartoons. Pupils draw well. Higher-attaining pupils use colour effectively. Standards at 16 and 18 years are well above the national average and have remained stable over the last three years. Pupils in Year 11 research systematically to develop their work for the GCSE examination. Some higher-attaining pupils sketch and take photographs of rotting wood and rusting metal on location and develop experimental studies with a variety of media to create textural effects. Lower-attaining pupils rely on copying and ready-made images. A-level pupils work independently on individual themes. Their work is researched thoroughly from objects they observe, or by working on location, documenting their observations carefully in sketchbooks. Final pieces are diverse and include huge paintings, striking sculptures, large textile hangings, graphical presentations and a video history about Edvard Munch. Pupils reach higher standards in art than in any other subject. Progress is good throughout all key stages. From above-average attainment on entry, pupils move through the school extending their knowledge and skill at a rapid rate. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well in relation to their prior levels of attainment. Pupils with particular gifts and talents are provided with the support required to extend their skills to the full.

101. Teaching and learning are good overall at all key stages, with significant strengths. The teachers' very good knowledge of what they teach and their high expectations of behaviour and effort ensure that pupils engage in their work to the full extent of their competence. Many lessons are characterised by the effective use of questioning, by which pupils are encouraged to discuss their work and use the appropriate language in evaluating it. For example, this was a marked feature of an outstanding lesson in Year 12, when skilful and subtle questioning led the pupils to some very intelligent analysis of their own work in relation to that of Howard Hodgkin, the English painter. The encouragement given to pupils to be responsible for their own learning improves their learning skills, particularly their knowledge of their attainment levels and of how to refine and improve their work. Good marking further extends their knowledge of their own learning. Constructive relationships with pupils encourage them to take risks with their work and let their imaginations run riot. This leads to some very creative and expressive work at all ages. Work is well matched to the pupils' levels of attainment.
102. Attitudes and behaviour are good throughout Key Stages 3 and 4 and are very good in the sixth form. Pupils listen intently to teachers and answer questions thoughtfully. Pupils respect the teachers, due to their very good knowledge of their subject. They work confidently, with interest and concentration, because teaching is good. They are polite and co-operative. Relationships are good, creating a harmonious atmosphere in the art department.
103. Good leadership and management are responsible for the maintenance of high standards since the last inspection. Clear systems for monitoring pupils' progress are a key factor in raising achievement. The technician is an art specialist with qualifications in ceramics. Effective deployment of this talented technician extends the skills of all teachers in the department. The high quality of display within the art department and around the school is an inspiration to all members of the school. Links with other subjects are a strong feature of the department. In Year 8, there are useful links with geography, when pupils study rainforests and endangered species. There are further imaginative links with religious education, when the differences between Hindu and Muslim religions inspire work in a variety of media.
104. There has been a good level of improvement since the last inspection. The high standards at all key stages have been maintained. The quality of teaching has been

improved significantly.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

105. Overall standards of attainment are below average. Pupils reach below-average standards in the GCSE and A-level examinations. Standards of attainment have fallen over the last four years. The most recent assessments conducted by the teachers at the age of 14 show that most pupils achieve the national expected standard. However, the method by which pupils' attainment in projects is assigned to National Curriculum levels is flawed and significantly over-estimates attainment. Attainment in lessons is generally satisfactory, but often poor in Year 9. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated in lessons and achieve well in relation to their prior attainment. In graphics and food technology lessons, the standard of work produced by pupils with special educational needs is good. Though no special arrangements are made for gifted and talented pupils, they achieve satisfactorily.
106. Pupils undertake an adequate range of projects using wood, metal, plastic and food materials. The department does not provide lessons in textile technology. Pupils are satisfactorily introduced to electronics, mechanisms, computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture. Good lessons were observed based upon an analysis of coleslaw sold by different retail outlets in Year 7, and the design of a promotional package for a CD computer game in Year 9. Many of the projects in electronics, graphics and food technology made good use of the design and make cycle in which pupils are given a design brief, research the product area, provide a range of possible designs, select and cost a design, plan making, produce a product and evaluate the outcome. Many of the projects undertaken make good use of information and communication technology to improve presentation, aid design and teach aspects of control. Pupils have some opportunities to write short texts addressed to a technical audience and learn key words. The use of numbers and measures is limited to quantities, costs and sizes.
107. At Key Stage 4 pupils select subjects from four groups of options and, as a result, not all take design and technology; an arrangement which breaches National Curriculum requirements. Overall, the attainment of pupils at the ages of 16 and 18 is unsatisfactory. However, the attainment of the 12 pupils who took the GCSE in electronic products last year was above average. Whilst the proportion of the 12 pupils who obtained the higher A*-C grades in the GCSE in resistant materials technology last year was well below the national average, it represents satisfactory achievement in relation to pupils' prior attainment. The attainment of the small number of pupils who took GCSEs in engineering and food technology in 2000 was well below the average, with less than one in seven pupils obtaining the higher A*-C grades. The attainment of the two pupils who took the A-level examination last year was poor; both passed but neither obtained the higher grades. The department has recently introduced an AS level in design and technology, a good addition to its curriculum arrangements.
108. Pupils undertake an interesting and adequate range of projects in GCSE and A-level courses. Good projects seen include the marketing of a movie and the design of a two-way intercom in Year 10, vegetarian food for teenagers in Year 11, modern chair design in Year 12 and a container for a model car in Year 13. The standard of the course work is satisfactory overall and sometimes good. Pupils have good opportunities to practise design and making skills. The full design and make cycle features strongly in most projects. Pupils have good opportunities to use English in extended written texts addressed to a number of different types of audience. Numeracy is used effectively to evaluate designs, analyse results and provide graphs and charts. Pupils have adequate

opportunities to use information and communication technology to word process texts, publish work and use spreadsheets.

109. The standard of teaching is satisfactory overall, but too often unsatisfactory in Key Stage 3. All teachers have a secure knowledge of the subject and use homework well to extend learning by, for example, requiring pupils to undertake independent research. The standard of teaching in graphics is always satisfactory and often good. In Key Stage 3, teachers' expectations in the resistant materials area are too low: as a result, they accept inaccurate products and designs that are poorly presented and drawn. They do not always insist that pupils use their detailed drawings when making products. As a result, designing and making skills are not sufficiently developed to support the more demanding work in Key Stage 4. Pupils do not make enough notes of the work they do or receive enough written guidance on the selection of methods and materials. The planning of some Year 8 food technology lessons is poor and, as a result, lessons are fragmented and the pace is too slow.
110. Since the last inspection, the leadership of the department has been unsatisfactory. The newly-appointed headteacher is now providing good support: confidence in the department is improving as a result. The teachers work harmoniously together under the leadership of an experienced teacher. The work of the teachers is well supported by two technicians. Despite the difficulties, some progress has been made since the last inspection. Electronics, computer-aided design and manufacturing are now taught. However, difficulties with the accommodation remain, with the consequence that the environment for the conduct of some activities is unsuitable. The standard of teaching, skills acquired by pupils and examination results have all fallen significantly. Design and technology is a cause for concern in the school and much needs to be done to bring about necessary improvements.

GEOGRAPHY

111. Overall standards in geography are above the national average in Years 9 and 11. GCSE results in geography are consistently above the national average and pupils attain more highly than in many other subjects.
112. In the work seen during the inspection and in teacher assessments, attainment in Year 9 is above average. Given the above-average attainment of pupils when they join the school, the overall achievements of pupils are satisfactory. Pupils gain a satisfactory knowledge of places and themes, ranging from the local area in Year 7 to global issues affecting the environment, such as global warming and acid rain. They generally read well for information, so that they acquire a sound knowledge base and show good levels of understanding of cause and effect. Individual investigations are a strong feature of pupils' work. They use a good range of techniques to collect and present information, including the use of information and communication technology. This culminates in some very good GCSE coursework, which contributes to the good examination results. Pupils on the GCSE course make satisfactory gains in their knowledge and understanding of issues. For example, they made good use of a case study of the Aral Sea to recognise that human actions may have unintended consequences for the environment. There is under-achievement in some lessons when the work is not hard enough for higher-attaining pupils, and some lower-attaining pupils need more help, usually with written work. Most pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress when they are well supported by structured tasks. Occasionally, pupils do not make enough progress when the pace of lessons is too slow to hold their interest and sustain concentration.

113. Attainment is less secure in the sixth form than in the younger age groups. Results in A-level examinations are below the national average, both for the higher grades and for the overall pass rate. Current work in the sixth form ranges widely. Residential fieldwork and practical work contribute well to pupils' understanding of ideas, so that higher-attaining pupils demonstrate good levels of understanding of physical processes. Most have adequate, well-organised notes, but some lower-attaining pupils tend to write descriptively when they need to explain and analyse. Weaknesses in writing are not always sufficiently challenged by teachers' marking. In the work seen during the inspection, pupils were making appropriate gains in their knowledge and understanding of the subject.
114. Pupils generally respond well to their work in geography. They behave well in lessons. Most concentrate well and do their best to complete tasks. They respond well to opportunities to work both in groups and independently. They use a good range of resources, including the Internet, to find information. Relationships with teachers are good. Occasionally, pupils become restless when the pace of work is less demanding. Pupils' good behaviour and positive attitudes to school contribute greatly to the good standards of work.
115. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, but in the lessons seen it ranged from very good to unsatisfactory. Teachers draw effectively on their knowledge of the subject to provide clear explanations and thorough preparation for GCSE examinations. The management of pupils is generally good, founded on good relationships. Well-planned fieldwork enriches the learning of all pupils. Homework is used effectively to encourage independent learning and to extend classwork. The most consistent weakness is in the unsatisfactory match of work to meet the range of pupils' needs. Occasionally, lower-attaining pupils do not get enough help, especially with writing, whilst some higher-attaining pupils are not always sufficiently challenged by the work. The best lessons are planned well to promote a balance of knowledge, understanding and skills with well-chosen and varied activities. For example, in a Year 8 lesson, pupils used their prior learning about life in a developing country to choose the most appropriate technology to provide a source of water for a village. Their knowledge and understanding of aid was deepened by the effective use of pupils' recent experiences of Comic Relief. The department has begun to identify key words in units of work with younger pupils, although little use was made of them in lessons. In some lessons, notes are often copied and pupils have limited opportunities to explain in their own words what they have learned. Teachers use a narrow range of ways to help pupils to improve their writing. Occasionally, too much talking by the teacher limits pupils' achievements because they are not actively engaged in tasks. In a lesson on plate tectonics in Year 9, the teacher introduced too much content, which was not sufficiently broken down into manageable steps, so pupils did not gain a secure understanding of the work. Although there is some perceptive and helpful marking of pupils' work, mainly in the sixth form, there are inconsistencies. Few comments give pupils a clear idea of what they need to do to improve their work and there is no consistent correction of work by teachers and pupils.
116. The geography department has made satisfactory progress since the previous inspection. The standards of work of younger pupils have improved; the development of enquiry skills, little developed at the time of the previous inspection, has contributed to this. The good GCSE results have been maintained, but the school has been unable to improve the examination performance at A level. Some unsatisfactory teaching continues to contribute to lower achievements in some lessons. The range of resources used has generally improved, although some teaching continues to rely too heavily on worksheets. The achievement of lower-attaining pupils has not improved.

HISTORY

117. Overall standards of attainment are above average. Pupils entering Year 7 have a good vocabulary and are fluent in reading and writing. This contributes to the good progress seen in lessons and work at the end of Year 9, which is confirmed in the above-average levels achieved in the assessments conducted by the teachers. A significant factor is the climate of learning created in almost all lessons by establishing routines which are clearly understood and accepted by the pupils.
118. In 1999 and 2000, the percentages of pupils obtaining A*-C grades was well above average. The proportion of A*-A grades was about average in 2000, though well above average in the previous year. Almost all pupils gain a grade in the A*-G range. The average points score is above the national figure and confirms that pupils do rather better in history than in their other subjects. In lessons and work seen at the end of Year 11, attainment is above expectations. The very good progress is the result of both the teaching, which emphasises literacy and analytical skills, and the knowledge and the motivation of the pupils. Standards at the last inspection were broadly similar and have been maintained.
119. For the last three years, the percentage of pupils gaining A/B grades in A-level examinations has steadily improved and is now close to average. Pupils usually obtain a grade in the A-E range. This represents at least sound and sometimes good progress when previous examination results are considered. In lessons and work seen, standards at the end of Year 13 are above average. These pupils have made good progress, building upon their GCSE work and benefiting from good teaching. Since the last inspection, standards in the sixth form have risen.
120. The good features in pupils' work are similar at the end of both Year 9 and Year 11. The foundation is solid knowledge, which is closely linked to chronology. Pupils not only date events, but also explain how the position of events in the time frame might affect interpretation. When studying the outbreak of the First World War in Year 9, pupils distinguish between short- and long-term causes accurately. Since the last inspection, pupils' skill in organising and developing their ideas in extended writing has improved, and is now good. In one Year 11 lesson, pupils showed good understanding of how the various causes of the Second World War are interlinked. Higher-attaining pupils do this very well, using evidence to support their reasoning. Pupils are confident in making presentations and, when questioned, give knowledgeable replies. All pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to their peers.
121. Sixth form pupils have the same good knowledge, but not all absorb and analyse the complex material fully. Thus, in writing, lower-attaining pupils have difficulty in structuring essays and developing ideas in detail. However, in a Year 13 lesson, pupils were very articulate. They compared Fascism with other ideologies and showed good understanding of the issues involved.
122. Pupils behave well in lessons. Even in a lesson where teaching lacked the normal good pace, they continued to work steadily with few signs of restlessness or impatience. Group work is common and teachers frequently use it to support or extend the work of high- and low-attaining pupils. They enjoy this and work very well together. Thus, in one Year 8 lesson, groups were preparing work for a display about the English Civil War. They shared out the tasks, researched in textbooks and on computers, wrote it up and put the material together. They accomplished much in thirty-five minutes. Pupils take pride in presenting their work well. Exercise books are neat, organised, and often well

illustrated.

123. The quality of teaching is almost always good and, in about half of the lessons, is very good. Teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject and think carefully about how they present a topic. Their choice matches the attainment and needs of the pupils well. Thus, in a Year 9 lesson, the teacher adopted various accents to represent the Great Powers and to indicate their self-interest. However, in a Year 12 lesson, a more traditional format of question, answer and note-taking was used to good effect. In almost all lessons, teachers convey their own enthusiasm effectively. In the most effective lessons, planning and methods result in very good learning. Pupils are totally involved and are continually encouraged, often through questioning, to think deeply and to look for evidence to support their opinions. In almost all lessons, pupils have many opportunities to give extended answers, benefiting pupils of all attainments. Homework is set and marked well. It is also well linked to class work by providing the basis for the next lesson. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, the pace of the lesson is slow and pupils have little opportunity to participate except by giving short answers. Their interest is diminished. Pupils with special educational needs are given effective additional support, by planned grouping or by an appropriate choice of textbook. The consistent emphasis on vocabulary, writing and presentation benefits these pupils particularly. The quality of teaching has improved substantially since the last inspection.
124. The department has continued to organise visits to places of interest, including a three-day trip to the First World War battlefields for Year 10 coursework, and these increase motivation and interest. The number of pupils choosing history as a GCSE option is steadily rising. The use of information and communication technology is now embedded in the schemes of work and is being used well for word processing, research and classification. The head of department has a very clear sense of direction. The ethos is strong, celebrating not only attainment but the efforts made by pupils. Displays of work in classrooms and corridors emphasise this. As the only full-time history teacher, other teachers having major responsibilities elsewhere, the head of department co-ordinates and leads very effectively. Resources have been managed well and are now generally adequate. Assessment of National Curriculum levels is now fully in place and is used well as part of the GCSE prediction and target setting.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

125. Standards of attainment in information and communication technology are better than national expectation by the end of Year 9. At the end of Key Stage 4, and in the sixth form, standards cover a wide range and are, overall, around the national average. Information and communication technology is not taught as a separate subject at any stage, and there is no systematic certification or assessment for Key Stage 4 or sixth form students. At these stages, learning varies according to individual interest and the quality of opportunities that are provided by teachers in other subjects. The Internet is used in all years for researching topics covering a wide range of subjects. Pupils of all ages, across the attainment range, who use computers and appropriate software at home, make good progress. Those who are not supported by computers at home make slower, though satisfactory, progress.
126. Key Stage 3 pupils use a good range of office applications. During this key stage, information and communication technology is integrated with most subjects in lessons, and pupils learn to log on to the school's network and organise their work into convenient files and folders for easy retrieval. There are limited opportunities for pupils to study systems and control technology. By the age of 14, all pupils are autonomous users of computers; they make good use of word-processing, database, spreadsheets

desk-top-publishing and presentation software. Year 9 pupils, for example, use modelling software in mathematics lessons to create procedures for drawing geometrical shapes. They edit their programming and add variables, demonstrating above-average attainment. Work in other subjects, such as English, science, geography, history, modern languages and religious education, also shows good knowledge, understanding and skills in the use of computer applications. For example, pupils studying biology and the nature of contagious diseases, import and redraft text and add pictures from different sources, including the Internet. They develop a good working knowledge of publishing and presentation software.

127. Over the past three years, teachers' assessments of overall attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 show a rising trend in achievement to well above that expected nationally. Standards observed during the inspection, in the work of the current Year 9, show above-average attainment, but there are indications that teachers' estimations are a little generous. However, a notable strength of achievement in Key Stage 3 is the confidence pupils show in extending their learning and skills through the exploration of software.
128. In Years 10 and 11, progress and attainment are constrained by the limited opportunities and resources that are available to Key Stage 4 pupils. English, mathematics, science and design and technology are insufficiently involved in providing integrated activities to fully meet the statutory information and communication technology requirements at this key stage. Not all pupils, for example, take design and technology, a subject that is closely linked, thus missing out on opportunities to apply the concepts and techniques of using information and communication technology to measure, record, respond to, control and automate events. Pupils studying business do not make sufficient use of computers. Modern languages, however, make good use of facilities that have been acquired through sponsorship, with the consequence that attainment and progress are enhanced by the very good integration of information technology. Overall, there is a wide range of skill in the use of computers; those with computers at home often show advanced knowledge, whilst others show a more limited range of skills.
129. All pupils approach their computer work with positive attitudes. They are well motivated and are keen to learn new skills. Teachers have established a very purposeful learning environment and built very good working relationships with pupils. Often, many pupils are to be found working earnestly and independently in the library and computer rooms, with a minimum of supervision, during break, at lunchtime and after school.
130. The overall quality of teaching is good. Teaching is satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Some very good teaching was observed, and many lessons have very good features, for example in mathematics. In the best lessons, learning is supported well with high quality worksheets, and the point of the lesson is shared with the pupils. Teaching is good when tasks are presented to the whole class in stages and pupils' understanding is regularly checked, enabling lessons to proceed at a good pace. Teaching is strengthened, too, when homework is set that is related to the lesson topic and is constructively marked, and when there is more demanding work for higher-attaining pupils. Generally, teachers have a very good knowledge of pupils' individual needs. In satisfactory lessons, teaching is less effective when pupils, especially those with special needs, are set work that is too difficult for them. However, most gain confidence through success and are inspired to further endeavours by the high quality work they achieve using a computer. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils and encourage them to work independently, but, in many cases, the lack of day-to-day information technology assessment reduces incentive. In the best lessons, teaching strategies are effective and allow for the limited

resources, but on too many occasions the sharing of computers results in some under-achievement.

131. Although many of the issues raised in the last inspection report have yet to be resolved, including weaknesses in assessment and in the range of resources, management and co-ordination of the subject have recently improved. Subject representatives are beginning to fulfil their responsibilities but are still constrained by unsatisfactory resources. There is now clear direction for the subject, with shared commitment to succeed in providing the necessary experiences for all and to raising levels of attainment across the school.
132. The subject is beginning to make a significant contribution to the spiritual, moral, social, cultural and personal development of pupils through the use of the Internet, by researching a wide range of subjects and by the consideration of ethical issues, such as the place of technology in today's society.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

133. In recent years, the percentage of GCSE A*-C grades in French has been broadly in line with the national average for boys in maintained schools, except in 1999, when it was above average. Results in German have improved steadily, and by 2000 were above the national average. Results in Spanish have declined year by year: in 1998 they were at the national average, but by 2000 were well below average. Spanish is one of the lowest-performing subjects in the school. The numbers taking A level have been too small for statistical analysis.
134. At Key Stage 3, attainment in the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing is generally above the national average in top sets, in line in middle sets and below the national average in lower sets. Pupils listen intently to the teacher, the tape-recorder and each other and respond to questions with confidence and good pronunciation. They conduct short dialogues, but are not yet given enough opportunities either to speak at length or to use the foreign language for their own purposes. Reading skills develop well as a result of the regular library lessons, where the boys are encouraged to read for pleasure. Writing is copious in both key stages and from pupils at all levels of attainment. The understanding of the structure of language is given a high priority in this school. In Year 7, copy-writing is careful and accurate. In Year 8, pupils write short accounts, for example, in Spanish, an accurate five-line description of Mi Casa. By the age of 14, higher-attaining pupils in French, in a letter describing their holiday, demonstrate an excellent understanding of the formation and use of the perfect tense, including reflexive verbs. At Key Stage 4, pupils undertake creative and extended writing. By Year 11, those in higher sets manipulate the foreign language with considerable sophistication, as in German, where a one-and-a-half-page account of a trip to America demonstrated extensive and accurate use of subordinate clauses. Standards in the A/S and A-level classes are in line with the national average and are above average in Year 13 French, where, in a discussion about the use of electric taxis in Amsterdam, pupils demonstrated their fluency in the language of debate and discussion, using the complex structures required to obtain high grades at A level. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, due to the setting system and sympathetic teaching. In mixed-ability classes in Year 7, teachers give these pupils extra help.
135. The overall quality of teaching is good. Teaching is nearly always satisfactory or better, good or very good in two-thirds of lessons and very good in one third. There was a

small measure of unsatisfactory teaching. All the teachers have a good knowledge of the languages they teach, but not all use the foreign language sufficiently, either to present material or for routine classroom instructions. There is frequently heavy reliance on translation. Lessons are nearly always well planned and taken at a brisk pace with good use of varied resources, usually the tape-recorder and the overhead projector. Expectations are high and presentation of material is well suited to the age and attainment level of the pupils. In the best lessons, the teachers' enthusiasm and flair evoke an excellent response from pupils, who demonstrate a real interest in language learning. For example, in a Year 8 Spanish class, there was a forest of eager hands up to respond to questions. A noticeable feature in many of the lessons is the number of pupils asking supplementary questions to further their understanding. In this school, they are not passive learners. The lessons judged to be only satisfactory all suffered from an unimaginative use of available resources. The few unsatisfactory lessons observed during the inspection were characterised by one or more of the following: poor classroom control, a brittle relationship with pupils or material presented to mixed-ability classes which met the needs of only a minority. These weaknesses were revealed particularly in the teaching of Spanish. Sixth form teaching is sufficiently rigorous to support pupils in meeting the demands of the courses they study.

136. Pupils are fortunate to have the opportunity to study two languages in Years 8 and 9, although the time allowance for this is currently rather limited. The numbers choosing to take two languages to GCSE level are slightly above the national average in Year 10 and below in Year 11. Numbers studying French, German and Spanish in the sixth form are increasing, though some groups are still very small. A well-established programme of foreign exchanges and work experience abroad enhances the already positive attitudes that pupils have to learning a language. The department benefits from very good leadership and management. In the three years since she took up the post, the head of department has raised considerably the profile of languages in the school and the department has been pro-active in the monitoring of teaching. Administration is highly efficient. The staff in the department feel well supported and operate successfully together as a team. The high quality departmental handbook is a useful tool for inexperienced teachers. Schemes of work are in place, although some need updating and made relevant to the mixed-ability classes. This issue was also raised in the last inspection and has not yet been satisfactorily addressed. Links with a local language college have proved very beneficial, particularly in the provision of 15 computers and the setting up of an information and communication technology base in the department. All pupils have regular access and information and communications technology is fully integrated into the work of the department.
137. Since the last inspection, examination results in French and particularly in German have improved and the issue of generally low standards in written work at Key Stage 4 has been successfully addressed. Standards in Spanish have deteriorated.

MUSIC

138. Results in the 2000 assessments for 14-year-olds conducted by the teachers were above national expectations. The 2000 GCSE results for A*-C grades were well above the national average. They were also well above average when compared to similar schools. There has been some fluctuation in the number of pupils taking the GCSE examination. The eight pupils who entered in 1999 all gained A*, A or B grades. In 1998, all 12 pupils gained A*-C grades. There are too few pupils entered for A-level examinations to make meaningful comparisons with national figures. However, in the past three years, no pupil has gained an A or B grade at A-Level.

139. At the end of Key Stages 3 and 4, attainment is above national expectations. In both key stages, a few pupils attain well above national expectations in performing skills. In the sixth form, attainment is average. The achievement of pupils in both key stages is good. Achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory. Pupils who attend extra-curricular activities reach standards of performance that are well above those expected from pupils of a similar age. Pupils with special educational needs and the more musically able make good progress in relation to their prior attainment. The school has been successful in maintaining the good standard of pupils' work since the previous inspection.
140. In Key Stage 3, pupils experience a good range of activities that enables them to develop secure skills as both performers and composers. Year 7 pupils devise their own music to represent a roller-coaster ride. They use an ostinato pattern, a repeated melody and a contrasting section in their piece. They talk about their composition and explain the different ideas used. They show a satisfactory knowledge of musical vocabulary. By the end of the key stage, Year 9 pupils have a good understanding of the musical elements. They are confident in creating contrasting sections in a composition and in using notation to record their work. They show a sound level of skill in using keyboards and in group ensemble performances. Pupils in Key Stage 4 understand basic chord structures and use these well in compositions. They demonstrate a secure rhythmic understanding. They have a good knowledge of musical terms and develop secure aural skills. For example, in a Year 11 lesson, pupils listened to a performance of a guitar solo. They correctly identified the musical features and evaluated the performance. They realised how phrasing and dynamics had been used well to improve the overall effect. Pupils in the sixth form show a good knowledge of different musical styles and periods. They have a good understanding of harmonic progressions.
141. Pupils in Key Stage 3 show good attitudes towards the subject. They work collaboratively on group tasks and are eager to exchange ideas. They behave sensibly in the practice rooms, when unsupervised. Pupils in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form have very good attitudes. They are well motivated and have a committed approach to work. The previous inspection found that sixth form pupils were passive learners. This is not now the case. They are involved and make a good contribution to discussions. Pupils throughout the school are enthusiastic in their response to extra-curricular activities.
142. The overall quality of teaching is very good. Teaching and learning are good in Key Stage 3. The good standard of teaching has been maintained since the previous inspection. In Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, teaching and learning is very good. Teachers have a secure knowledge of what they teach. Effective support is given to pupils during group tasks. This ensures that pupils of all abilities make progress in their learning. Skilled use is made of questioning. For example, in a Year 12 lesson, pupils listened to a short extract of music from the Baroque period: the teacher enabled pupils to extend their aural ability by asking specific questions relating to what they heard. This had a positive impact on pupils' learning: as a result, pupils had a greater understanding of how to identify aurally the key features of the music. The previous inspection found that there was no provision for music technology and insufficient opportunity for pupils to study music from non-western cultures. These issues have now been successfully addressed.
143. There is excellent provision for extra-curricular activities. This is a major strength of the department and involves many pupils. There is a variety of high quality rehearsal groups, which work to an excellent standard of performance. These include the concert

band, jazz ensemble and the ceilidh band. Good opportunities for rehearsal and performance are provided through inter-house competitions. Pupils perform at a variety of venues, including Hertford Castle and local primary schools. The playing of the ceilidh band has been much appreciated by different audiences. The previous inspection found that there was a lack of vocal work, both in lessons and in extra-curricular activities. There are now plenty of opportunities for developing pupils' vocal skills. Good links have been established with other subjects.

144. The department is well led. The head of department is very ably assisted by a colleague. Over 240 pupils receive instrumental lessons provided by teachers from the Hertfordshire music service. These teachers make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. Parents give generously of their time to provide practical support to the department. The accommodation is very good and offers sufficient space for rehearsals. The resources are satisfactory. The subject makes a very good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There has been a good improvement in provision for the subject since the previous inspection.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

145. The average points score per pupil, in the GCSE examination in 2000, was in line with the national average, but passes at the higher grades A*-C were below average. Compared to other subjects in the school, physical education results were lower than average. However, the majority of pupils obtained higher than predicted grades, and their average point score was better than the same pupils obtained in their other subjects. Current work seen in Year 11 at GCSE indicates that standards are set to rise above the national average, and to at least in line with results in 1999 and 1998. A-level results in 2000 were broadly in line with national averages and follow a pattern similar to that of the last three years. The school teams are very successful, both in the locality and further afield. Year 7 boys won the Hertfordshire County Basketball Championships.
146. Throughout the school, standards are above expectations. For the size of school, a significantly higher proportion of pupils attains the very highest standards. About 16 boys gained representative honours at county level in various sports such as rugby, cross-country and athletics. High standards in lessons and in competitive team games are largely due to adequate curriculum time, good teaching and teachers' commitment to an extensive programme of inter-school competitive sport. In addition to physical education teachers, about eight other staff give generously of their time, often on Saturdays.
147. At age 14, standards are good. This judgement is accurately reflected in the results of the assessments conducted by the teachers at the end of Year 9. The majority of pupils are fit, strong and well co-ordinated. Many pupils have already acquired the high-level tactics and techniques expected of older pupils. In football, they are familiar with a variety of techniques for taking penalty shots at goal, and high-attaining pupils swerve an angled shot to avoid the wall defence. At age 16, the standard of team games such as football, badminton and volleyball is good. In badminton, examination pupils skilfully combine shots of serve, lob and volley and use space intelligently to outwit the opponent. The standard of pupils' theoretical work is equally as good as their practical work: this is partly because their literacy skills are well developed. All pupils on the A-level course meet course requirements. About half have acquired higher-level skills of debate, analysis and the development of hypotheses.
148. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, make steady progress as they

move up through the school. Throughout the school, the majority of pupils participate in extra-curricular sport, at either school or house level, which further reinforces, extends and consolidates their knowledge, skills and understanding. Most pupils largely fulfil their potential, particularly In Years 10, 11 and in the sixth form. In Years 7, 8, and 9, one of the most striking features of their progress in games is the speed with which pupils grasp basic skills, and this quickly leads on to an understanding of the full game. The skills of planning and evaluating are under-developed because they are not consistently taught across the department. However, in a Year 7 gymnastics lesson observed, pupils skilfully evaluated their movement sequences using the correct technical language. Pockets of under-achievement, particularly in Years 7 and 8, are occasionally due to teachers' weak management of mildly challenging pupils and result in distracting behaviour.

149. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Teaching is good in about half the lessons and satisfactory in about a quarter. There are small measures of very good teaching and of teaching that is unsatisfactory, where the main weakness lies in inadequate planning and weak management of pupils' behaviour. Key strengths in teaching are the extent of the teachers' knowledge and their skill in communicating to the pupils what they have to do and how to improve. A further strength lies in the teaching of basic skills, thus enabling pupils to progress steadily onto higher-level tactics and techniques. The constructive management of the majority of lessons results in an orderly and safe learning environment where pupils thrive. Pupils with special educational needs are skilfully integrated into lessons in a way that ensures they make good progress. Where teaching is very good, clear planning of lessons ensures that pupils are challenged, both physically and mentally. In a Year 7 lesson observed, pupils decided on their own orienteering route according to their individual level of fitness, worked co-operatively with other pupils, and extended their map reading and numeracy skills. Inconsistencies in the teaching of planning and evaluating skills stem from lack of detail in the schemes of work. Informal assessment procedures are insufficiently linked with formal assessment procedures and, as a result, pupils have little awareness of National Curriculum levels or what they have to do to achieve them. Although there has been an improvement in the range of teaching methods, described in the last inspection report as 'universally directed', other styles of teaching are not generally used. This results in missed opportunities to develop pupils' oral and evaluating skills, and in taking responsibility as coach or group leader. Most pupils behave well, thrive on competition and thoroughly enjoy sport. They appreciate fair play, support one another and display good team spirit.
150. The department is satisfactorily led and managed. The head of department has established good working relationships and leads by example. The priorities for the department are accurately identified, but there are insufficient systems and strategies in place to bring about effective improvements. Roles and responsibilities assigned to the head of department are unclear and this results in insufficient monitoring of the department's work. Indoor accommodation is unsatisfactory and seriously affects the quality of the curriculum.
151. Satisfactory progress has been made on the issues identified in the last inspection. Planning of lessons to meet the needs of all pupils has improved, but the teaching of planning and evaluating skills has yet to be systematically incorporated into the work of the department. The over-emphasis on games' skills has been addressed as far as the indoor accommodation permits. A module of gymnastics has been extended from Year 7, to include Years 8 and 9, and the curriculum broadened to include orienteering, volleyball and badminton. Updating of formal assessment procedures has been satisfactorily completed. Other improvements include an increase in uptake at GCSE,

and provision of better resources, such as textbooks for AS-level pupils.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

152. The GCSE examination results in religious education in 2000 were below the national average and the average for similar schools. One pupil gained a higher grade A*-C and the other seven pupils achieved grades within the A*-G range. In 2000, pupils did less well in religious education than in their other GCSE examinations. In 1999, a quarter of the pupils entered gained A*-C grades, which was close to the national average.
153. Standards of attainment at age 14, overall, are above the expected levels. Higher-attaining pupils recall, in detail, Christian rites of passage concerning death, compare them with the Jewish faith and give convincing accounts of the meaning of eternal life. Middle-attaining pupils identify the main differences between Christian and Jewish rituals. Lower-attaining pupils recount some religious symbols used at burial services. Overall attainment for 16-year-olds in work seen in lessons, books and discussions is unsatisfactory. In Year 11 classes, attainment is unsatisfactory, partly due to short lessons, until recently, a history of teaching by non-specialists and poor motivation, resulting in little gain in knowledge and understanding. At the age of 18, examination pupils' standards of attainment are average. Pupils develop their skill in the use of passages from the Bible to support their judgements, with higher-attaining pupils showing greater depth in analysis.
154. In relation to their prior attainment, most pupils at Key Stage 3 make good progress in religious education, with a marked development in their basic literacy skills which is helped by key words posted in the classrooms. However, the progress of pupils with special educational needs is sometimes retarded due to lack of support in lessons. Overall, pupils with average prior attainment make better progress over the long term than those with high or low prior attainment. During Key Stage 4, in relation to their prior attainment, pupils do not progress as well as they should because often they make little effort to learn and produce a minimal amount of written work. Achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory in relation to pupils' prior attainment.
155. At Key Stage 3, in the majority of lessons, the behaviour and attitudes of pupils are good, with pupils approaching the subject positively. In Year 9, a few pupils occasionally misbehave: this impedes the progress of the rest of the class. Generally, pupils respond appropriately in discussions, showing respect for the opinions of others. They listen attentively when teachers make the lessons interesting and relevant and show good attitudes. Most pupils are co-operative and show interest in their work. The collaborative manner in which the pupils work together contributes to their social development as well as their understanding of the work. Attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory at Key Stage 4 and very good in the sixth form.
156. Teaching is good in Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form; it is satisfactory in Key Stage 4. It is good or very good in two-thirds of lessons, with a small element of unsatisfactory teaching in Year 9. The best teaching is at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form. Teachers know their subject well and this gives the pupils confidence in asking questions. In most lessons, teachers have clear objectives based on detailed schemes of work, which relate closely to agreed syllabus requirements. Generally, teachers' expectations are high and there is a challenging and rigorous approach to the study of religion. Teachers' use of a wide range of stimulating resources including music, art, video clips, poems and artefacts enlivens many lessons. Although adequate for the middle- and lower-attaining pupils, the content of the lessons at Key Stages 3 and 4 does not always challenge the higher-attaining pupils. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported by teachers, but lack of support in lessons in Key Stage 3 hampers the

learning of some lower-attaining pupils. The teaching of religious education enriches pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This was particularly evident in a moving Year 7 lesson on meditation. There is still no coherent system of assessment and monitoring at Key Stages 3 and 4, a weakness noted at the last inspection: this prevents the accurate tracking of pupils' progress.

157. The use of information and communication technology enhances teaching and learning in religious education, and the department is one of the leading exponents in this field within the school. Homework is an area of strength in the department, particularly at Key Stage 3, where the use of homework is very good, with teachers giving feedback at the beginning of every lesson. The variety of stimulating tasks set and the subsequently positive response by almost all pupils make this a major feature of teaching and learning. In one Year 8 lesson, pupils could hardly wait to show others their efforts in making a 'flick-pic' from a piece of card to depict scenes from the Bible. Good examples of homework are used in impressive displays in classrooms and corridors to celebrate achievement.
158. Since the last inspection, there have been difficulties with staffing, accommodation and resources. The enthusiastic head of department has been in post one year. He has begun to tackle the under-achievement that still exists in Key Stage 4. The school continues to fail in its statutory duty to provide religious education for all pupils, as not all pupils are provided with religious education in the sixth form.
159. This is an improving department, which is well led and managed. The department has implemented many improvements since the last inspection, updating textbooks, extending the range of resources and updating schemes of work to match the Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus, and changing GCSE and A-level courses to create a better match to pupils' needs. A major innovation is the GCSE short course, which 20 per cent of Year 11 pupils have chosen to study during two lunchtimes.

BUSINESS EDUCATION

160. Overall attainment and achievement are both satisfactory at the age of 16 and have steadily improved over the past three years. Last year, three out of every five pupils who took the GCSE examinations in business studies reached above-average standards. Pupils have a good understanding of the business environment, business structures and organisation, business behaviour, people and business, and business and change. Good teaching in lessons on product branding in Year 10 and organisation, integration and economic scale in Year 11 lead to significant advances in learning. Information and communication technology features in many lessons and pupils learn to apply word processing, publishing, spreadsheets and databases to their work. Good use is made of numerical data, tables and charts in many lessons. Pupils have opportunities to use English in writing extended texts addressed to different audiences and to learn key words. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated in lessons and perform well in relation to their prior attainment. There are no special arrangements for gifted and talented pupils. However they make satisfactory progress in the development of their understanding of business concepts and practices.
161. In 2000, 12 pupils took the A-level course in economics and business and one quarter of them obtained the higher A – C grades, a result which is below the average but represents satisfactory achievement in relation to the prior attainment of the pupils. Pupils have many good opportunities to learn basic economic and business theories and how to apply them to local, national and global events. Good lessons were

observed on multi-national activity, a case study based on Cadbury Schweppes, in Year 12, and communication and decision-making, a case study based on Proctor and Gamble, in Year 13. Pupils have satisfactory opportunities to visit local companies to study commercial practices and to hear local businessmen talk about business practices. They have many good opportunities to apply information and communication technology to their work. Many course-work reports demonstrate the use of satisfactory and sometimes good literacy and numeracy skills.

162. Five pupils are currently taking a well-organised GNVQ course in business studies at intermediate level. They have good opportunities to complete portfolio assignments that include vocational knowledge and key skills. The attainment of pupils on the GNVQ course is satisfactory. A good feature of the course is the opportunity to participate in the Young Enterprise Programme.
163. The overall standard of teaching is good and very good in the sixth form. All teachers have a good knowledge of the subject, plan lessons well and adopt very good teaching methods. They give good and challenging introductions to lessons and use question-and-answer sessions well. As a result, all pupils are fully involved in their lessons and eager to participate in group work. Topics are well chosen. The pace of lessons and rate of progress are always good as a result of setting time limits for the completion of tasks. Appropriate homework, which involves pupils in research and extends learning, is regularly set and marked.
164. The department is well led by an experienced and enthusiastic teacher. Teachers work in harmony with each other and are committed to helping pupils to improve and reach high standards. The accommodation is modern but only just adequate; some GNVQ lessons have to be held in the teachers' offices. The number of computer terminals in the department is inadequate and impedes progress; not all pupils in lessons work on them simultaneously at any one time. The department has made good progress since the last inspection. The number of courses has been extended and pupils taking the subject increased. Attainment has been improved at all levels.