

INSPECTION REPORT

QUEEN ELIZABETH'S SCHOOL

WIMBORNE MINSTER

LEA area: Dorset

Unique reference number: 113883

Headteacher: Mr S S Tong

Reporting inspector: Mr M Pavey
17650

Dates of inspection: 3-7 April 2000

Inspection number: 186222

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: | Voluntary controlled |
| Age range of students: | 13 to 18 |
| Gender of students: | Mixed |
| School address: | Wimborne Minster Dorset |
| Postcode: | BH21 4DT |
| Telephone number: | 01202 885233 |
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| Appropriate authority: | Governing body |
| Name of chair of governors: | Mrs M Sadler |
| Date of previous inspection: | 27 November 1995 |

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

| Team members | | Subject responsibilities | Aspect responsibilities |
|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Martin Pavey | Registered inspector | | What sort of school is it? |
| | | | The school's results and achievements |
| | | | How well are students taught? |
| | | | How well is the school led and managed? |
| | | | What should the school do to improve further? |
| Rona Orme | Lay inspector | | Students' attitudes, values and personal development |
| | | | How well does the school care for its students? |
| | | | How well does the school work in partnership with parents? |
| Anne Bridger | Team inspector | Business Education/Vocational | |
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| Malcolm Burley | Team inspector | Science | |
| Anthony Fiddian-Green | Team inspector | Religious education | |
| | | Special educational needs | |
| Roger Freeman | Team inspector | Mathematics | |
| Keith Hopkins | Team inspector | Design and technology | |
| | | Information technology | |
| Stephanie Matthews | Team inspector | History | |
| David Morris | Team inspector | Music | |
| Roger Moyle | Team inspector | Physical education | |
| Janet Simms | Team inspector | Art | How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students? |
| Barry Smith | Team inspector | Geography | |
| Ian Waters | Team inspector | Modern languages | |
| Martyn Williams | Team inspector | Spanish | |
| Philip Winch | Team inspector | English | |

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Queen Elizabeth's is a Church of England voluntary controlled mixed comprehensive upper school of 1272 students aged 13-18, including 325 in the sixth form. It serves the small town of Wimborne Minster and a very large rural area to the north and east. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals (four per cent) is well below the national average. There is only one student who has English as an additional language. There are 248 students on the register of students with special educational needs, around the national average, of whom 16 have statements. Students' attainment is broadly in line with the national average on entry to the school.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Queen Elizabeth's is an effective school with some very strong features. When students join, their attainment is around average, but they respond well to good teaching and achieve results above the average in tests at the end of Key Stage 3 and in GCSE. Advanced level results are around the national average. Leadership and management are very good and give very clear educational direction to the school. Teaching is of good quality. The school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- The school achieves good results in tests and examinations.
- Teaching is of good quality and leads to good learning at all stages.
- Students' attitudes to the school and their behaviour are very good. Relationships are excellent.
- The school provides a good curriculum, with particular strengths in the sixth form which is a very successful part of the school.
- Provision for students' social development is very good.
- Arrangements for the assessment of students' work and for monitoring and supporting their academic progress are very good.
- Leadership and management are very good. The school takes very effective action to meet its published targets.
- The monitoring and development of good teaching are very effective.

What could be improved

- There is not enough time for teaching information and communication technology (ICT) at Key Stage 3, and ICT is not taught fully enough across the curriculum at Key Stage 4.
- GCSE results need improvement in history and physical education, and the school needs to continue its efforts to improve the GCSE performance of boys.
- A clearer focus on the potential of gifted and talented students is needed.
- The quality of reports to parents needs improvement, with fuller analysis of students' attainment and progress.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan. The school is already aware of the issues concerning ICT and GCSE performance.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Improvement has been good since the last inspection in November 1995. The school has maintained and improved the high standards reported then. Attainment has improved in the tests at the end of Key Stage 3 and in A level examinations, and high attainment has been maintained in GCSE for the percentage of students gaining five or more passes at grades A*-C. The quality of teaching and learning has improved considerably. The school's leadership has responded well to the issues raised in the last inspection report. Improvement has been good in most subject areas and aspects of management. The school has a good capacity to maintain and improve its present high standards.

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 |
| | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 1999 |
| GCSE examinations | A | B | A | C |
| A-levels/AS-levels | C | C | C | |

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

* Throughout the report, 'similar schools' refer to schools with similar proportions of students eligible for free school meals.

When students join the school, their attainment is in line with the national average. After a year, they achieve results above average in the national tests in English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 3. Their performance in these tests was in line with that of similar schools in 1999. Boys and girls perform equally and overall results have been rising over recent years.

In GCSE examinations, results for those gaining five or more passes at grades A*-C are above the national average. Results were well above average for five or more passes at grades A*-G in 1999. Boys' results were above average and girls' results well above average, but the performance of boys has been declining over the last four years. Results were in line with those in similar schools in 1999.

Results in A level have been in line with the national average and have improved in recent years, with strong performance at grades A and B in 1999.

The school sets itself demanding but attainable targets for performance at the end of Key Stage 3 and in GCSE. It nearly reached its GCSE target in 1999 and has set a range of targets for 2000, higher than the previous year's.

Students attained high standards in most subjects seen during the inspection, including the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, although science results have been below average in GCSE in recent years. Results were below average in expressive arts in 1999 and well below in history and PE.

Students achieve well. They make good progress at all stages in most subjects, though the progress of gifted and talented students is overall satisfactory. Progress is satisfactory rather than good in ICT across the curriculum, and also in history and modern foreign languages. Generally, though, students make rapid gains in their knowledge and understanding, responding well to clear and challenging teaching.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

| Aspect | Comment |
|--|--|
| Attitudes to the school | These are very positive, seen for example in students' enthusiastic participation in a wide range of activities. |
| Behaviour, in and out of classrooms | This is very good and helps students to learn well and to respond positively to good teaching. |
| Personal development and relationships | These are very good also. Students are courteous to staff and each other. Relationships are excellent. |

| | |
|------------|---|
| Attendance | This is satisfactory overall, though attendance in some classes during the inspection was poor. Punctuality to lessons is good. |
|------------|---|

Very good attitudes to the school and to learning help students make good progress and enable teachers to teach with pace and confidence. Sixth formers make a very positive contribution to these attitudes and the excellent relationships which many students remark on.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

| Teaching of pupils: | aged 11-14 years | aged 14-16 years | aged over 16 years |
|----------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Lessons seen overall | Good | Good | Very good |

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

Teaching is good overall. Students therefore learn well and make good progress. All teaching is at least satisfactory, 80 per cent is good or better and a third is very good, including a small amount which is excellent. Teaching and learning are good in English, mathematics and science, and very good in English in the sixth form. The skills of literacy are well taught and the teaching of numeracy is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are at least good in almost all other subjects. They are satisfactory in history and modern foreign languages, though good in these subjects in the sixth form. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in ICT across the curriculum. Both are very good in design and technology, music and drama. Teaching meets the needs of students with special educational needs. However, although gifted and talented students achieve good results, the school has no particular policy for meeting their needs.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

| Aspect | Comment |
|---|--|
| The quality and range of the curriculum | The curriculum provides a good range of subjects and activities at Key Stages 3 and 4, and a very good range in the sixth form. |
| Provision for students with special educational needs | The school gives these students good support through well-planned teaching in the classroom and clear plans for those with statements. |
| Provision for students with English as an additional language | The school has identified one student, who is well taught and is making good progress. |
| Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | This is good overall. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. That for moral and cultural development is good, while provision for students' social development is very good. |
| How well the school cares for its students | The school has very good systems for the assessment and monitoring of students' work. Procedures for encouraging attendance and behaviour are good. |

The school works well with its parents. There is a very good range of information, although reports are not as informative as they should be.

The curriculum is particularly strong in the sixth form and in the opportunities it offers to all students. Statutory requirements are met, with the exception of the provision of ICT across the curriculum. The school has very good links with its partner middle schools. Careers education, extra-curricular activities and the school's links with the community are good and make a positive contribution to

students' wider education.

Teachers are very good at assessing students' work and discussing their progress with them. Tutors also spend much time in planned discussions with individuals, reviewing their work and considering targets for improvement.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

| Aspect | Comment |
|--|---|
| Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff | Leadership is very good. Senior staff and heads of faculty, year and department give very effective leadership, leading to a shared commitment to maintain and improve standards. |
| How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities | Governors are well led, are well informed about the school and fulfil their responsibilities well. |
| The school's evaluation of its performance | This is very good. There are clear and well directed systems for all important aspects, reflected in a comprehensive set of targets. |
| The strategic use of resources | The school makes very good use of its resources. Budgets are well-planned and monitored, and resources economically allocated. |

Teachers are well matched to the needs of the curriculum and there are particular strengths in the induction of new staff and in the staff appraisal system. Resources for learning are adequate overall, and the provision of computers has improved. Generally, accommodation is adequate; it is very good for sports and PE, but has shortcomings in several areas, particularly mathematics and science, and in some aspects of design and technology.

Leadership is highly effective in taking the action necessary to reach its targets, for example in its very good monitoring of teaching, which has led to at least satisfactory standards in every lesson seen in this inspection. It has been very effective in supporting departments and teachers needing help in improving the quality of education they offer. The school applies the principles of best value well.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

| What pleases parents most | What parents would like to see improved |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Their children are making good progress in school.• The school expects students to work hard and achieve their best.• Teaching is good.• The great majority think that leadership, behaviour and the range of activities are good.• Most feel that school is helping their children become mature and responsible. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some parents consider that their children do not get the right amount of homework.• A quarter of the 440 returning questionnaires considers that they are not well informed about their children's progress.• A third considers that the school does not work closely with parents, but most feel that they would feel comfortable in approaching the school. |

Inspectors agree with the positive views of parents. Parents' most positive opinions were about good work and progress, and inspectors agree that these are strong qualities. Inspectors consider that homework is satisfactory overall, though it is not the strongest aspect of teaching. They consider that the school gives a very good range of information to parents, but that reports need some improvement. There was clear evidence of good communication with parents, for example in the higher education evening held during the inspection, and inspectors found no evidence that the school does not work closely with parents. However, there are initiatives which the school could take

to improve contact in a very large country area, and the school is keen to do so.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

* Throughout the report, 'similar schools' refer to schools with similar proportions of students eligible for free school meals.

1. When students join the school, their attainment measured in nationally recognised tests is overall in line with the national average. In the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999, overall attainment in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science was well above average and broadly in line with the average for similar schools. In English, performance was above the national average for 1999 and for the four years 1996-1999. Although statistics show that English results in 1999 were below the average for similar schools, inspection findings indicate that students are achieving well in relation to their capabilities. In mathematics and science, performance was well above average for 1999 and above average over a four year period. Over the four years, boys and girls performed equally in English and mathematics, and boys performed more highly than girls in science. Overall, there is little difference in the performance of boys and girls in the core subjects at the end of Key Stage 3.

2. In the GCSE examinations at the end of Key Stage 4, the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C has been above the national average in 1999 and over the last three years. In 1999, the school achieved a 57 per cent pass rate at grades A*-C, against a national average of 46 per cent. In 1999, achievement in five or more passes at grades A*-G was well above the national average and has been above average over the last three years. In terms of the average points scored in 1999, results were broadly in line with those of similar schools. Results for the Dorset Achievement in Religious Education (DARE) are good.

3. Boys' GCSE results were above the national average in 1999, but have been falling gradually over the last four years. Despite this, they have remained well above the national average over a three year period. Girls' results exceeded boys' by a wide margin in 1999 and were well above the national average in that year and over a three year period. Over the last three years, however, both boys and girls have exceeded their respective national averages by approximately the same amount in total points scored. When the performance of boys and girls at grades A*-C only are compared, girls have achieved higher scores, often far higher, than boys in almost all subjects in recent years. The only exceptions have been in music, science in 1998 and history in 1997 and 1998. Otherwise, the dominance of girls at top grades is complete.

4. The school's GCSE results have remained at the same overall level in recent years, while the national trend has been rising. Although results for five or more grades A*-C are above average, those for A* and A are somewhat below. The school does not have a policy for the encouragement of its gifted and talented students. Although these students do well in general, the school has not done enough to ensure they make the best possible progress.

5. Results in English at grades A*-C have remained above the national average in recent years, while those in English literature have fluctuated, being above average in 1999. Mathematics results have risen to above average, while those in science have fallen from above to below average. Of these core subjects, English is the strongest performer,

reversing the position at the end of Key Stage 3. In other subjects, the strongest results are in design and technology and French, which have risen to well above average in 1999; also in art and music, which have risen strongly and were well above average in 1999; humanities results have been high and well above average in the last two years; and psychology, where results have been rising strongly and were also well above average in 1999. Other subjects in which results have been rising include IT and geography, which are now in line with the national average, and German where results have risen to just above average. Results have fluctuated in expressive arts, and have fallen in recent years to below average levels, though improving greatly in 1999 on the previous year's grades. In several other subjects, results have been falling. These include business studies, which have been above average but were average in 1999, and drama which have been well above average, but were average in 1999. Results which have been below average in recent years have been history, which have fallen to well below average, and PE in which results have been falling each year for four years and are now well below the national average. The school is well aware of its under-performing subjects and has been taking measures to improve performance in them.

6. Results in GCSE A level and the General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) intermediate and advanced examinations have been in line with the national average for points scored, and have shown steady improvement, in recent years. Although achievement in the highest GCSE grades is modest, that for the highest achievers in A level is good, with some 40 students averaging between them 28.5 points, compared with the national average of 17.9. The highest achieving subjects in recent years in passes at grades A and B have been English literature, mathematics and business studies, where results have risen to well above national averages. History results have risen to above the average in 1999, while physics, geography, computing and English language have been above average in recent years. Results in French, general studies and art have been variable, but were above average in 1999. Psychology results have been around average in recent years. Chemistry results have risen to match the average in 1999, while biology has been variable but below average. Sociology and theatre studies results have been below average, while results in PE have fallen to below average in 1999. Results in design and technology and economics have been well below average in recent years. Boys and girls have achieved very similar proportions of A and B grades in the last three years and were exactly equal in 1999, which saw an overall rise of seven per cent in achievement in these grades over the previous two years. Though the average points score was in line with the national average in 1999, achievement at grades A and B was above this level.

7. Across the school, achievement in lessons is high. Students work well, achieving standards which are at least high enough for their abilities. Students achieve well and make good progress in all subjects, with the exception of ICT, history and modern foreign languages, where achievement and progress are satisfactory overall.

8. Generally, progress is good over students' time at Key Stage 3, from their average attainment on joining the school to the high results they achieve in the tests at the end of the stage. In lessons at this stage, students learnt well in four lessons out of five seen. They were keen to make progress and responded well to the teachers' clear knowledge and good planning.

9. Students make further good progress over Key Stage 4, seen in their above-average attainment in GCSE and the progress measure achieved in 1999 from the end of Key Stage 3. This placed the school in the top five per cent of schools for progress over the key stage. During lessons at this stage, students learnt well in seven out of ten lessons seen. As they gain in confidence and maturity, teachers increasingly share goals with them

and give them a positive part to play in the lesson. Students respond well to this, willingly taking the lead in explaining and debating issues, and learning well in consequence.

10. Students continue to make good progress over their sixth form courses, seen in the higher than average proportion achieving grades A and B and also gaining pass grades in 1999, and the proportion, 75 per cent, entering further and higher education. During lessons at this stage, students learnt well in nearly nine out of ten lessons, joining in readily and asking well informed, relevant questions. At this level, they enjoy a very good partnership with their teachers, who give them well prepared and challenging lessons.

11. In almost all subjects and lessons, students learn well because their teachers set them challenging tasks and measure the amount of progress they have made in regular interviews with individual students, setting them targets for grades to achieve and things to do. Generally, boys and girls learn equally well at Key Stage 3, but it is the girls who profit most from good teaching and clear target setting at Key Stage 4. At this stage, girls often learn very competently, producing clear and very thorough notes and finished work. Boys learn well, making good progress in acquiring knowledge and skills, but do not respond to very good teaching as effectively as the girls. In the sixth form, boys and girls learn equally well, with boys often making original and valuable contributions in lessons. Students who have special needs make good progress towards their targets. In the majority of subjects they receive good support and guidance, either from assistants or from subject teachers.

12. The school has a comprehensive and challenging set of targets for academic achievement. For this year, the school plans to raise results further. It has set targets of 78 per cent of students gaining level 5 and above in the tests at the end of Key Stage 3, 65 per cent gaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C and an average points score of 19.5 for two or more A level passes. These targets are based on the measurement of students' potential, and are demanding and attainable. Good progress has been made towards achieving the GCSE target, seen in a positive set of mock GCSE results, with particularly strong improvement in science results.

13. The standard of literacy is above the national average, and is well developed across subjects. Students speak fluently and confidently, and listen well. They read aloud with accuracy and write clearly. They have sufficient numeracy skills to cope with subjects across the curriculum when required, but are often slower than expected in arriving at the correct solution. In ICT, skills across the curriculum vary according to the subject and aspect of ICT being handled. Though many individual students have good skills, for example in word processing, they are not given the range of ICT experiences necessary to develop their skills well in all areas.

14. Since the last inspection, the school has maintained its previous high standards of achievement in tests and examinations. Results have risen in the tests in core subjects at the end of Key Stage 3. In A level, results have improved in points scored and in the proportion achieving grades A and B. Overall, GCSE performance for grades A*-C is higher than in 1995, but lower than 1994. GCSE results have not shown a consistent improvement, while the national trend has been rising. Maintaining the overall high results is due entirely to the improved performance of girls, as that of boys has declined.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

15. Students come to school with very positive attitudes. The large number of students taking part in extra-curricular activities, despite the difficulties of transport, reflects this enthusiasm for all the school offers. In nearly all lessons they are eager to learn and take a keen interest in their studies. They behave well in class, concentrate well and work collaboratively when required. For example, Year 9 students showed an excellent response in a music lesson on creating mood through expressive performance; they worked well together and were interested in getting their part right. A lower Year 11 set concentrated well in an English lesson on poems from other cultures; they were considerate to each other, were thoughtful to the visitor and wanted to please the teacher. Students in the sixth form display an even greater enthusiasm for their studies and often produce copious amounts of work. For example, Year 13 business education students were totally committed to their task, worked at a very good pace, and were eager to improve their own performance. In a rare instance of poor response, Year 11 students in a lower ability group were unable to focus on their written work in a history lesson, lacked concentration and showed some poor behaviour despite the best efforts of the teacher.

16. Behaviour in the school is very good, although nearly a fifth of the 400 parents responding to the questionnaire disagree with this view. The number of temporary exclusions is average and there have been no permanent exclusions in the last two years. Students and parents report that there are few instances of bullying. The personal development of students is very good. Students are courteous and able to respect well the feelings, beliefs and values of other people. They are keen to take initiative and to exercise responsibility. For example, many students have volunteered to train as peer educators for drugs, sex and health education. Other students represent their peers on the year and school councils and display considerable maturity in their role. Members of the school council were recently involved in the interviewing process for two staff appointments, and this reflects the trust the school rightly gives students. The initiative and personal responsibility displayed by the sixth form are excellent. Students describe relationships as a significant strength of the school, and the inspection judged them to be excellent.

17. Attendance is satisfactory. It has improved in the last year and is broadly in line with the national average. However, in some classes attendance was poor during the inspection, and attendance is not as high as it might be. Punctuality is good and allows teachers and students to make good use of their time.

18. Since the last inspection, the previous high standards of behaviour and relationships have been at least maintained and relationships are now one of the prime features of good learning and progress.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

19. The quality of teaching and of students' learning and their progress are good at Key Stages 3 and 4, and very good in the sixth form. Good teaching has a positive effect on the quality of students' learning and progress.

20. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen, at any stage. At Key Stage 3, teaching was good in over three lessons in five and very good in approaching a further one in five. The quality of students' learning and progress was similar at this stage. At Key Stage 4, teaching was good in two lessons in five and very good in approaching a third, with similar results for students' learning and progress. There was more very good teaching and learning at this stage than at Key Stage 3, and a few lessons seen were of excellent

quality. In the sixth form, teaching and learning were stronger again than at Key Stage 4. Here, both teaching and learning were good in two lessons in five and very good in a similar proportion. In nearly one lesson in ten, teaching was excellent.

21. Generally, good teaching produces equally good learning and progress, confirming that students are making good use of their opportunities. At all stages, there is rather more very good and excellent teaching than there is equivalent learning, confirming that it is very positive teaching which leads to the good results seen, and that students are capable of even greater progress than was seen.

22. Teaching is good in all three core subjects. It is a strength in English, where teaching is good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in the sixth form. In just over half the lessons seen, teaching was very good and occasionally excellent. Students respond positively to this good teaching and make rapid and assured progress at all levels. Teachers' knowledge and understanding are very good. In mathematics, teaching is good overall and some lessons are of a very high standard. Very good relationships between students and teachers create a positive working atmosphere. Teachers use their good knowledge and enthusiasm to give students realistic and interesting challenges. In science, teaching at all key stages was good or very good in three-quarters of the lessons seen. Teachers treat students in a mature way and share their enthusiasm for science. Their knowledge of the subject is very good. Lessons are well-planned with clear objectives, although these are not always shared with students at the beginning of the lesson. Relationships are good.

23. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and apply this very well to the way they present their lessons. For example, in a Year 9 music lesson, the teacher's very good knowledge of improvisation and rhythm led to very clear and well focussed instruction. As a result, students developed their ideas with great confidence and surprised even themselves with the quality and length of the improvisations they achieved. The fine public performances seen during the inspection derive from teaching and response of this calibre and add greatly to the quality of some assemblies seen. A further example of the effect of very good subject knowledge was seen in a Year 11 business studies lesson, in which the teacher had invited some sixth formers to help the class in a practical revision project. Very clear subject knowledge led to excellent presentation of what could have been a dry revision topic, so that students revised all the necessary facts through playing a production game. In both these examples, students had to apply considerable intellectual and creative effort to achieve good results, and the quality of teaching released their potential to do this.

24. Teachers plan their lessons and the development of the topics they teach very effectively. For example, students in a Year 13 English lesson showed considerable knowledge of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and interest in the development of the plot. The teacher had planned a most effective series of lessons, supported by very helpful information sheets which allowed students to concentrate well on the matter being discussed and to develop their knowledge of such issues as marriage and feminism. In a Year 9 PE lesson, the teacher had planned a very good sequence of events so that students improved their techniques of dribbling, stopping and passing, understanding very clearly how to improve their performances.

25. Expectations are high in most lessons, which have a good level of challenge. As a result, students produce work of good quality and work at a good pace. For example, in a Year 11 French lesson, expectations were high and led to clear progress in oral competence. There were many opportunities to speak, augmented by the teacher's decision to ask a boy to lead part of the lesson. This is one of many examples where

students are challenged to learn for themselves rather than learn passively from the teacher. The teaching of A level sociology provides another good example of successful challenge. Students respond very well to the need to produce and present their own research, learning confidently from each other. Teachers' expectations of students' maturity and confidence lead them to rise to the challenge in almost all subjects. This is not the case in history at Key Stages 3 and 4, but there are examples of growing confidence in this subject too.

26. Teachers use effective methods in almost all subjects. For example, the approach of requiring all students to reply to questions in full sentences led to their careful consideration of the issues in looking after the elderly in two successful humanities lessons in Year 11. A clear series of explanations combined with good humour led to good interest and improved understanding in a Year 12 chemistry lesson on acids and bases. The teacher's clear methods seen in the joint exploration by a Year 9 class on designing and making a celebratory biscuit for a children's party enabled students to learn more than they realised about the design and making process, while making learning practical and good fun.

27. The management of students is very good. Teachers create a positive atmosphere which leads to good interest and concentration in almost all lessons. For example, a Year 11 practical mathematics lesson on loci was very well managed to include the maximum possible involvement of students. Not all teachers, again, for example, in mathematics, manage students with such flair. In another Year 11 lesson, students responded to an unenthusiastic lesson on measurement with appropriate lack of involvement. Generally, though, teachers take every opportunity to involve students, notably in the GNVQ subjects where there is very effective use of practical presentation, often including ICT. Although some students commented that lessons were not always as lively as those seen during the inspection, teachers are clearly well used to involving students as good partners in the management of their lessons, leading to quick interest and sustained concentration.

28. Teachers use time well. Thanks to good subject knowledge and planning, lessons are well timed to include a range of different activities. For example, a Year 13 business studies lesson contained a wide range of activities including role play and video, ensuring that time was used to the maximum and that intellectual effort was maintained throughout. In a Year 11 physics lesson, the teacher used time well to present a revision topic on circuits and resistance, which included some relevant experimental work. Teachers' use of support staff is satisfactory overall, while their use of the resources available to them is very good. For example, the teacher had made good use of resources to encourage a wide range of finished pieces in Year 11 art, while music teachers have made maximum use of all the resources, instrumental and electronic, they possess. Teachers of drama use the space available to good effect, for example in a Year 9 lesson in which groups used the studio well in planning their pieces on a murder mystery.

29. Teachers' assessment of written work is good, but the encouragement and support they give individuals in the lesson are often the deciding factor in the good progress they make. For example, the fact that the RE teacher had himself written the play about racism which his Year 9 students were preparing allowed him to give them direct encouragement in improving their performances and in drawing out the moral qualities in the drama. Teachers' use and marking of homework are satisfactory. Homework is generally well set, but assignments are sometimes undemanding and not well designed to extend students' learning. Some parents feel there is too much homework and some too little, though most of those present at the meeting felt that homework is helpful. Some homework seen was of very high quality and confirmed that students have a clear understanding of what they are

doing. Teachers make a point of discussing work on an individual basis, setting new targets and grades to aim at. This gives students a very clear idea of their present standard and how they can improve.

30. Generally, teachers give students with special educational needs (SEN) positive help and encouragement. They work well with classroom assistants who give good support in the lessons they are able to cover. Most individual education plans are well written and set clear and attainable targets. In a minority of subjects, they are unsatisfactory and do not provide sufficiently focused help. The teaching of the basic skills of literacy is good. Across the curriculum, teachers provide good opportunities for reading, speaking and writing, so that students benefit from this wide range of opportunity to practise the skills of literacy. The teaching of numeracy skills is satisfactory. Though there are many examples of good teaching and the helpful application of numeracy in a number of subjects including mathematics, science, geography, business studies, PE and psychology, students are overall given fewer opportunities to practice and improve their numeracy than literacy skills. Teachers do not always extend the possibilities of work in numeracy, and sometimes students are too readily allowed to use calculators. As a result, achievement in numeracy is average, but that in literacy is high. Although the teaching of gifted and talented students is satisfactory overall, and these students benefit from the good teaching which all receive, the school has not made a priority of this and, despite effective teaching, results in top grades in GCSE are no higher than average.

31. Since the last inspection, the school has made very good progress in further improving the quality of teaching. This was already good in 1995, with 90 per cent of lessons satisfactory or better, and the 100 per cent now gained is a distinguished achievement.

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

32. The quality and range of the school's curriculum are good in Year 9 and at Key Stage 4, and very good in the sixth form. The curriculum provides well for the range of students, their aptitudes and interests. With the exception of the requirements for ICT, all statutory aspects are well provided, and very good continuity and progression are ensured for Year 9 through strong, effective links with students' middle schools in almost all curriculum areas. Internal planning through schemes of work is also good, ensuring continuity into Key Stage 4, where there is a wide range of GCSE subjects. Students can choose one subject in addition to their prescribed selection, so allowing them to specialise while maintaining a good breadth of subjects. At Key Stage 4, the curriculum is given very good extra width by the requirement to study a performing arts subject. Students have the option to take a GCSE course in expressive arts as an alternative to the separate subjects of art, music, drama and PE which are all within the performing and expressive arts faculty. The faculty has a well designed curriculum, with clear and comprehensive schemes of work. Good breadth is also offered in the humanities faculty, where students may take a GCSE in integrated humanities. Both in subjects offered and in the planning of schemes of work, the curriculum at Key Stage 4 provides a good basis for sixth form work.

33. In the sixth form, there is a very good range of A level and vocational GNVQ and NVQ courses. Students can gain further qualifications through their vocational courses, for example the first aid qualifications which are available through GNVQ health and social care. The school is well advanced in its planning for the changes in September 2000, which will extend this range even further. As a result of this good planning, equality of access and opportunity for all are good throughout the school.

34. Provision for ICT suffers from a present lack of time in Year 9 and the absence of a common course at Key Stage 4. However, students taking the GCSE course in ICT receive a good curriculum. The school has recognised the need to improve the course in Year 9 and has appointed the staff to do so. It has not yet provided suitably for all students at Key Stage 4. Provision for students who have special needs is generally good, and they have full access to the school's curriculum. The great majority of help is given within lessons, although some students are withdrawn for specialist help on occasions.

35. Extra-curricular activities are good in quality and the range of activities offered, particularly in PE and music. There is a large number of well supported activities, at all levels in the school. During the inspection, there were two well attended concerts. One was an expressive arts evening which included music technology, and the other a recital in the Minster. There was also a very enjoyable workshop session, given by musicians from the band of the Royal Signals. The curriculum is well extended by regular visits and field work, for example in science and geography. Further examples include the mathematics club which meets twice a week and holds a Saturday morning session monthly, and the GNVQ course in leisure and tourism which included a visit to Canada, making good use of a link with a school there.

36. The curriculum provided for personal, health and social education (PHSE) is satisfactory, and contains appropriate information on health and sex education, and drugs misuse. PHSE is taught by the students' tutors through the life studies course. It was not possible to observe any lessons, which took place outside the arranged inspection period during the week. Careers education is good. It is well regarded by students, and is given both by staff in the school and by visiting specialists. There is a good programme of visits, particularly for students considering entry to higher education. A well run and informative higher education conference for Year 12 students was held during the inspection, giving good early information about the application process, with very good contributions from Year 13 students and their parents, and those now at university.

37. The sixth form curriculum provides a good range of vocational education in GNVQ courses which give welcome breadth and relevance and enable a large number of students to find suitable courses in school. Such courses contribute well to the school's community involvement through its extensive contacts with local organisations and businesses. The school's contacts with its partner institutions, particularly the middle schools, are very good. There are good links between the faculties and the teachers of individual subjects in the middle schools, and the Year 9 induction process is very thorough, effective and appreciated. Middle schools are involved in a range of activities. For example, the school's highly successful fashion show, to raise funds for a forthcoming visit to Kyrgyzstan was greatly enjoyed by an appreciative audience of middle school pupils. At the other end of the age range, the school has good links with a local university which provides much help on the applications procedure and with a university department of education for a teacher training partnership.

38. The school's overall provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its students is good, with good contributions made by religious education, the performing arts faculty, English and modern foreign languages.

39. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. There are strong links with the Minster, and music in worship is a very important and valued feature of school life. Services take place at the important times of the Christian calendar, together with a service of welcome for Year 9 and a service to celebrate the achievements of the year in the summer.

Eucharists are held in school at regular intervals throughout the year. Despite this, apart from the fine painting of the Minster in the main corridor, there is little to make the visitor aware of the school's close links with its church or of its Christian foundation. The school's themes for assemblies for the year offer opportunities for Christian worship, but not all assemblies observed during the inspection were acts of worship. However, assemblies very successfully involve students in considering issues of value, and there are examples in lessons where outlooks of a spiritual nature come from a reflection on the beliefs and attitudes of others. For example, in a Year 9 lesson in religious studies, students were asked to empathise within role-play about how it feels to be victimised. The expression of inner feelings and thoughts takes place through the movement of dance and gymnastics. In a Year 9 tutor period, a student with special needs read two moving poems of his own about feeling lonely; the class listened with great attention and asked for an encore.

40. Provision for students' moral development is good. Students know the standards that are expected of them and behave well. Older students take a leading role in moral discussion with younger ones. Year 10 students act as peer trainers for Year 9 on HIV and Aids, and the sixth formers run the Health module. A visiting theatre presents the dangers of drinking and driving to the sixth form, and there are visiting speakers from Alcoholics Anonymous. Local magistrates and prison officers visit the school to talk on citizenship and law. Abortion, prejudice and discrimination are discussed in religious education. In physical education, students are taught the values of honesty, fair play and keeping to the rules. The study of drugs misuse occurs in the GCSE PE theory paper. Opportunities are well taken to discuss moral issues in lessons. For example, in modern foreign languages, Year 11 students discussed relationships with parents and siblings, while in geography, Year 9 students were studying a theme, *Rich world, Poor world*.

41. Provision for students' social development is very good. There are good opportunities for pair or group work in a number of subjects. For example, students work co-operatively in physical education, and there are good opportunities in extra-curricular activities. Students organise talent and fashion shows, while entrants to the sixth form take part in a two-day induction programme. Opportunities for taking responsibility are good. Sixth formers now monitor late-comers at the start of morning school; Year 10 students and sixth formers help with the life skills programme; sixth formers are attached to each tutor group. The school council is highly regarded and plays an effective role in the life of the school, for example in reviewing the bullying policy and in interviewing prospective members of staff. The residential trips, such as the one to Iona, as well as exchanges, visits, work experience abroad and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme all contribute to students' social development.

42. Provision for students' cultural development is good. There are many examples of the very good use of Western art in all students' work. Very good use of art from other cultures is made beyond Key Stage 3. Artists in residence are also helpful in fostering cultural links and awareness in all students. There are very good contacts with local galleries and visits to national galleries. For example, an art exhibition for the school and all its middle schools took place on the theme of metamorphosis during the inspection, with much interesting and stimulating work on display. Courses in the expressive arts faculty are also a very good contributor to this area. Music provides very good opportunities for extra-curricular activities, for example wind band and vocal band; many concerts are given. Visits abroad are provided in modern foreign languages, GNVQ and media studies. Multicultural opportunities exist in art, with the study of aboriginal art and African masks. Music has a samba band. The Japanese cinema is studied in media studies. Buddhists visit the school. Year 9 students visit the Bournemouth Islamic Centre and mosque with their tutors. In health education in Year 13, students spend one day looking at the problems of Muslim

girls, for example racism and inter-generational issues. Young ethnic minority students come to talk to them.

43. Since the last inspection, the school has maintained the good curriculum and opportunities then reported. There have been further developments in the range of sixth form vocational provision. The school has maintained its high standards in moral and social development, while provision for multicultural development has improved. However, the school still does not provide a daily act of collective worship for all students.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

44. The welfare and guidance of students continue to be organised well by the school. The introduction of a computerised system to monitor attendance has enabled the school to improve the regular attendance of students in the past year. More detailed analysis of attendance patterns of individual students means the school can take action quickly to encourage regular attendance. However, the school acknowledges that a further improvement in attendance is still required.

45. The school has recently developed a new behaviour management policy in consultation with governors, parents and students, and this has helped maintain consistent standards by staff. Students are satisfied that staff deal effectively with the few instances of bullying that arise. The school has good arrangements for child protection, which meet statutory requirements. Health and safety matters are thoroughly covered in comprehensive documentation and thorough action to ensure good standards, for example in regular risk assessments, although procedures for these do not appear in the PE department's documentation. Otherwise, the physical education department provides an effective health and fitness programme. There is a good range of healthy eating options provided in the canteen. No health and safety concerns were noted during the inspection.

46. Staff monitor and support students' personal development well, particularly through the personal interview given to each student. It was not possible to observe life studies lessons being taught during the inspection, but some students report that the standards of teaching can be uneven. Students receive good academic guidance, which enables them to make realistic and well-informed choices for Key Stage 4, and at sixteen and eighteen. Careers education is comprehensive, although accommodation for this within the learning resources centre is unsatisfactory.

47. The procedures for assessing the attainment and progress of students and for monitoring students' academic performance and personal development, particularly at Key Stage 4 and for sixth form students, are very good. These procedures are very well understood by teachers and students. Good use is made by faculties of external information systems, such as standardised test scores and an externally administered system to indicate A level potential. These form a good basis for target-setting for GCSE and A levels, and students are fully involved in these processes.

48. Assessment plays a central role in the learning of every student, as set out in the school's assessment policy. In the sixth form, for example, very good use is made of the system of progress checks, which students report are helping them to raise their aspirations, their grades and their self-esteem. Detailed statistical analysis for all three key stages is used for target-setting within subjects and for individual students. The school fully complies with statutory requirements for recording assessments, and for the assessment of students with statements of SEN.

49. Teachers make good use of assessment information to guide curricular planning, changing schemes of work and syllabuses to meet the needs of students. Departmental documentation, for example for vocational and business education, contains clear guidelines on the methods used by staff to keep students informed of their progress, as well as detailed analysis of test scores to set appropriate targets for students. The procedures are well understood by students, who ask their teachers how to achieve better grades.

50. The school's procedures for monitoring and supporting students' academic development are very good. A detailed policy statement, emphasising that assessment should play a central part in the learning of every student, is followed by all faculty areas and subject departments. This policy is very well implemented in the progress checks which take place at regular intervals for students in all years. For example, information is carefully collected on the performance of Year 10 students in each subject, to set whole-school targets for raising A*-C grades and to reduce the gap between the achievements of boys and of girls; analysis of Year 11 mock examination results identifies under-achievers in need of support. Progress checks take place every half term. For example, in English GCSE weaknesses are noted and schemes of work modified accordingly. There are good advice sheets on assessment criteria with comments assisting students to reach the next level. In science, the departmental marking policy is helping to ensure consistency, and information on progress is helpfully shared with students. As a further example, assessment in art is very good. Data at the end of Key Stage 3 is well logged and assessment at Key Stage 4 and in post-16 courses is extremely well managed, using all available data, to which both staff and students have access. Following disappointing external examination results in physical education, monitoring of students' performance has much improved during this academic year. There are some shortcomings in assessment of ICT, caused partly by the teaching arrangements in Year 9 and partly by the lack of a well used system to measure progress across the curriculum in all necessary aspects of the subject. As a result of the school's very good assessment systems, students are well aware of their own standards and are able to identify areas for improvement.

51. The identification and subsequent testing of students with SEN are good. The school uses information from middle schools and has its own programme of testing and assessment. Annual reviews are held appropriately and statutory requirements are met. However, there are no agreed procedures for the identification and encouragement of gifted and talented students, though the school provides many opportunities to encourage individual talents, for example in music and drama.

52. The school has continued to build on the good systems for students' welfare and the assessment and recording of their work, noted in the last inspection report. Procedures for target setting have been well developed, and the use of data from middle schools and the assessment of the needs of students with SEN have improved. Homework diaries which contained assessments of attitude, organisation, presentation, homework and coursework have been redesigned, and the layout simplified. Assessment procedures are now more consistently applied across all subject areas.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

53. A large number of parents, 440, representing over a third of the students on roll, responded to the questionnaire sent to them before the inspection, and many wrote thoughtful and detailed comments. Inspectors considered all these closely, as well as the views expressed at the meeting chaired by the registered inspector. A very large majority considered that the school expected students to work hard and achieve their best. As a

result, it was strongly agreed that students made good progress. A large majority considered that teaching was good. The inspection evidence agrees with all these views. However, inspectors reach more favourable views than the substantial minority of parents who consider behaviour and communication aspects to be unsatisfactory.

54. The school continues to maintain effective links with parents. There is an excellent range of general information provided on paper and through special meetings for parents about induction to the school and its systems, about the curriculum and about events and successes. A third of parents responding to the questionnaire do not feel that the school works closely with them, but inspectors consider that the school makes many efforts to involve parents. The school accepts that the perception of parents needs to be addressed and has plans to develop further its communication links. For example, there are plans to develop a parents and friends association to take over some of the roles of the present parent-teacher association, and there has been a very successful concert in one of the school's communities. The school already publishes an informative newsletter.

55. There are many examples of good cooperation with parents in the regular life of the school. The mathematics department invites parents to a 'How can I help my child in mathematics?' session, while all departments give parents advice about supporting GCSE revision. There was a well attended evening for Year 11 students on the borderline of achieving a C or D grade, in which parents were invited to learn alongside their children. Parents were involved in the development of the new behaviour management policy, and the school has started to survey parents about different aspects of its work. A good example of parental involvement, a very well organised conference on higher education for Year 12 students and their parents, was held during the inspection. A number of parents provide valuable coaching in physical education, support with geography fieldwork and transport home from after-school activities. Parents' good support in events such as these, and their willing cooperation in such regular matters as looking at homework diaries and providing transport for their children to the large number of activities, has a very positive effect on students' learning and progress.

56. A quarter of parents responding to the questionnaire report that they do not feel well-informed about their child's progress. Inspectors agree that annual reports do not contain sufficient detail about students' attainment and progress in each subject. Reports do not make clear what the target grades mean and there is inconsistency between departments. The termly progress checks recorded in homework diaries and information provided through tutor and subject consultation evenings give helpful information about students' individual progress.

57. In general, the links with parents of special needs students are satisfactory, and the majority of those invited attend annual reviews. Parents' consultation times also provide opportunities for discussion with special needs staff.

58. The good standard of partnership with parents reported in the last inspection has been maintained.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

59. The headteacher and senior staff lead the school very effectively. There is a clear and direct mission statement which declares the aim of the school - to provide quality in all it does, with the student as the focus of its work. This statement, though it does not appear in the prospectus, is the leading item of the school improvement plan, whose first aim is to set agreed professional standards and to implement them, in academic work and behaviour. The school has already achieved high standards in both, but is committed to raising them further. For example, it has introduced an effective new procedure for the appraisal of staff which enables participating teachers and management to work together for the development of professional skills.

60. The headteacher shares and delegates responsibility very effectively, working closely with the senior team in monitoring the performance of the school's subjects and year organisations. This has led to a very good partnership between senior staff and the leaders of subjects. Most heads of faculty, department and year lead their areas very well, in turn creating a very good partnership with their teachers. As a result, teachers share a very good commitment to the continued improvement of standards. This is seen, for example, in the priorities agreed after the 1999 GCSE and A level results, which include most of the issues identified for the improvement of subjects in this inspection report. The leadership of faculties is very good, particularly of those including a large number of subjects, performing and expressive arts (PEA), and humanities. The PEA faculty has a very well presented handbook and a clear and detailed development plan.

61. The school's leadership has proved its ability to raise standards, in two leading respects. First, it has made a number of significant interventions in the management of departments, making several new and effective appointments, for example in science. Second, it has developed rigorous and very successful procedures for the monitoring of teaching. The head of faculty and line manager observe all their colleagues teach each term and write a full and objective report on each observation. From these, they are now developing overall evaluations of the departments' strengths and weaknesses, to improve the quality of teaching and learning further.

62. Very good monitoring and assessment of performance allow the school to set ambitious but realistic targets for improvement. These appear at the front of the school improvement plan and include aspirations for results, attendance, behaviour and teaching. Targets are reviewed regularly; all teachers discuss progress with each student in their class each half term, setting new targets and adjusting target grades. Though some targets are very general, students know that they will be individually assessed. Tutors have time reserved for the discussion of their students' overall progress. These procedures give the school very good information on the progress of a particular year towards its potential and targets.

63. The governing body is well led and is fortunate in the expertise of its members. It has effective committees for all areas of the school's work, including finance, the curriculum, staffing, and for the school and community. These committees are well served by members of the senior team. As a result, governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They gain this knowledge also by their involvement in monitoring the school's results and the progress of the improvement plan. Governors give dedicated and professional service. Members are linked to academic departments, attend school functions and also hold informal meetings to discuss their work.

64. Very good financial management ensures that the school makes best use of its resources. The ratio of staff to students is well calculated and the allocation of teachers to departments is very carefully planned to ensure their most effective use. Resources for sixth form students are economically used to provide a wide sixth form curriculum, with some sixth form income well allocated to support the education of younger students as well. Budgets are carefully prepared, with clear statements for governors and senior staff. Money is allocated to subjects on a closely calculated formula at the start of the financial year and accurately adjusted to reflect actual numbers in September. Financial systems are very carefully managed and the latest audit report reflected good levels of financial control. Administrative and financial staff provide a very good level of service, greatly helping the school to function in an efficient and supportive way. Specific grants are used well for their designated purposes, for example to support the education of students with statements of SEN and to provide training for staff in school improvement. The school's educational foundation provides a modest but welcome contribution each year. The use of new technology is satisfactory overall. It is well used in some faculty areas, but not in others. Though the school makes very good central use of ICT in some operations, for example in analysing academic performance and attendance, it is not yet using it to help keep records of teachers' assessment, and faculties are not well linked by ICT to central information systems.

65. The principles of best value are well applied overall. The school compares its results with national data very well and sets careful targets accordingly. It challenges itself well to provide a good curriculum which reflects the needs of its students. For example, after much consultation, it has taken particular care to prepare a very wide and well considered new sixth form curriculum, and has made scarce funds available to develop more space for private study to reflect the demands which this new curriculum will make. In many ways, the school consults fully and well, for example in taking wide soundings about the new behaviour policy and sixth form curriculum. However, a large minority of parents does not feel well informed about students' progress and feels that the school is not working closely with them. To this extent, its consultation procedures appear not to have been effective. The school's procedures for encouraging competition for services are excellent, with detailed analyses of specifications and tenders, leading to very competitive contracts. In terms of its use of resources and the good results it has achieved with them, the school offers good value for money.

66. The special needs department receives strong support from senior managers and its provision is now generally satisfactory. Individual education plans are good, and teachers contribute suitable targets in most subjects. This has a positive effect on students' learning and generally leads to good progress in most subjects. However, there are still some shortcomings. Although identification and testing of students with SEN are satisfactory, there is still a larger number of students than necessary at stages one and two of the code of practice, so that scarce expertise and resources are not best used to support those who need help most. There is no policy or provision for the identification and needs of gifted and talented students.

67. Work that is suitably adapted for students with SEN, while good in most subjects, such as physical education, is lacking in some subjects such as science and history. There is insufficient guidance across the whole range of subjects from the special needs department and therefore outcomes rest largely upon subject teachers. In annual reviews, parents' views are not always recorded. The deployment of two very experienced and long-serving SEN teachers, largely in supporting roles, is inefficient and therefore unsatisfactory. In many subjects during the inspection period, no support assistants were available, and this sometimes affects students' progress in those subjects.

68. The special needs policy document was criticised in the last report, and still has some of the same deficiencies. It does not address fully all aspects of the code of practice, for example there is no mention of parents, or of a complaints procedure.

69. Since the last inspection, the school has made good improvement in the effectiveness of its leadership and management. Systems for the monitoring of teaching and setting targets have been particularly effective. The school has maintained, and has the capacity to improve, the high standards previously reported.

70. Overall, the match of teachers to the demands of the curriculum is good. The student-teacher ratio is appropriate and classes are taught by specialist teachers. In performing and expressive arts, a shortage of teachers means that current Year 10 students are unable to experience art as one of the two arts subjects they must study. Steps have been taken to improve the currently inadequate staffing for ICT.

71. Arrangements for appraisal and performance management have been carefully reviewed and are very good. An active continuing professional development group is making a useful contribution to a training and development plan for September 2000. Appraisal of the headteacher and staff has been reintroduced in a useful, well-documented plan. The training needs of all staff, teaching and support, are well identified, and related to school, faculty and individual requirements. For example, there have been residential conferences for all staff. The school is a very good provider of training. It has a core of experienced trainers and mentors, and procedures are thorough, clear and developed to suit the needs of the school. Teachers new to the school and a large number of students following an initial teacher training programme benefit from the school's good provision. Individuals have attested to the way in which they are cared for by the school during induction.

72. The school has continued the good staffing procedures noted in the last inspection report.

73. Overall, the standard of accommodation is satisfactory and meets the needs of most subject areas. It varies from unsatisfactory in science, due to problems of flexibility, access and room size, to excellent in physical education. The school has a fair proportion of undersized teaching areas. For example, the size of four classrooms in mathematics restricts the possible range of work. Access to some mathematics classrooms is through others. Lack of space also occurs in areas of ICT, design and technology, geography, and religious education. Most department rooms are helpfully grouped together. The school's best features include an outstanding indoor sports complex, a well managed, but small, learning resource centre, a well-equipped drama studio and well maintained sports grounds. Cafeteria arrangements remain inadequate, but are due for considerable improvements

74. Maintenance and improvements are well managed and there is a programme for the refurbishment of teaching areas. Many curtains, blinds and carpets have been replaced since the last inspection. The good quality of display materials in most classrooms and corridors encourages interest and achievement. Graffiti and vandalism are not problems and the school uses appropriate strategies to minimise litter. The school buildings are used for a wide range of evening and weekend activities.

75. Since the last inspection, the school has done what it could, making limited improvements in mathematics, English and science accommodation. The refurbishment programme continues to improve the working environment of the school.

76. The overall provision of learning resources is satisfactory and meets the requirements of the National Curriculum and students. Resources are adequate for most subjects and good for PE. However, some subjects are still under-resourced. In design and technology there is not enough CAD/CAM technology, and a shortage of materials for work in class. In history and geography, there are still shortages of textbooks and problems of access to television and computers. In modern foreign languages, audio equipment is in poor condition and there are still shortages of some textbooks, especially dictionaries. Storage and access are unsatisfactory in the majority of subjects and only physical education has good access to its resources and equipment. The overall management of resources is sound and available resources are appropriately used in all departments.

77. The quality of resources for information technology has improved recently and there is good access to ICT resources for students on vocational and other courses. There has been an increased level of spending on computers and computer suites and Internet facilities since the last inspection. The learning resource centre has a good stock of books and periodicals as well as computing and photocopying facilities. It is an attractive and valuable focus for learning and it is accessible at all times during the day. However, the area devoted to careers education is small and lacks any privacy.

78. Good use is made of the local area and its community as a learning resource and students are involved in a wide variety of activities which enhance their work in the classroom. The school makes good use of its many contacts, for example the local Education Business Partnership, in setting up opportunities for work experience.

79. The school has maintained its adequate supply of resources since the last inspection. It has much improved its provision of computers and the presentation of the learning resource centre.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

80. The governors and senior staff should now:

- (1) increase the amount of time for teaching ICT at Key Stage 3 and provide more comprehensive teaching across the curriculum at Key Stage 4, so that all aspects of the National Curriculum are provided in this subject;
(See paragraphs 32, 34, 167, 168)
- (2) improve GCSE results in history and PE and continue present efforts to improve the GCSE performance of boys;
(See paragraphs 3, 5, 154, 195)
- (3) introduce a policy for meeting the educational needs of gifted and talented students at all stages, but with the particular aim of increasing the proportion of A* and A grades achieved in GCSE;
(See paragraphs 4, 66)

- (4) improve the quality of information in reports to parents, with fuller and more accurate analysis of students' attainment and progress.
(See paragraph 56)

81. Other weaknesses which should be considered by the school for inclusion in its action plan include:

- continuing to work to improve attendance;
(See paragraph 17)
- investigating the causes of some parents' dissatisfaction with the school's communication with them and taking any necessary steps to improve this further;
(See paragraph 54)
- continuing the programme of improvements to the management of the SEN department, so that help is better provided for those who most need it and the department plays a leading role in the support of gifted and talented students.
(See paragraph 66)

THE SIXTH FORM

82. The sixth form is a strength of the school in its curriculum provision, the quality of teaching and learning, relationships between staff and students, the role played by sixth formers and the range of activities available.

83. The inclusion of four GNVQ courses, two at both intermediate and advanced levels, complements the broad range of A and AS level examinations offered, in addition to an enrichment programme of general studies and activities. There is full social integration of students on academic and vocational courses and a number take both GNVQ and A levels. The general studies programme is well structured, with students taking a series of short modules. Some students opt to take general studies AS or A level examinations in Year 13, where attainment has been above the national average for the last five years; others follow the Youth Award Scheme. Overall results at A level have been around the national average in points scored, but results at grades A and B have risen in 1999, when they were above the average for comprehensive schools.

84. The quality of teaching across all subjects in the sixth form is very good. Two lessons in five were judged very good during the inspection and a further one in ten excellent. There was no unsatisfactory teaching and the great majority was at least good. Students learnt well and made good progress in nearly half the lessons seen, and very well in a further two in five. Again, students learnt well in the great majority of lessons. Their attitudes and behaviour in lessons were very good and in a quarter of lessons, their outlook and conduct were excellent. Students make the most of their opportunities, supported by teaching of a high standard.

85. These good standards come from careful planning, both academic and personal. At the start of the year, students and their tutors take part in an induction course, designed as a team-building exercise. Students have excellent relationships with each other, with their tutors and with their teachers.

86. Sixth formers play a very positive part in the life of the whole school. For example, many sixth formers volunteer to be counsellors for drugs education or to help with reading schemes for younger students; for mentoring Year 11 or for helping to raise the aspirations of Year 9 students. They help with role play or simulations, for example in business studies. A sixth former recently gave an address to an audience of over 500 Year 11 parents and students, outlining the changes which the new Curriculum 2000 would bring to post-16 courses and qualifications. Sixth formers are prominent in charity fund-raising. They take the lead in the well-supported student council and the sixth form council takes an active part in discussions with staff, for example in considering the new sixth form curriculum and the design of the sixth form centre.

87. Tutors keep detailed records of their students' service to the community. Examples range from assistance with school clubs (for example, squash and mathematics), to lunchtime ICT supervision, community activities for the under-eights, a Christmas party for a special school and helping the elderly with gardening. At the Minster, some students act as readers, prayer leaders and also as Worship Coordinators, and they shepherd younger students to and from the Minster for school events.

88. There is a great range of activities in the sixth form. For example, a big talent show raised funds for cancer relief. An interactive exhibition on images and sounds in Wimborne involved sixth form art and media students. Some students and a member of staff are preparing for their expedition next summer to the remote mountainous region of Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia, where they will be working with the local community as well as trekking. These students have worked very well together to raise £2,500 each towards the cost of the venture. There are many regular sports and activities, and individual pursuits such as sailing or rock-climbing. Visits are organised, for example to London, Paris and Stratford-upon-Avon. The Young Enterprise group reached the regional finals last year, and has high hopes of capping that achievement this year.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

| | |
|--|-----|
| Number of lessons observed | 208 |
| Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students | 53 |

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

| Excellent | Very good | Good | Satisfactory | Unsatisfactory | Poor | Very Poor |
|-----------|-----------|------|--------------|----------------|------|-----------|
| 5 | 28 | 46 | 21 | 0 | 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

| | Y9 – Y11 | Sixth form |
|---|----------|------------|
| Number of pupils on the school's roll | 947 | 325 |
| Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals | 37 | - |

Special educational needs

| | Y9 – Y11 | Sixth form |
|---|----------|------------|
| Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs | 14 | 2 |
| Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register | 239 | 9 |

English as an additional language

| | No of pupils |
|---|--------------|
| Number of pupils with English as an additional language | 1 |

Pupil mobility in the last school year

| | No of pupils |
|--|--------------|
| Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission | 43 |
| Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving | 55 |

Attendance

Authorised absence

| | % |
|---------------------------|-----|
| School data | 7 |
| National comparative data | 7.9 |

Unauthorised absence

| | % |
|---------------------------|-----|
| School data | 0.8 |
| 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 | 1999 | 152 | 158 | 310 |

| National Curriculum Test/Task Results | | English | Mathematics | Science |
|---|----------|---------|-------------|---------|
| Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above | Boys | 97 | 114 | 115 |
| | Girls | 129 | 119 | 112 |
| | Total | 226 | 233 | 227 |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above | School | 73 (78) | 75 (68) | 73 (67) |
| | National | 63 (65) | 62 (59) | 55 (56) |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above | School | 25 (50) | 51 (43) | 38 (32) |
| | National | 28 (35) | 38 (36) | 23 (27) |

| Teachers' Assessments | | English | Mathematics | Science |
|---|----------|---------|-------------|---------|
| Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above | Boys | 105 | 105 | 120 |
| | Girls | 135 | 111 | 129 |
| | Total | 240 | 216 | 249 |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above | School | 77 (64) | 70 (82) | 80 (74) |
| | National | 64 (62) | 64 (64) | 60 (62) |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above | School | 36 (25) | 36 (49) | 43 (42) |
| | National | 31 (31) | 37 (37) | 28 (31) |

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

| | Year | Boys | Girls | Total |
|--|------|------|-------|-------|
| Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year | 1999 | 165 | 166 | 331 |

| 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 | 68 | 158 | 162 |
| | Girls | 122 | 161 | 163 |
| | Total | 190 | 319 | 325 |
| Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified | School | 57 (50) | 96 (95) | 98 (99) |
| | National | 46.3 (44.6) | 90.7 (89.8) | 95.7 (95.9) |
| Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year. | | | | |
| | | GCSE results | | GCSE point score |
| | | Average point score per pupil | School | 43 (42) |
| | | | National | 37.8 (36.8) |

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 | 1999 | 67 | 72 | 139 |

| 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 | 17.5 | 18.1 | 17.8 (18) | 1.1 | 2.1 | 1.6 (2.1) |
| National | 17.7 | 18.1 | 17.9(17.6) | 2.7 | 2.8 | 2.8 (2.8) |

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

| Vocational qualifications | | Number | % success rate |
|---|----------|--------|----------------|
| Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied | School | 38 | 76 |
| | National | | 72.5 |

Ethnic background of pupils

| | No of pupils |
|---------------------------------|--------------|
| Black – Caribbean heritage | 1 |
| Black – African heritage | 0 |
| Black – other | 1 |
| Indian | 1 |
| Pakistani | 0 |
| Bangladeshi | 1 |
| Chinese | 1 |
| White | 1266 |
| Any other minority ethnic group | 1 |

Exclusions in the last school year

| | Fixed period | Permanent |
|------------------------------|--------------|-----------|
| Black – Caribbean heritage | 0 | 0 |
| Black – African heritage | 0 | 0 |
| Black – other | 0 | 0 |
| Indian | 0 | 0 |
| Pakistani | 0 | 0 |
| Bangladeshi | 0 | 0 |
| Chinese | 0 | 0 |
| White | 37 | 5 |
| Other minority ethnic groups | 0 | 0 |

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y9 – Y13

| | |
|--|------|
| Total number of qualified teachers (FTE) | 75.6 |
| Number of pupils per qualified teacher | 16.8 |

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y9 – Y13

| | |
|---|-----|
| Total number of education support staff | 13 |
| Total aggregate hours worked per week | 346 |

Deployment of teachers: Y9– Y13

| | |
|---|------|
| Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes | 75.4 |
|---|------|

Average teaching group size: Y9 – Y13

| | |
|-------------|------|
| Key Stage 3 | 24.3 |
| Key Stage 4 | 23.8 |

Financial information

| | |
|----------------|------|
| Financial year | 1999 |
|----------------|------|

| | £ |
|--|---------|
| Total income | 3267801 |
| Total expenditure | 3270984 |
| Expenditure per pupil | 2571 |
| Balance brought forward from previous year | 12800 |
| Balance carried forward to next year | 9617 |

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| Number of questionnaires sent out | 1272 |
| Number of questionnaires returned | 440 |

Percentage of responses in each category

| | Strongly agree | Tend to agree | Tend to disagree | Strongly disagree | Don't know |
|--|----------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------|------------|
| My child likes school. | 23 | 62 | 10 | 4 | 1 |
| My child is making good progress in school. | 31 | 62 | 5 | 1 | 1 |
| Behaviour in the school is good. | 14 | 58 | 15 | 2 | 11 |
| My child gets the right amount of work to do at home. | 14 | 57 | 20 | 7 | 2 |
| The teaching is good. | 17 | 62 | 9 | 2 | 10 |
| I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on. | 24 | 48 | 21 | 4 | 3 |
| I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem. | 35 | 47 | 13 | 3 | 2 |
| The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best. | 40 | 53 | 5 | 1 | 1 |
| The school works closely with parents. | 19 | 46 | 27 | 5 | 3 |
| The school is well led and managed. | 16 | 60 | 12 | 4 | 8 |
| The school is helping my child become mature and responsible. | 24 | 55 | 15 | 3 | 3 |
| The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons. | 21 | 47 | 13 | 3 | 16 |

Other issues raised by parents

The meeting attended by 40 parents was more positive about the way that the school works closely with parents, with particular appreciation for the willingness of teachers to contact the home when necessary. Homework was generally useful and helped students to make progress. Behaviour was generally good and a good range of activities was available.

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

ENGLISH

89. At the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999, the results in the National Curriculum tests in English were above the national average. Although statistics show that results were below the average for similar schools, inspection findings indicate that students are achieving well in relation to their capabilities. In the period 1996-1999, results were generally above average but dipped in 1997. Results in English in 1999 were not as good as those in mathematics and science.

90. At the end of Key Stage 4, the proportion of students achieving the higher grades (A*-C) in the 1999 GCSE examination was well above the national average. The number of A* grades achieved was three times the national average. There were very few low grades. Over the past three years results have risen, though they fell in 1998. In English literature, the proportion of students achieving the higher grades (A*-C) in 1999 was above the national average. Results have fluctuated over recent years, but have remained above average. Girls achieve much higher results than boys at grades A*-C; the gap increased considerably in 1999, when 20 per cent more girls than boys achieved these grades in English, and over 30 per cent more in literature. Despite this, students' results in English language and literature were better than their results in most other subjects, including mathematics and science. The school enters nearly all of its Year 11 students for GCSE English and English literature.

91. Results for A level in 1999 were well above the national average and similar to those of recent years. English is a popular subject at A level.

92. In lessons and work seen during the inspection, standards at the end of Key Stage 3 in English were above expected levels overall and well above in speaking and listening. Students achieve highly at this stage. They speak clearly and confidently, in Standard English when appropriate, and command a wide range of vocabulary. They listen attentively to their teachers and to one another in group work. Students read aloud fluently and accurately, though not always with expression. They are particularly skilled at reading aloud their own work to the class. For example, in a Year 9 class, students read willingly their imaginary letters from Olivia, in connection with their studies of *Twelfth Night*. The provision of book boxes for Year 9 groups is encouraging wider reading. Students have a very good range of writing skills. They compose play scripts and discursive pieces on how television influences young people. They make detailed comparisons between Wordsworth's poem *Composed upon Westminster Bridge* and Turner's *Daily London Recipe*; and between Jules Verne's and Michael Palin's *Around the World in Eighty Days*. Students write narrative and descriptive essays, poems, book reviews and reflective pieces based on their own experiences. They achieve a good standard of technical accuracy. Lower achievers have difficulty with spelling and sentence structure. Presentation is very good, with appropriate use of word processing to enhance appearance.

93. Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are well above expected levels. Here students achieve very high standards. They speak with assurance and in well-developed responses, showing a keen sense of audience, as in a Year 11 lesson where pairs of students, using overhead projector transparencies, gave well-informed talks on themes from *Lord of the Flies*. Students listen carefully. For example, in another Year 11 lesson on Golding's novel, good listening enabled students in groups to answer challenging questions spoken by the teacher. Students read aloud with variation of pace and appreciate hidden meaning,

though lower achievers take words literally. Students write well in different styles, with many sustaining accuracy for several pages. Students respond sensitively to literature. There is inspired writing on poems such as *Presents from My Aunt in Pakistan* and on novels such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Computers are well used, as when preparing the front page of *The Daily Dartmoor*, relating events from the Sherlock Holmes novel *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. In terms of what students could do better at Key Stages 3 and 4, though vocabulary is appropriate and punctuation aids meaning, commas are overused where full stops are needed. Occasionally, students do not focus closely enough on the set topic and quotations are not fully explained.

94. Standards in the sixth form are well above average and achievement is high. Students are highly articulate, as when discussing the poetry of Seamus Heaney. They read with an eye for detail and appreciate how an author uses language for effect. Written work has many impressive features. Occasionally an argument lacks clarity, but most essays are well researched and structured. Students write enthusiastically on Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Tale* and consider the way writers express a view in Orwell's *1984* and Wyndham's *Day of the Triffids*. Students carefully analyse the characters of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* and Blanche in Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

95. In media studies, standards in GCSE and A level examinations are in line with the national average. This is confirmed by inspection findings. At Key Stage 4, students of widely varying abilities take the subject. They write about publicising a new film and analyse soap operas and detective stories. While lower achievers find it hard to sustain an argument, higher achievers write in subject specific language and research in detail the history of film. In A level and GNVQ courses, students discuss advertisements and the development of popular music, and consider how to market audio products. They realise the hard work that goes into preparing a short newscast by organising their own broadcast, with camera and lighting effects.

96. Teaching is a strength in English. The quality of teaching is good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in the sixth form. In just over half the lessons observed, teaching was very good and occasionally excellent. Students respond positively to this good teaching and make rapid and assured progress at all levels. Teachers' knowledge and understanding are very good and this helps students to widen their vocabulary and develop a keen appreciation of literature. Lesson planning is very good. Teachers provide a variety of imaginative activities to maintain students' interest during revision lessons for national tests and examinations. For example, a Year 9 class discussed in pairs how to direct a scene from *Twelfth Night*. The teacher guided the students to examine how specific lines should be spoken and this led to a greater understanding of the text. In another Year 9 class on the same play, students in groups sequenced events from a scene. Valuable discussion enabled students to learn quickly. In a Year 13 class, the teacher gave students the opportunity to discuss characters in *King Lear* before presenting their ideas to the whole group, using a flip chart. The students' mature attitude to their work and the teacher's clear explanations resulted in very good progress. The active involvement of students in their own learning is a very positive feature of English lessons and is promoting high standards. Just occasionally, teachers direct questions to the same willing speakers, without drawing in the silent minority. Teachers encourage excellent relationships in class: this explains the effectiveness of collaboration in group work. Behaviour is very good. Most students are highly motivated, though in Year 11, a minority, mainly boys, adopt a more casual approach to work and this limits their progress. Teachers maintain a brisk pace in lessons; hence students concentrate hard. Occasionally the pace is too fast and students do not have enough time to reflect on what they have learnt. Teachers mark work thoroughly and give clear advice on raising standards.

97. Teaching in media studies is very good. Teachers have considerable expertise in the subject and employ a wide range of resources to help students learn. Their explanations are clear and expectations high. In the sixth form, students take responsibility for their own learning. For example, in a Year 13 lesson, they reviewed the results of a survey on Year 11 responses to film clips. The teacher helped students to identify strengths and weaknesses and his expert advice showed students how they could improve.

98. The English curriculum is broad and balanced, giving students the opportunity to taste a wide variety of literature. Careful planning gives students with special educational needs access to the curriculum and this is further aided by good in-class support. In Year 9, mixed ability classes there is not enough support and this restricts learning sometimes. Challenging material is available for gifted and talented students, who achieve well. Assessment procedures are very good, particularly for speaking and listening. Data is carefully analysed and schemes of work are modified to raise standards. English teachers give valuable support to the assessment of communication skills in the post-16 GNVQ courses. They also make a very good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through a study of literature. For example, students have the chance to reflect on and evaluate the behaviour of George and Lennie in *Of Mice and Men* and the Birlings in *An Inspector Calls*. The department is very well led. The co-ordinator for English monitors the work of the department efficiently and has created a very good team spirit, with all staff fully committed to raising standards further, especially those of boys. The scrutiny of work indicates that the gap between the attainment of boys and girls is much narrower than suggested by the 1999 GCSE results.

99. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Results in the Key Stage 3 national tests are higher. Although they are lower in GCSE they are still well above the national average. High standards at A level have been maintained. There is a much better match of materials to students' ages and abilities and a wider range of reading matter for Year 9. Accommodation is better. Learning is no longer adversely affected by a lack of curtains and blinds. Given the teachers' commitment to high standards of work and behaviour and the students' very good attitudes to learning, the capacity for further improvement is good.

Literacy

100. The standard of literacy in the school is above the national average. In English, students speak fluently and with great confidence, using a wide range of vocabulary, and Standard English where appropriate. Listening skills are highly developed. Students read aloud accurately and with understanding. They write in a variety of forms, and generally sustain a good level of technical accuracy. Lower achieving students find spelling and punctuation more difficult. Although there is no whole school literacy policy, opportunities arise in several lessons for students to develop skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing.

101. Students are articulate in discussion, and keen listeners. In mathematics, they take on a teaching role with confidence, and in physical education, sixth form students orally plan their work with good results. In drama, good speaking and listening skills in group work lead to improved performance. However, in history, opportunities for discussion are few. Students have a good understanding of what they read. In mathematics, they are good at drawing conclusions from investigations, and teachers help students to see the implications of examination questions. In art and religious education, students have the opportunity to develop good research skills. In history, students are helped to develop competence in

reading and in the use of vocabulary. There are opportunities for extended writing in mathematics and geography, where students develop hypotheses – and in history, where students draft well and write for different audiences. In religious education and drama, students keep well-written reflection diaries, and in art they clearly evaluate what they do. However, in science there are too few opportunities for extended writing, and in mathematics not enough attention is paid to how students should produce written solutions. Technical accuracy is often good. In religious education, the marking of grammar and spelling errors helps students to improve their writing. In science and technology, effective use is made of key words.

Drama

102. At the end of Key Stage 4, the proportion of students achieving the higher grades (A*-C) in the 1999 GCSE examination was above the national average. While boys' results were average, girls' results were well above average. Results have fallen over the past four years, but remain above average. Recently, drama groups have included a significant minority of lower achieving boys, and this affects results overall. Students' standards in drama are similar to those they achieve in the other subjects they take.

103. At A level, students taking theatre studies usually gain a pass grade, but in the last two years, there have been fewer higher grades (A/B). However, students achieve in line with their capabilities.

104. Many students enter the school with a limited experience of formal drama teaching and with undeveloped drama skills. By the end of Key Stage 3, in lessons and work seen during the inspection, attainment is in line with the national average. Progress is restricted because Year 9 classes have only one drama lesson a fortnight. Students work efficiently in groups, for example to plan a science fiction drama. They listen well to one another and enjoy sharing ideas. In practical work, boys place overemphasis on action, to the detriment of dialogue, and do not spend as long on planning as girls do. All students use space and props well, and appreciate how lighting enhances the drama. In writing, they reflect on their performance and illustrate their points with neat sketches.

105. By the end of Key Stage 4, students – including gifted and talented students, and students with special educational needs – have made good progress. They enter a role and sustain it convincingly. For example, a Year 11 group, performing a GCSE assessment piece before an audience of infants, captured their attention well in the recreating of an infant class, showing the value of friendship. Students collaborated closely and realised the importance of body language and audience awareness. They keep useful notebooks in which they discuss problems and successes. This helps them to identify their own strengths and weaknesses. Teachers mark written work well and set high standards in presentation and in the planning of devised drama.

106. In A level classes, there is a wide spread of ability. Students rehearse conscientiously for A level practical assessments. They take responsibility for their own learning, realising the importance of rehearsal time and the need to co-operate and share tasks. They have a good knowledge of different drama techniques – such as those promoted by Stanislavsky and Brecht. In writing, students compose well-constructed monologues based on chosen texts – for example, Ustinov's *The Moment of Truth* and Berkoff's *Harry's Christmas*. Students use notebooks sensibly to plan tasks. Sometimes, ideas are insufficiently developed, and not enough attention is given to all elements of the drama. Good use is made of information technology to word process assignments and to scan photographs.

107. Teaching is very good and students learn rapidly. Teachers' very good subject knowledge and planning ensure that lessons move at a brisk pace. Relationships are very good and so this group work is very effective. Students of differing abilities work well together. Those with learning difficulties achieve well and their success in practical work raises their self-esteem. Teachers focus closely on examination requirements, and their assessments of practical assignments are very well organised. For example, in a Year 11 class, the teacher reminded the audience of their vital, supportive role. As a result, the students watched and listened attentively while their friends performed. This enabled the students being assessed to do their best.

108. The curriculum meets the needs of students of all abilities. It makes a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, particularly in its emphasis on group planning and on consideration for others' thoughts and feelings. Drama teachers work very well together, especially in the moderation of practical work. They seek to raise standards by giving students many opportunities to practise drama skills.

109. Since the last inspection, standards have generally been maintained. Although GCSE results are lower, the number of students, including a significant minority of lower achieving boys, has tripled, but results remain above average. Students with special educational needs sometimes achieve higher grades (A*-C). At A level, average standards have been maintained.

MATHEMATICS

110. Students' attainment on entry is in line with the national average. Girls' and boys' overall performances in 1999 Key Stage 3 tests are very similar, well above national averages for level 5 and level 6, and broadly in line with those of similar schools. Results in these tests have improved at a faster rate than nationally. They exceed those in English but are below those in science.

111. GCSE results are above national averages and have shown a general upward trend since the last inspection. Girls have made the greater improvement over the last three years. Their proportion of A*-C grades has risen from 38 per cent in 1997 to 56 per cent in 1999, whilst that of the boys has risen, in line with that seen nationally, from 42 per cent to 46 per cent during the same period of time. Attainment is in line with other subjects.

112. A level results are well above those for comprehensive schools and have continued to improve each year since the last inspection, with the proportion attaining A and B grades in 1999 being 58 per cent. The number of students studying advanced level also continues to rise, with 40 students in Year 13 and 50 in Year 12. The number of boys far exceeds that of girls. Mathematics achieves some of the best advanced level results in the school.

113. Students' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above nationally expected levels. They are getting on well, making good progress in lessons and over the year. For students of all levels of ability, achievement is at least high enough. Higher attaining Year 9 students achieve high standards. They use information effectively, for example locating hidden treasure by drawing on a map using a set of clues, which include being within a five kilometre radius of the inn and equidistant from the station and the church. The lower attaining students have a good spacial awareness, enabling them to find the image of an object that has been rotated through 90° and then reflected in a mirror at 45° to the horizontal. All students have good oral communication skills. However, written English is not always of the same standard.

114. Towards the end of Key Stage 4, achievement is also above expected levels and progress remains good over the key stage and in individual lessons. Students do well in all aspects of the mathematics curriculum at this stage. Higher attaining Year 11 students demonstrate a very good understanding and application of number and algebra, for example when developing their investigations to find the number of apples in a two metre high pyramid. Their work is often enhanced by the use of spreadsheets, generating mathematical models and producing graphs that illustrate their findings. Their hypotheses are tested and conclusions are reasoned well. All coursework is produced with care and is of a higher standard than that seen in exercise books. Lower attaining Year 11 students are working successfully towards attaining a GCSE grade. They show good recall skills covering number, space and shape and data collection when completing work cards based on the design of a jelly packet. Students could do better in written English, which is not well used in exercise books, at both Key Stages 3 and 4. Higher attaining students could do even better in mathematics; the current timetable structure does not enable them to work in a challenging enough atmosphere, which is a contributing factor to the low proportion of A* GCSE grades.

115. Sixth formers achieve very high standards in relation to their capabilities, and their achievements are at least as high as could be expected. All advanced level students confidently meet course requirements and often achieve standards well above them. This level of achievement comes from very good relationships and motivation, which often leads to very rapid progress at this stage. Students in the final year of the numerical analysis course work with understanding to develop algebraic series in order to find values of functions between given limits. GNVQ students demonstrate the necessary competence in the application of number but opportunities for these are insufficiently integrated into coursework assignments.

116. Teaching is good overall, with one lesson in six producing very high standards. Learning in lessons is enhanced by very good student-teacher relationships that create a positive working atmosphere. Teachers use their good knowledge and enthusiasm to present realistic and interesting challenges to classes. This, together with good questioning, enables students to apply their understanding to a variety of situations and develop their powers of thinking and reasoning. This was particularly evident when students were working at the whiteboard, explaining mathematical procedures to the class, and when, for example, Year 9 students calculated the maximum area of ground that a tethered goat could cover. Most lessons have a careful structure and contain highlights which enable students to recall facts at a later date. For example, in one lesson students became a perpendicular bisector when physically positioning themselves equidistant from two chosen students. The most successful lessons enliven GCSE revision and build confidence by giving timed questions and providing pointers to improve examination techniques. The detailed scheme of work, wealth of resource material and a sharing of good practice effectively support teachers' planning. However, meeting a class for the second time in a day sometimes results in lessons that lack pace and enthusiasm from both the teacher and students. Some teachers do not make good use of the board, so that students are not always clear what they have to do. The faculty has developed a strategy, 'quick five', to improve students' number work; however, this is not always conducted at sufficient pace to promote mental agility. Teachers' continual observation of students enables them to give support when needed, which builds students' confidence. Smaller lower sets in Year 9 to Year 11 are beneficial, enabling students with special educational needs to make good progress. The way that support for students with SEN is given is uneconomical, and more could be achieved with a better use of the resources available

117. Students behave very well and are keen to learn. They work well despite cramped conditions in some of the smaller rooms. However, these rooms present the same safety hazards as stated in the previous inspection report and reduce the range of teaching and learning activities. The very good quality of marking in project work informs students how to improve. Together with thorough assessment procedures, students receive valuable information about their progress.

118. Leadership is very good, is well directed to the improvement of performance and has ensured positive improvement since the last inspection. The faculty is well organised, with a clear vision of how to raise standards. Good delegation ensures all team members make an effective, combined contribution to the faculty's development. The faculty now makes better use of examination data to improve teaching strategies, provide targets for students and identify underachievement. Students now benefit from additional support through the homework club and books which encourage independent learning. The popular advanced level revision weekend grows in strength. Improved communication and partnership with parents and middle schools provide prospective and underachieving students with improved additional support.

Numeracy

119. Students have sufficient numeracy skills to cope with subjects across the curriculum when required, as a result of the higher profile given to numeracy by the mathematics faculty since the previous inspection. Despite the lack of a whole-school numeracy policy, students can transfer their skills to work in other areas of the curriculum. For example, the geography and science faculties complement the work of the mathematics department in developing measurement and mapping skills not covered by some of the middle schools. In geography, business studies, PE, psychology and science, students can collect and tabulate data, present it in graphical form and interpret their results. In one lesson seen, advanced level PE students collected data about their training intensity and illustrated this in relation to their performance levels. In another, Year 12 psychology students were familiar with the statistical procedures used to record test results, while business studies students successfully manipulated numbers when calculating ratios as part of their break-even analyses.

120. Skills of numeracy are not always well applied. Sometimes, students are slower than expected in arriving at the correct solution. Sixth form students in mathematics are too quick to use calculators for simple calculations, while in science they adopt a mechanical approach, with little mathematical thinking, when solving problems that involve more than one calculation.

SCIENCE

121. In the 1999 national tests at the end of Key Stage 3, the proportions of students reaching level 5 and above and 6 and above were well above the national average. Results are close to the average in comparison with similar schools. The performance of boys was

better than that of girls. Results are better than those of the previous year and have been above the national average over the past four years.

122. In the 1999 GCSE examinations in science (double award) the proportion of candidates awarded grades A* to C (45 per cent) was lower than the national average. The performance of girls was higher than that of boys. The proportion attaining grade G or above was close to the national average. Results are much better than those of the previous year but not as high as those in 1997. The proportion attaining the higher grades in science was lower than that in mathematics and English.

123. Candidates entering the A level examinations in physics, chemistry and biology attained the full range of grades from A to E. The proportion attaining the higher grades in biology and chemistry was below the national average. The number entering physics was too small to provide a significant comparison but half the candidates obtained grades A and B in 1999 and almost all candidates have passed in the last three years. The results overall have been similar in recent years.

124. In lessons and work seen during the inspection, students achieved well towards the end of Key Stages 3 and 4. Girls' achievement was higher than boys', but both were getting on well, responding to good teaching with very good behaviour and relationships. Achievement was higher than expected at these stages, and higher than GCSE examination results might suggest, thanks to the considerable, recent improvements in teaching and leadership. Students in Year 9 have a sound knowledge and understanding in all attainment targets. They know for example about the structure of the lungs, about elements and compounds and can carry out simple experiments to investigate aspects of electricity. Students at all levels of attainment in Year 11 have an understanding of genetics and demonstrate good investigative skills. Achievement is satisfactory in the sixth form. Here, students achieve results in line with their abilities in each subject, demonstrating a range of attainment levels which reflect those obtained in examinations over the past few years.

125. At all key stages, students with special needs work hard and attain the targets they are set. Some have difficulty with written work, but their spoken contributions show that their knowledge and understanding of science are appropriate and at times good. Higher attaining students respond well when they are given work with an additional challenge.

126. Students have a good knowledge of scientific and technical terms and make use of the vocabulary lists which the faculty provides. Most students at Key Stages 3 and 4 have sufficient numerical skills to access the curriculum. Those studying A level physics and chemistry use mathematics competently. Lack of easy access to suitable hardware prevents students from developing fully their skills in information and control technology. However when given the opportunity, many students, especially those in the sixth form, use these skills effectively.

127. The quality of teaching at all key stages is never less than satisfactory and in three-quarters of the lessons observed it was good or very good. Good teaching has a positive impact on students' attitudes and achievements, which were high in most lessons seen. Responding to good teaching, students make good progress, at all stages. They enter the school in Year 9 with an average level of attainment and make good progress, bringing them above nationally expected levels by the end of the key stage. Recent changes in staffing and a review of teaching styles have improved the quality of students' learning at Key Stage 4, so that students continue to make good progress through this key stage also. Good progress is continued in the sixth form. Progress is sometimes hindered when

teachers fail to explain the purpose at the beginning of the lesson and neglect to summarise what has been taught at the end.

128. Teachers treat students in a mature way and share with them their enthusiasm for the subject. Their knowledge of the subject is very good. Lessons are well-planned with clear objectives, but these are not always shared with students at the beginning of the lesson. Relationships with students are good and humour is often used to good effect. In the best lessons, teachers used a variety of tasks to maintain students' interest. Students made good progress when they were set short term targets and provided with constant challenge. A Year 11 group made excellent progress in their understanding of some difficult concepts related to the genetic and environmental factors affecting variation, when the teacher ably combined discussion, group observation and writing. The use of praise and encouragement is a strong feature of much science teaching. Resources are used well. Short sections of video recordings related to research on DNA were used effectively with a Year 13 chemistry group to enhance their understanding of the structure of proteins. This was used in conjunction with other material, and students made rapid increases in their knowledge and understanding of the structure of proteins. Another teacher made good use of the learning resources centre to encourage a lower attaining Year 9 group to consolidate their work on electricity. Students used books, computer programs and the Internet with competence and confidence. Teachers have a good understanding of the requirements of lower attaining students and those with special needs, providing individual education plans with specific science targets. However, teachers do not give enough challenge to the highest attainers.

129. Students have a positive attitude to learning and have a desire to succeed. They show an interest in their work and appreciate the opportunity to work independently. They are courteous to one another and to adults. They work well in groups and support one another. Behaviour in most lessons is very good.

130. The faculty has a good assessment policy and it makes excellent use of data to set targets and monitor students' progress. However the quality of marking varies from good, where students are given clear information about what they need to do to improve, to unsatisfactory, where infrequent ticks merely acknowledge that work has been done.

131. A recently appointed head of faculty leads a team of teachers who share a common purpose in the good teaching of science. Leadership of the faculty is now clearly focused on the monitoring and improvement of standards. Teaching is ably supported by three laboratory assistants. Documentation is of a very high standard and sets out clearly the department's policies and procedures. Resources are adequate but the accommodation is old and not conducive to modern methods of science teaching. Attractive displays of work go some way towards creating a welcoming environment.

132. Overall, improvement has been satisfactory since the last inspection. High results have been maintained in the tests at the end of Key Stage 3, and new staff appointments have improved performance at Key Stage 4. Leadership and management have greatly improved and are now very good. It has not been possible to make any improvements to the accommodation and the faculty still has insufficient resources for the least able.

ART

133. GCSE A*-C results were above the national average in 1999. At 74 per cent, these compared well with the national average. Attainment of girls was particularly good. GCSE results have risen steadily since the last inspection when they were well below average. A-

B grades at A level were also above average in 1999, although these grades have been variable in recent years.

134. Students possess an average range of skills and understanding on entry to the school, and they progress well through Year 9. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above average and students achieve well for their abilities. Girls and boys get on well, in all aspects of the subject. The timetabling arrangements which hindered progress at the time of the last inspection have been removed. Very good curriculum liaison with students' middle schools contributes significantly to this effective progression through Year 9. Technical skills are good. Work in students' sketchbooks and folders shows that their understanding of artists' styles is also good, and that most can use this knowledge well in their practical work. Their experience and understanding of art from other cultures also enhance their two and three dimensional work.

135. Students' attainment remains above average in the present Key Stage 4. Although Year 10 were on work experience at the time of the inspection, and Year 11 were doing their examination, students' coursework and examination pieces were scrutinised extensively. Students continue to achieve well, with girls making better use of their opportunities than boys. Girls' work therefore remains broadly better than boys', but the disparity between their standards is narrowing. Attainment varies, but more students are above than are below average overall. No work observed showed underachievement, but higher attainers could do better with closer challenge at this stage. Some students of both genders show very good standards in mark-making, especially in paint. The work of many students is positively influenced by the artists' styles which they are studying. In the sixth form, standards match those expected for A level in Year 13, and are particularly high in Year 12. Here, students' individuality and flair become apparent in their work, combined well with very good technical competence. They achieve well at this stage also, making good progress thanks to good teaching and the positive relationships which help them to do their best.

136. The quality of teaching is generally good. It is sometimes very good, and is now satisfactory where non-specialists teach in the department. This was a key concern in the last report, but non-specialist teaching now has no major adverse effect on standards or quality. Teachers are effective in teaching the technical skills students require, particularly those of drawing and painting, but ranging widely to include printing and three-dimensional skills such as ceramics. Two good examples of teaching pottery skills were seen in Year 9. Teachers make the understanding of theory and the work of artists and crafts-people interesting and meaningful, so that students can use these ideas to good effect in their own work. Teachers' encouraging feedback and excellent assessment of their progress give students a very clear idea of what they need to do to improve their work. Teachers create a good degree of independence in students' learning as they progress through the key stages. During the inspection, Year 11 students were confident and self-motivated in working completely independently. In the sixth form this independence is very good and relationships are highly mature. Teaching has been very successful in raising the standards of lower attaining students. The identification of potentially talented students, and a greater focus on how to stretch them to attain the highest grades at GCSE, could improve the department's success yet further. Teachers also need to incorporate more teaching of the creative aspects of ICT, so that students can use this as an additional tool in their range of techniques.

137. The management of the department is good, with effective monitoring of students' performance, which has had a positive effect on standards. The head of department works closely with the head of faculty to promote high standards of teaching and learning.

138. The department has responded well to the last inspection report, and has made good improvement. Examination results have improved very significantly. Non-specialist teaching is now more effective. Accommodation, especially for the sixth form, is unsatisfactory. Rooms for these students are inappropriate and too small. One of the main art teaching rooms is also too small for the large groups studying there. Both these accommodation issues place constraints on the scale of work, and on what can realistically be taught in the curriculum. Space has become an issue since the last inspection. The department requires more, and better, ICT resources if it is to fulfil the cross-curricular requirements placed on the subject.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

139. GCSE results for 1999 were significantly above the national average for A*-C grades in electronics, food, graphics, textiles and child development. In resistant materials, they were significantly below the national averages, although well matched to students' capabilities, seen in their performance in tests taken on entry to the school. The A*-C grades in all technology subjects combined are well above the national averages and show improvement on the results for 1998 and 1997. Achievement in A*-G grades during this period have also been above the national average. Girls outperform boys in the subject, reflecting the national trend. However the proportion of girls achieving an A*-C grade is significantly above the national average for girls, while boys achieve in line with the national average for boys. Results for technology compare well with results for other subjects. Results in A-B grades at A level are well below the national averages but are broadly in line for A-E grades. A level results have improved since the last inspection with students attaining well in relation to their GCSE grades on entry to the courses.

140. By the end of Year 9 the great majority of students attain the nationally expected level, with a significant minority attaining above it. Responding well to good teaching, students begin to make the rapid progress they will need to reach high standards at Key Stage 4, after only a year of this work in the school. Both boys and girls get on as they should. Most students achieve satisfactory and often good levels of creativity in their design work in electronics, food, graphics and textiles. In resistant materials, some tasks are over-prescriptive, with insufficient scope for students to develop their design skills to any significant depth. In all material areas, students develop good presentation and graphicacy skills. Higher attaining students show good levels of fluency in the use of technical terms, but lower attaining students are hesitant and unsure of the correct terminology. In all areas, the product outcomes are well matched to the initial design specification and students show good skills in the making of their products. Skills in disassembling and evaluating the properties of products are developed effectively in project work in Year 9 food technology. However, a small proportion of lower attaining students could do better in their use of colour pens and in better rendering techniques.

141. From an average attainment at the start of Key Stage 4, the great majority of students attain well above average standards by the end of the key stage. A small minority attains significantly above this level. Work seen in all material areas matches recent GCSE examination results and reflects a rising trend in attainment overall in all aspects except resistant materials, where achievement in class is below average though generally in line with the abilities of the students taking the course. With this exception, students achieve more than expected at this stage. Having learnt well at Key Stage 3, they now make rapid progress, greatly helped by teachers' very good subject knowledge and planning. Standards are therefore high in all areas except resistant materials, and are high enough in all areas. Among the things they do well, students show a good understanding of the

principles and processes of designing in a broad range of materials, which often incorporate electronic components. In food technology, they relate their tasks relate well to product designs and industrial practice. They achieve a good understanding of the nutritive, sensory, chemical and physical properties of food. In graphics, the great majority show much flair and imagination in their design solutions. Almost all students show good skills in using tools, equipment and machinery and are very conscious of the need for safe working practices. Their standards of technical writing and graphical communication skills are good, with clear and detailed annotated sketches used to explain design ideas. In almost all design areas, students use ICT well to complete coursework. Although this is mostly word-processing or desktop publishing, the work produced is of a good standard. Students could be more proficient in using computer aided design software or computer aided manufacturing equipment. In these, their understanding is very much underdeveloped, being limited by an insufficient range of suitable equipment.

142. Standards in the sixth form are high. Students get on well and their achievements are high enough in relation to their abilities. They produce innovative and imaginative solutions to design problems and their standards of graphical presentation are good. There are high levels of flair and imagination in the designs produced by A level students in textiles, where the outcomes also reflect very good making skills. In A level food technology, students show good skills of research and investigation into eating disorders and heart disease, and used a sophisticated computer presentation package to good effect to present their reports on these issues.

143. Teaching is never less than satisfactory and it is good or better in most lessons throughout all key stages. Overall, it is good at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. All teachers have a very secure knowledge and understanding in their subject specialisms. Teachers use a range of exemplar design material, which is either displayed on workshop walls or in display folders, which guides and supports students' design work well. Project worksheets provide clear guidelines, effectively challenging and extending the higher attainers. However, some worksheets are insufficiently modified to meet the needs of lower attainers who, despite satisfactory or good progress in general, sometimes therefore fail to make the progress they might if these materials were better adapted for them. Good teaching ensures that most students are well motivated and clearly aware of what they need to do in their projects. In many lessons, good humour prevails and a positive atmosphere is established. All students respond well to their teachers and show very good levels of interest, sustaining concentration over long periods and making good, often very good, progress in lessons. Homework is regularly set and extends the curriculum well in most material areas. The technician provides invaluable support. Teachers provide good verbal feedback to students on their progress and the assessment system very effectively enables students to understand how well they are progressing.

144. The leadership and management of design and technology are very good and have enabled the department to make good progress in resolving most of the issues identified in the last inspection. Leadership is active in promoting the improvement of performance through the monitoring of teaching and schemes of work. The department as a whole approached the findings of the previous inspection in a positive manner and standards overall have improved. Whilst improvements have been made to the accommodation, there remains an imbalance in the provision of specialist rooms. Resources are inadequate, particularly in the provision of some equipment, and this adversely affects standards of attainment in computer aided manufacturing.

GEOGRAPHY

145. Since 1997 the status of geography, within humanities, has changed and there has been a large increase in the numbers entered for GCSE. From being 10 per cent below the national average of A*-C grades in 1997 and 1998, the department gained 52 per cent A*-C grades in 1999, in line with the national average. Girls scored better than boys and gained 68 per cent A*-C grades, well above the average. Boys, with 40 per cent A*-C grades, were below average, but in line with predictions for that year.

146. A*-G grades awarded over the last four years mirror those at A*-C. Until 1999, the percentage was slightly below the national average, but in 1999 there was a major improvement so that results were in line with the national average. The overall trend in GCSE grades is upwards. Results are improving for girls, but boys' performance is erratic.

147. Numbers taking A level have been rising in recent years, during which time results have been erratic. In 1996 the number of A-B grades was below the national average. In 1997 it was well above, but back to average in 1998. In 1999, the department gained the best results yet, well above the national average. At A level, boys reverse the trend at GCSE and score more heavily than girls.

148. Teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 confirm the observations made during the inspection: in the majority of lessons seen, attainment is above the national average. Students achieve high results in relation to their previous attainment, and their achievements are high enough. Those in higher sets achieve written work of good quality, including extended and imaginative writing, seen in well illustrated pieces on the Amazon rainforest, letters describing the consequences of flooding and 'the diary of a schoolboy in Holland'. Students at all levels of attainment complete well prepared worksheets satisfactorily and take notes from texts and classroom presentations. Any gaps in basic skills on entry are soon filled and students display good spatial awareness, mapping skills and use of number. They can measure line and angle and present data in a variety of forms, as seen in rainfall and temperature graphs and flood hydrographs. They can interpret data from scattergraphs, demographic transition models and population pyramids. Across all key stages, students have a good technical vocabulary and understanding of the science of geography.

149. In work seen towards the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is above the national average level. Responding well to good teaching, students achieve standards at least as high as they should be, and higher than expected in view of recent GCSE results. Students' written skills are strongly developed and result in well presented personal studies and coursework, often achieving a high standard. In this category are accounts of the San Francisco earthquake and presentations on the river Rhone. Students achieve good skills in ICT, for example in the interesting mock newspaper reports of significant events, produced at Key Stage 4. Steady progress in ICT culminates in sixth form work using the internet and database material in studies of hurricane tracks. In Years 10 and 11, students learn to hypothesise, gather data, analyse and draw conclusions. Fluent, thoughtful responses in challenging question and answer sessions show that the majority of students have a clear understanding of their work.

150. In the sixth form, attainment in lessons and at the end of the course is above average. Students achieve high standards, are confident in their knowledge and are able to develop ideas in good group discussions. Skills learned previously are built on and combined to produce well argued essays and investigations in which local knowledge and good knowledge of other subjects often feature. One such piece of work was a report on ozone depletion.

151. At all stages, higher attaining students achieve well for their capabilities. This was seen in the higher than average results at grades A* and A in 1999. Lower attaining students achieve well for their capabilities, because materials are well prepared and suited to their abilities. Despite differences between boys' and girls' attainment in examinations, these are not obvious in most lessons, apart from the higher standard of presentation by most girls.

152. Across the key stages, all teaching is satisfactory or better, with the great majority of lessons seen good or very good. Teachers plan their lessons well, with good use of resources, a variety of activities and work, including extension work, suited to the abilities of students. As a result, students develop an interest in the subject and are regularly challenged. They are required to think carefully about the work and use their initiative in seeking answers to problems. For example, in a Year 9 lesson on population, the teacher encouraged students to make contributions to the debate, resulting in good class participation and sharing of knowledge. High expectation of students includes the use of a good technical vocabulary. Enthusiastic, friendly teaching gives students the confidence to participate in lessons and develop necessary skills. Careful, regular assessment ensures that students know what level they have reached and assists in maintaining the good progress made by the majority of students, at all stages. Good progress results from good teaching and from the good behaviour of the students. They are attentive and willing to participate in the work. They volunteer information and are able to work independently or usefully in groups.

153. Leadership is of a good standard and analysis of the department's work is detailed and useful in setting and monitoring targets. A major review of the department by the head of faculty has led to an improvement in the monitoring of most aspects of the department's work. As a result, teaching has improved and so has learning, at all levels of ability. Better tracking, assessment and review of the curriculum have had a beneficial effect on progress. GCSE results have improved, and the work of current Year 9 and 10 students suggests that the improvement will continue. As the result of these factors, improvement has been good since the last inspection.

HISTORY

154. Attainment is in line with the nationally expected level at the end of Key Stage 3. However, GCSE results are well below average, with 39 per cent achieving grades A*-C against the national average of 56 per cent. Results are well below those for the school as a whole and there has been a marked downward trend in the last three years. Boys' results were 10 per cent lower than the girls' in 1999 and well below the national average for boys.

155. Standards are high at A level and the trend is towards both an improvement in pass rates and in the number of students awarded A and B grades. In 1998, of the 15 students entered, 80 per cent passed and four students were awarded an A grade. This was an improvement on the previous year. Results in 1999 improved again with a 100 per cent pass rate and half of students gaining A or B grades. The standard of work observed during the inspection was high.

156. Politics is also taught at A level, although relatively few students take the subject. There was no entry in 1999 but all students passed in 1998. There are no students in Year 13 but high standards of work were seen in Year 12.

157. In work seen towards the end of Key Stage 3, students achieve as well as they should in relation to their prior levels of attainment; they achieve average standards. They talk well about the topics that they have studied and their listening skills are good. For example, in Year 9 they showed a good awareness of the importance of key events such as the signing of the Treaty of Versailles and understood some of the reasons why this treated Germany harshly. However, source-based work is less secure at the end of Key Stage 3 and students often have limited skills in using sources to understand why events happened. Lower attaining students found considerable difficulty in coping with the events in Germany which led to the rise of the Nazi party, although more able students were able to identify the major weaknesses of the Weimar Republic.

158. This weakness in using sources becomes significant in how students achieve at Key Stage 4. Here, standards are not high enough and are below those expected for these students. In GCSE classes, higher attaining students are competent in organising and using information, including source materials. However, there are many respects in which students could do better. Many are still held back by their weakness in all aspects of evidence-based work. In several lessons, students were able to understand the development of the Cuban Missile Crisis by using evidence of the sequence of events. However, many lacked detailed knowledge of work they had done earlier and lower attaining students were not clear on many issues related to the Cold War, which they had studied very recently. Students across the ability range found difficulty in retaining information and showed lack of knowledge and confusion about the areas studied.

159. In A level classes, students achieve well. They have good knowledge and a ready command of historical method. For example, they showed skill in using information to consider the role of government in responding to poverty in nineteenth century England and in evaluating concepts such as self help and middle class values. They were also able to discuss the main features of the personality cult that was built up by Mussolini in Italy. In politics classes, students showed clear understanding of the role of non-government organisations in dealing with international aid and an ability to evaluate possible alternatives to the House of Lords. The essay and document work of the majority of students was of an appropriate standard. They make good progress in the development of research skills, in acquiring confidence in preparing notes for class discussion, and in writing essays.

160. The response of the majority of students in history classes is satisfactory and behaviour is good. Written work at all levels is often well presented because individual students take real pride in their work. In some classes containing mostly higher attaining students, response was good because the pace and content of the lesson were appropriate. However in other classes, particularly where the books used are too difficult, response is unsatisfactory. Response in the sixth form is very good. Students are very interested in their work and take real responsibility for their own learning by careful research and preparation for lessons.

161. The quality of teaching observed was satisfactory at Key Stage 3. It was satisfactory overall at Key Stage 4, though there were some unsatisfactory features at this stage. Teaching was good in the sixth form. At all stages, teachers are knowledgeable about the subject and manage students well. The most effective lessons are well-planned and resourced. In these, particularly in the sixth form, clear objectives were set which identified

what students should know by the end of the lesson. There was a clear focus on skills and concepts, the lessons were interesting and matched the range of ability in the class. Good subject knowledge and a shared enthusiasm for the subject help sixth form students make good progress in lessons and over the A level course. They learn very well, acquiring knowledge and skills at a fast pace, and showing considerable interest and independence in their work.

162. At Key Stage 3, teaching helps students make a sound start in most respects, but there is insufficient emphasis on source-based work. Students learn in a satisfactory way, have good curiosity and work at a sound pace. At Key Stage 4, despite teachers' good subject knowledge, management of students and use of homework, some lessons lacked the good pace and planning seen at other stages and tasks were not sufficiently varied. Most lessons observed showed too little focus on skills, resulting in some lack of opportunity for independent learning. Marking was appropriate and assessment procedures were effective in the monitoring of examination work. However, assessment information was not always used in planning and resourcing lessons appropriately. At this stage, students' learning was satisfactory overall, but lacked the pace and independence seen in other stages.

163. History makes a sound contribution to students' spiritual, moral social and cultural education and to the development of skills in literacy. Although reading comprehension is insufficiently developed there is a good focus on the development of vocabulary and many opportunities for extended writing. There is insufficient opportunity for the development of skills in the use of information technology or of numeracy at present.

164. Accommodation is adequate, but the availability of resources is unsatisfactory, although those available are well used in most classes. Good textbooks are available for the examination courses. However, resources do not always match the learning requirements of the range of students in the class, particularly at Key Stage 3, and displays are of uneven quality. During the inspection teachers did not have easy access to televisions, videos, overhead projectors or computers. These factors inhibit the range, variety and pace of learning.

165. The history department has some strengths, especially in assessment and the teaching of A level which has much improved since the last inspection. The management of the subject is now sound because there has been considerable recent improvement in planning, monitoring and the development of new schemes of work. These improvements have not yet affected GCSE results, which indicate a continued need for support and the further development of teaching skills, particularly at Key Stage 4. Support given so far has succeeded in raising the overall quality of teaching to a satisfactory level at this stage, but the department is not yet monitoring students' progress rigorously enough to ensure that results improve to the levels seen elsewhere in the school. There has therefore been insufficient overall improvement since the last inspection. Links with the middle school are still not well enough developed.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

166. The proportion of students who achieved an A*-C grade in GCSE information technology (IT) in 1999 was in line with the national average. This was an improvement on 1998 results and a significant improvement on those achieved in 1997. The attainment of girls is below the national average for girls, with few choosing IT for GCSE. Boys achieve broadly similar standards to the national average for boys. Students attain as well in IT as in their other subjects. In A level over the last two years, the proportion of students

achieving A and B grades in computer studies has been significantly above the national average and was well above in 1997.

167. Towards the end of Key Stage 3, students' attainment is overall below the expected level and their standards are not as high as they should be. In some aspects, they are getting on as well as they should. For example, in the Year 9 project, the great majority of students attain in line with the nationally expected level in communicating information through word processing and desktop publishing. Students produced a promotional package for the school which included the design of a suitable logo, a business card, brochure and poster. At this stage, most students show a good understanding of the hardware and the software used. Almost all of the students have satisfactory keyboarding skills. They use the mouse well to negotiate icons, menus and functions when loading the required software from the network. However, the curriculum does not provide enough time at this key stage and so does not enable all students to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding to any significant depth in modelling, measuring and control technology. Consequently, the great majority of students attain below the expected level in these aspects. Almost all students showed a positive attitude to learning in lessons observed. They spoke with enthusiasm about their work and most used the technical vocabulary of the subject well.

168. By the end of Key Stage 4, the great majority of students taking a GCSE course in IT achieve the expected standards for the course with a small minority attaining above these. For those not taking GCSE, the lack of opportunity to develop skills through a planned and systematic provision of ICT affects overall standards. These students achieve lower standards than they should and do not have the chance to get on as they could. Across the curriculum, a minority of subjects have yet to identify how the national requirements for ICT are to be provided in their schemes of work. Many students make good use of ICT to word-process or desktop publish their coursework, but this is uneven within subjects and very much dependent on staff interest and expertise. Standards of researching topics using CD ROM, the Internet, and use of spreadsheets for modelling or graph work remain below average levels throughout the key stage, and experience in these aspects is not well enough provided across the curriculum.

169. The great majority of students in the sixth form have satisfactory skills in word-processing, desktop publishing and in using the computer for researching topics using the Internet. In the A level course, standards are above expected levels for the great majority of students and reflect the rising trends in the standards achieved in A level examinations. Standards of ICT competence are very good in the vocational courses. Overall, sixth form students achieve well and the standards of those remaining in the sixth form are high in relation to those expected from their work at Key Stage 4.

170. In all the timetabled IT lessons observed, the teaching was never less than satisfactory and was good or better in most. IT teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and effectively stimulate students' interest and motivation. Word-processing and desktop publishing applications are well explained through clear, straightforward, effective demonstrations. Teachers provide challenging and interesting tasks, well matched to students' interests and abilities. The problems teachers posed built effectively on students' existing knowledge. Teachers provide high levels of individual support and guidance, working with students at their computers. Teaching has a positive effect on students' learning. As a result, most students show good interest, sustain their concentration for long spans of time and make good progress in developing their skills in lessons. Teachers are good at testing students' understanding. Worksheets, produced within the department, successfully identify learning objectives. Most students have a good attitude to learning and

show good behaviour in lessons. The technician provides excellent support to teachers and students alike. Students with SEN make satisfactory progress and achieve satisfactory standards in line with their capabilities.

171. The leadership of the department is satisfactory. It has received much support from senior management, who have now appointed a further teacher in order to extend the amount of ICT in the curriculum. There is an increasing emphasis on the monitoring of teaching and students' results, and this has led to the recent improvements in GCSE. There has been major investment in ICT recently, including the introduction of new software, which has improved students' interest and motivation. However, overall improvement has been unsatisfactory since the last inspection. The school approached the findings of the previous inspection in a very positive manner and remedied several issues, but the initiative was not sustained. As a result, students' experience of ICT across the curriculum remains insufficient. The school is aware of the issues still needing improvement and has taken the necessary steps to achieve them.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

172. The proportion of students gaining grades A* to C in GCSE in 1999 in French and German was above the national average. The proportion of girls gaining these grades was above the national average for girls; boys were just below the national average for boys in French and well below in German. The performance of girls has been better than boys over the last two years in both languages at this level. The proportion of students gaining grades A* to G in 1999 was above the national average in French and German. Despite entering a larger number of students, French results rose by 10 per cent at grades A* to C in comparison with the previous year: German results also rose, but with a smaller number of entrants. The number of students gaining grades A* to B also increased in both languages, but no student has gained an A* grade in German in either year. Currently, performance is better in French than in other languages. Spanish has been introduced in Year 9 and as a GCSE subject in the sixth form, but students have not yet taken examinations in this language.

173. Although the proportion of students gaining grades A and B in French in the A level examination in 1999 was above the national average, the overall percentage pass rate for all grades was below the national average. However, these results showed an improvement on 1998. Both candidates in the German examination secured a pass grade.

174. Students' achievement in their main language, French, by the end of Key Stage 3, is high. They get on at least as well as expected in relation to their previous levels of attainment. In their writing, higher attaining students showed a good knowledge of the perfect tense in short passages of writing. They can write about environmental matters and give their opinion as to the most serious problem. They display a good knowledge of topic vocabulary.

175. Achievement in German and Spanish is satisfactory and standards for these students are high enough at this stage. In German, an optional language with Spanish, begun in Year 9 with limited time allocation, students can write about themselves and their likes and dislikes, some of them using inversion. In Spanish, students' written work is good, reflecting a brisk start to their learning. They write competent paragraphs about themselves, their families and friends. They identify relevant words from authentic Spanish recordings well. They read simple dialogues, although reading aloud shows sometimes strong English accents. Oral skills vary. In one Year 9 German class students could talk about the subjects they like and dislike, but in another German class their oral skills were limited. In a French

class, students needed prompting to speak about the environment. In Spanish, students observed did not speak confidently or at length.

176. Students' attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is above the national average in French and average in German. At the top of the ability range, coursework in both languages is of very good quality, showing a good knowledge of vocabulary and tenses, combined with good constructions and expressions. In the middle and lower range, students' writing demonstrates a knowledge of the relevant vocabulary but lacks accuracy, particularly with accents in French and in German with the umlaut and small letters for nouns. Writing is well used to support oral presentations. Oral skills vary considerably. Higher attainers in a Year 11 French lesson took part in short conversations with a partner about relationships, though the middle group was very reliant on prompts for this. In a German set, students spoke confidently about school subjects with the help of symbols, though some students in another set had difficulty recalling colours. On some of the coursework tapes, students spoke and communicated very well, but French intonation was poor.

177. In Spanish at Key Stage 4, the good progress from Key Stage 3 is maintained, so that by Year 11 written coursework is of high quality. All students regularly demonstrate good vocabulary and use of tenses. The highest attainers use examples of complex grammar well, and at times include authentic Spanish idioms. They listen to recordings of native speakers, competently identifying a range of information. They understand printed texts, using dictionaries appropriately and can, in general, read aloud well. Speaking is relatively less well developed. Students are often hesitant, rarely take the initiative in conversation and do not prolong exchanges. Whilst they cope satisfactorily in structured contexts, they have difficulties with more open-ended situations. Their accents are often strongly influenced by English. Overall at Key Stage 4, students achieve as well as they should in all languages and their standards are high enough.

178. Students' attainment in the sixth form in French and German is average. They understand the lesson conducted entirely in the foreign language. Students are able to work with authentic texts covering a range of topics, extract the main points from them and either present the facts orally or test their understanding in reading exercises. All the French students in Year 12 had undertaken work experience in Cherbourg recently. Those starting GCSE Spanish in Year 12 make good progress, particularly in writing. By Year 13, they reach standards close to those achieved by students in Year 11.

179. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. In just over one third of the lessons observed, teaching and learning were good. Attitudes to learning are never less than satisfactory and are often good. Students are attentive and well behaved, but response to teaching is sometimes limited, despite teachers' attempts to engage students' interest. Generally, students work cooperatively in pairs and relationships are good.

180. Teachers know their students well and have a good knowledge of their past performance. In many lessons, teachers provide opportunities for students to work in pairs. They make good use of overhead projectors and worksheets. Homework is set regularly, and written work is well marked, with helpful comments and suggestions for improvement in

many cases. Classroom management is good. As a result, students' good progress at Key Stage 3 is maintained through Key Stage 4 and into the sixth form. Students with special needs generally make good progress.

181. In some lessons, better use could be made of time, as there is too much direction by the teacher and students are slow to change tasks. Some lessons do not finish crisply, with a recapitulation of what has been learnt. Sometimes students are not challenged enough to develop their powers of memory. Teachers work very hard in preparing their lessons and in their delivery, but they do not always evoke from the students the oral response that their teaching deserves. At times, students require much prompting to make oral contributions.

182. Teachers of French and German have sound subject knowledge and two are native speakers. They make good use of the foreign language in most lessons. They plan their lessons well, with a variety of tasks and of skills. There are no specialist Spanish teachers, but dedicated staff have made concerted efforts, frequently in their own time and at their own expense, to increase their skills to satisfy demand for this popular subject. They have enabled their students to reach good standards, but are aware that the limitations of their expertise contribute to the disparity between students' good written work and their less competent speaking.

183. The department has been without a faculty head for over one year and staff have all worked very effectively to minimise disruption and advance good standards, with helpful support and monitoring by the link manager from the senior team. During this time, standards have improved. The majority of teachers are part-time, but have worked with much dedication and commitment.

184. Progress since the last inspection has been good. Attainment has improved at both key stages in French and German, and Spanish has been added to the curriculum. Very good liaison has been established with the feeder schools and a common assessment base created. The department makes a good contribution to students' social and cultural development through the exploration of European society and culture. The department is under-resourced, both for books and equipment, and this has an adverse effect on the range of methods which can be used and sometimes on the quality of response which teachers can get from students.

MUSIC

185. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3, seen in lessons and performance observed, is in line with the national average, although teachers' assessments in 1999 at the end of Key Stage 3 recorded this as well above national standards. GCSE results in 1999 were well above average with 95 per cent of students obtaining A*-C passes. Boys' results were well above national averages but not as high as girls', all of whom obtained A*-C passes. In 1999, students performed significantly better in music than most other subjects. Results were well above average in 1998, in line in 1997 and above in 1996 giving an improving trend over the period since the last inspection. In 1998 all boys obtained passes within the range A*-C, outperforming girls by a substantial margin, although girls were still well above national averages.

186. At A level in 1999 there were three candidates, one of whom obtained a C pass and two of whom obtained D. In 1998 one candidate obtained A and the other C. In 1997 the

only candidate obtained A. Statistically these numbers are too small to make meaningful comparisons with national figures but show good attainment by the individuals concerned.

187. About six per cent of students, an average number for similar schools, enhance their musical attainment with additional instrumental lessons, and these and a great many others gain further experience in the numerous extra-curricular groups. These are very strong and achieve high standards.

188. In work seen during the inspection, attainment towards the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with the average expected nationally. Students achieve as well as they should, making satisfactory progress. They have a satisfactory understanding of the musical elements, and can read and play from simple notation within the scale of C major, assigning correct time values to notes within the range minim to semiquavers. They are familiar with the pentatonic scale and devices such as ostinato and drone and employ these and other composing devices satisfactorily in compositions. They compare music across time and place, for example in the 'Power of Music' unit and critically appraise their own work, using appropriate vocabulary.

189. In work seen during the inspection attainment towards the end of Key Stage 4 is above average. Students achieve well and make good progress. Their performing skills are good, in some cases very good. Compositions, often making use of musical technology, are of a high standard. Musical knowledge of composers, styles, forms and periods is systematically acquired and well remembered.

190. In work seen during the inspection, attainment in the sixth form is above average. Students' knowledge and understanding of musical history and analysis are good. Performance skills are well advanced. A student recital ranged from a sensitive performance of a Chopin Nocturne to a nicely judged group of songs from a promising bass/baritone. Two students doing advanced level music technology demonstrated high levels of accomplishment.

191. Students' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are excellent. Typically, students listen and follow intently. They sustain concentration extremely well and increasingly show well developed study habits in their research and compositions. Numbers opting for GCSE courses are unusually high.

192. The quality of teaching and learning is very good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and good in the sixth form. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and fine musical skills. Teaching methods are very effective and management of students is very good. Use of resources is good, although these are sometimes limited. Assessment, particularly at Key Stage 4, is very good and the student booklet is a model of good practice. The department is well led, including the provision of instrumental teaching and the organisation of extra-curricular groups. The high levels of performance achieved by these groups reflect great credit on the students and the commitment of the staff, and are much appreciated by the community. In response to very good teaching, students acquire skills, knowledge and understanding well. High, average and low attaining students and those with special educational needs make very good progress. For example, in an especially good Year 9 lesson using improvised percussion instruments, students created a twenty minute piece of improvised music of unusually good quality, incorporating varying timbres, dynamics and textures in a very musical performance. Two students with special educational needs

performed their part in this on drum kit and conga drums extremely well. Another student added a blues keyboard part. Free-wheeling lessons such as this are only possible as the result of very good behaviour and teaching.

193. The leadership of the department is good and has enabled high standards to be maintained and increased, also the school's very good programme of extra-curricular activities. The performance of students and teachers is well monitored and has greatly helped to develop existing good standards.

194. Good standards have been maintained since the last inspection. Attainment at Key Stage 3 has improved. The number of students taking GCSE music has risen sharply and the results over the last two years have been excellent. The provision of keyboards has improved but they are already ageing. Very few of them, for example, are touch-sensitive, a fundamental requirement for the development of musical performances. There is still only the one old computer although others are expected. Tuned percussion instruments are limited. The adverse effects of these shortages are overcome by very good teaching, but require attention.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

195. Results in GCSE sports studies in 1999 are well below national averages. Significantly more girls gained A*-C passes than boys. There has been a clear downward trend in higher grades attained, since the last inspection. A*-G passes remain constant at 100 per cent. These results do not equate with the standards seen in GCSE classes during the inspection, which are at the expected national level. The disparity is partly explained by the GCSE examination taken, partly by a comparative shortage of time, but mostly because the school and department are now working very effectively to raise standards in GCSE. This has already had a positive effect on teaching and learning, which are now good. Results at A level in 1999 were well below national averages for the higher grades A and B, although a large number of students achieved grade C. In the previous three years, results in top grades have been in line with the national average.

196. Towards the end of Key Stage 3, standards in work seen during the inspection are in line with the expected level for 14 year-olds. When given the opportunity, most students can work competently and independently. In games, they show good skills and understand basic principles of attack and defence. Lower attainers lack spatial awareness. Higher attainers show good tactical awareness in games. In badminton, they use a variety of serves. Students achieve satisfactory standards in relation to their previous attainment.

197. Towards the end of Key Stage 4, standards are above expected national levels in non-examination PE. Most students successfully apply knowledge of tactics and rules in games. Their good understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle is developed from the well-planned, health-related fitness programme. High performing students in basketball use a range of attacking skills to outmanoeuvre defences. Low attainers lack tactical awareness. GCSE students are on target to achieve nationally expected levels at the end of Key Stage 4. Higher attainers in Year 11 GCSE athletics demonstrate good sprint technique. Most show good practical skills and a satisfactory knowledge of theoretical aspects. They produce well researched, written assignments. Students have good opportunities to develop skills in speaking and listening. Most are articulate in discussion and listen well. They confidently use number in a range of contexts. Students, both in GCSE and non-examination PE, achieve high levels at this stage and make good progress.

198. Standards are high in the sixth form also. Sixth formers confidently lead Community

Sports Leaders' Award sessions. A level students are on target to achieve slightly beyond the national average at the end of Year 13. Most are achieving well in their practical aspects and are confident in debate.

199. The quality of teaching and learning is good at both key stages and very good in the sixth form. Teachers' subject knowledge is very good, enabling students to make considerable gains in knowledge of health-related aspects, skills, tactics and rules. Teachers manage students very well, creating a good atmosphere for learning. Their expectations are high, particularly with regard to performance, behaviour, kit and safety. Well-planned and challenging teaching helps students make good progress. For example, in a Year 12 fitness lesson, the teacher created a stimulating learning atmosphere through using outstanding equipment, recording and evaluation sheets, appropriate music and very well-informed teaching. Opportunities were provided for students to plan, perform and evaluate performance and most progressed beyond expectations. Though teaching in every lesson was satisfactory overall, a minority of lessons had few opportunities for students to plan and evaluate work and teachers' subject knowledge was not secure enough to set a high level of challenge.

200. As the result of good teaching, students' attitudes to learning are good, at all stages. They listen to instructions, communicate well in group work and confidently try new skills. Students with SEN learn well in non-examination lessons, because teaching is planned to suit their requirements. For example, in a Year 9 badminton lesson, tasks and instructions were simplified, groupings carefully set and additional support was provided by a student teacher. Learning is reinforced by regular homework. Students with special needs make limited progress in examination classes, due to lack of learning support. Extension work for high attainers is readily available through extra-curricular sport. Students lack opportunities to enhance their learning through the use of ICT.

201. The department is well led. Appropriate policies are in force, except for risk assessment, though safe, professional practice is the norm in almost all cases. Extensive strategies are in use to improve GCSE results, including use of an external adviser. The department is now monitoring the performance of staff and students more effectively, and this has led to the improved standards seen at Key Stage 4. Assessment procedures are very thorough. The subject makes a considerable contribution to students' moral, social and cultural development. Provision for extra-curricular sport is good and many students (55 per cent) are involved. Individuals and teams perform successfully at county, regional and sometimes national levels.

202. Since the last inspection, the good quality of teaching has been maintained and in specific areas, improved. Most lessons now cater for the needs of all students and there are greater opportunities for them to plan and evaluate performance. Teachers' relationships with students are now good in most lessons. Curricular time at both key stages remains below the national average, making it difficult to teach all aspects of the curriculum in sufficient depth. Curricular links with partner middle schools are much improved, but the aesthetic aspects of the middle school curriculum are not continued in the Year 9 curriculum. Schemes of work now include appropriate assessment and teaching methods.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

203. During the inspection period, Year 10 students were not in school, but analysis of work for the whole of Key Stage 4 and lesson observations of Year 11 indicate that in general, attainment meets the expectations of the locally Agreed Syllabus, and that some is

above average. In 1999, results for the Dorset Achievement in Religious Education (DARE), for students at the end of Key Stage 4, were good, with well over three-quarters of those who took the examination gaining merits or distinctions. Almost all students gained grades which fall within the full range of GCSE grades. Students in the sixth form who take the general course attain as expected by the locally Agreed Syllabus, and A level students attain at nationally expected levels.

204. By the end of Key Stage 3, students' attainment is as expected by the locally Agreed Syllabus. By the age of 14 students know about the essence of a Buddhist shrine with its flowers, incense and statues, and they understand some of the symbolism. For example, they know that incense spreads, and represents the spread of the influence of kind actions upon the world. Some students in Year 9 were seen engaged in a very well guided meditation, and some spent a lesson in role-play, where they were able to empathise with victims in a supposed racist attack.

205. Students at Key Stage 4 use more advanced skills of discussion and debate. For example, they offer their own opinions and reason them through well. In one lesson, students successfully found the messages of hope and eternal life in a Christian funeral service, while in other lessons they debated whether there is such a thing as a just war. They make reference to the teachings of world religions in these topics, such as those of Islam and Christianity.

206. Sixth form students in their general studies were observed talking about the Holocaust and beginning to examine some of the fundamental issues behind the atrocities. A level students are studying St Luke's gospel and were observed matching Biblical references to quotations and discussing such topics as the miracles of Jesus.

207. These findings about attainment, especially the examination results, represent improvement since the last inspection. Throughout all stages, students achieve well, building upon previous work and increasing their understanding. Students with SEN make good progress towards their own targets.

208. Teaching is good overall, with a range that is from satisfactory to very good; one lesson was excellent and none were unsatisfactory. Teachers are very well qualified and use their expertise to good effect. The challenge that they present to students keeps the level of interest high. Methods are very good and have a positive impact on students' learning, enabling them to acquire new knowledge and further their understanding well. For example, teachers gave students much experience of Buddhist meditation and symbolism in Year 9 lessons. Assessment of students' work and the monitoring of their progress are both good, and appropriate homework carries the work of lessons further. The last lesson in the DARE programme was observed, a round-up of all that students have covered in their final module of work. Teaching was excellent, setting high expectations for future results.

209. Schemes of work are securely based upon the guidelines of the locally Agreed Syllabus, and the time allocated to religious education meets statutory requirements. Assessment throughout the subject is good and enables teachers to monitor students' progress. Literacy skills are appropriately developed in the subject, through discussion, research, and role-play, and through students' recording their work in lessons and for homework. In sixth form general studies, topics that are not specifically part of religious education often contain religious elements and references.

210. The general organisation and management of the subject were criticised in the last

inspection report, but having received strong support from senior managers, leadership is now satisfactory. The head of department has produced good plans for the development of the subject, and he and the team of teachers implement them well.

211. The subject makes a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They have opportunities for reflection, consideration of moral dilemmas, and often work successfully in groups. Cultural development is furthered by the study of world religions, their cultures and practices.

212. Overall there has been good improvement since the last inspection, more particularly in teaching, the arrangement of the syllabus, and the allocation of time in the sixth form. Attainment has also improved generally.

BUSINESS EDUCATION AT KEY STAGE 4 AND IN THE SIXTH FORM

213. Attainment in GCSE business studies was above the national average in 1999. Students' results in this subject are as good as in their other subjects. Girls achieved slightly better grades than boys over the last three years, although boys achieved proportionally more A* grades than girls in the most recent examination.

214. Attainment in sixth form courses is very good in A level business studies, with 50 per cent of candidates achieving the higher grades A and B - almost twice the national average - in 1999, and showing a rising trend since the last inspection. The performance of girls and of boys is broadly similar over the range of grades, and whilst girls did better at the higher grades in 1998, the position was reversed last year. Attainment was below the national average in economics in recent years, with no statistical difference between the performance of girls and of boys. There were no entries in this subject in 1998.

215. Attainment in Key Stage 4 business studies is good and students make very good progress particularly in view of the reduced allocation of contact time compared with other GCSE courses (as part of enrichment options, it is allocated four periods per cycle rather than five). Students in Year 10 and Year 11 achieve high results in relation to their capabilities and make very good progress, building up a sound knowledge of business procedures and processes. They are able to apply their knowledge to a wide range of business situations through assignments and case studies, employing appropriate terminology with ease in written and oral work, and using numerical applications confidently, for example when calculating profit and loss accounts, compiling cash flows or break-even charts. Students can relate theory to practice, such as when analysing a classroom simulation activity on production. There are good examples of the use of ICT in students' coursework, but access to computers during lessons is limited.

216. In the sixth form, students' attainment is good in business studies and in economics. Students' ICT skills are impressive, with a high standard of work produced both in school and at home. Students make good use of the Internet, seen in an excellent essay analysing economic considerations in the compilation of a budget. Students have confident knowledge, for example when explaining ratio analysis; are able to argue and to challenge during classroom discussions, such as when assessing each other's answers; and can apply their knowledge to a range of situations, for example using demand and supply curves to illustrate pricing policies, or assessing non-collusive oligopoly with the use of kinked demand curves.

217. Teaching is never less than good, and in two thirds of lessons is very good or excellent. The quality of teaching makes a major contribution to the success of business

education. Students' responses to their teachers, and their behaviour in lessons, are excellent, particularly in the sixth form. Relationships are warm and friendly, whilst remaining respectful on both sides, and lessons are clearly enjoyed by students and teachers. Lessons are very well-planned, with objectives clearly identified, communicated to the students and reviewed at the close of lessons. Staff have very good command of their subjects, are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about the examination courses offered, and make excellent use of assessment procedures. Frequent monitoring of individual performances helps students to be aware of their own standards in relation to examination requirements. They are given clear targets for improvement, as well as pointers towards improvement and very good practice in examination preparation. They receive plenty of praise and encouragement. Responding to this, students are always ready to contribute orally, are cooperative and work well individually or collaboratively, and concentrate well throughout lessons. Teachers have high expectations of them, and the students respond well to their teachers' confidence in them.

218. The business education department, as well as the GNVQ courses, is coordinated and managed by one head of department. These curricular areas are very well led and administered. The analysis of examination performance, record-keeping, assessment processes and the maintenance of departmental documentation are meticulous and maintained to a high standard. Individual students' strengths and weaknesses are very well known to the teaching team, and students' progress is thoroughly monitored and evaluated. There are very good strategies for improving students' performance, for example the emphasis on their acquisition of key vocabulary and its application in various classroom and research tasks, as well as meticulous, helpful marking of students' work. Schemes of work are real working documents. Staff are mutually supportive, meet regularly to share ideas and resources, and engage in mutual observation and team teaching. There are regular links with a wide range of businesses and organisations, providing both work experience opportunities and a rich mix of visiting speakers, as well as many extra-curricular activities.

219. Since the last inspection standards in the quality of business education have risen and are continuing to improve at both key stages.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN THE SIXTH FORM

220. General national vocational qualifications are offered at intermediate and advanced levels in four subjects: business, health and social care, leisure and tourism, and media studies.

221. Attainment in GNVQ courses has improved since the last inspection. Attainment in advanced subjects has been at least at the national average level and often above this. More than 50 per cent of advanced students achieved merit or distinction grades in 1999, and 65 per cent in 1998. At intermediate level, attainment has been below national averages but there have been notable individual successes, especially amongst students on the special needs register. Results in 1999 did not quite reach the very good standards of the previous year in leisure and tourism, health and social care or media studies. Attainment in business advanced and intermediate was very good in 1999 and in 1998.

222. Standards of attainment in Year 12 and Year 13 are mainly good in all four of the vocational specialisms. Students work very well as individuals or on group tasks, and their presentations are excellent. They demonstrate very good research and planning skills, and are making good progress in both advanced and intermediate courses. In the case of many individuals, progress is very good, especially those for whom GCSE results did not

anticipate their present achievements. This quality of learning is due to the very good organisational strategies of the teachers who make very good use of lesson time, particularly in view of the reduced amount available to them. The quality of students' presentations and the broad range of course-related activities, depicted in photographs, audio recordings and videos as well as portfolio evidence are most impressive. Work experience is appropriately incorporated into courses and students are encouraged to build up their own links with appropriate businesses and organisations, in addition to the many opportunities provided by teachers for regular and extensive contacts with the outside world.

223. The quality of teaching in vocational subjects was good in nearly half of lessons observed, and very good or excellent in the remainder. It is the major factor in the successes achieved by students in each of the vocational areas. Teachers are excellent facilitators, are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subjects as well as committed to the GNVQ philosophy, and plan teaching sessions very effectively in order to maximise the reduced contact time available. They make excellent use of tutorial sessions with individuals or groups of students, and provide very good written feedback and formative comments, enabling students to enhance their own organisational and evaluation skills. They give freely of their non-teaching time in a range of extra-curricular and extended tutorial contacts.

224. All subject specialisms maintain extensive links with local organisations, including regular work placements, workplace visits, and investigations using institutions or individuals. Visits overseas, such as that to Disneyland Paris, offer students the opportunity to collect primary data. Health and social care students make very good use of local contacts, such as hospitals or social services, when investigating ethical issues in the care professions. In leisure and tourism, students demonstrate their very good organisational skills by planning major events for local children or their peers, such as visits to the Millennium Dome, as well as in marketing presentations. There are opportunities to qualify for additional related training for leisure and tourism students. In media studies, a very well organised media day offered students first-hand experience of the manufacture of news. GNVQ business students combine their vocational knowledge with fund-raising, such as when running a promises auction, during which the impressive sum of £1286 was raised for a children's charity.

225. Access to the use of computers is variable for GNVQ students, with those on business or leisure and tourism courses having more opportunities to use ICT on a regular basis than do students following media or health and social care courses. Nevertheless, some of the work of the latter on child development, for example, includes excellent examples of the use of ICT. The school's intranet carries a well-constructed and informative GNVQ site.

226. GNVQ courses are very well coordinated and administered. There is a good system of regular meetings and consultation. Schemes of work, policies and assessment are very good. Good results are achieved on less than the recommended amount of time, which is a measure of the efficiency of the department.

227. Since the last inspection both the quality and range of vocational education have improved. The department is well placed to make a further success of the expansion planned in vocational subjects in September 2000.