

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **ST CUTHBERT'S R C HIGH SCHOOL**

St Helens

LEA area: St Helens

Unique reference number: 104835

Headteacher: Mr R Irving

Reporting inspector: Mr J W Ashton  
4492

Dates of inspection: 7 – 11 February 2000

Inspection number: 186350  
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 aided
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Berrys Lane Sutton St Helens Merseyside
Postcode:	WA9 3HE
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr J B Webster
Date of previous inspection:	19 January 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
J Ashton	Registered inspector		The school's results and achievements
			How well pupils are taught
			How well the school is led and managed
J Acaster	Lay inspector	Equal opportunities	Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development
			How well the school cares for its pupils
			How well the school works in partnership with parents
I Middlebrough	Team inspector	English	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils
		English as an additional language	
C Meakin	Team inspector	Mathematics	
G Murray	Team inspector	History	
M Foulds	Team inspector	Science	
M Padmore	Team inspector	Information technology	
		Design and technology	
C Campbell	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
H Feasey	Team inspector	Geography	
M Pettitt	Team inspector	Art	
		Music	
R Chick	Team inspector	Physical education	
R Parker	Team inspector	Special educational needs	

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Cuthbert's is a mixed, Roman Catholic, comprehensive, voluntary aided school, in an industrial part of St Helens. Its age range is 11 to 16 and it has 645 pupils on roll (*67 more than at the time of the last inspection*) with almost equal numbers of boys and girls. All but one of its pupils are white and there is one pupil on roll for whom English is an additional language. On entry to the school, a below average proportion of the pupils reach the expected levels of attainment for this age group in English, mathematics and science. The percentage of pupils on the school's register as having special educational needs is below the national average for secondary schools, but the number with statements is (43 i.e. 6.7 per cent) high. A majority of these pupils have a moderate learning difficulty. Thirty nine per cent of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is above average for comprehensive schools (*there are high levels of unemployment in the area*). There is a new headteacher since the last inspection.

### HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St Cuthbert's is a happy, welcoming and much improved school. Standards are above average compared to similar schools. The quality of teaching is much better than at the time of the last inspection. The school's ethos is one of a thoroughly Christian, hard working and effective learning community. It is well led and provides good value for money.

#### What the school does well

- Standards of attainment in English, mathematics and science, although below average compared to all schools, are above average compared to similar schools.
- Standards at GCSE level are improving year on year at a faster rate than the national rate of increase.
- Standards in GCSE physical education are higher than average for *all* schools.
- The quality of teaching is good, and much improved since the last inspection. (*Half of the lessons seen were good, a further three lessons in ten were very good. There were few unsatisfactory lessons*).
- Pupils in Year 7 receive a particularly effective start to their school careers.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are both very good.
- The procedures for child protection and for ensuring pupils' welfare are very good.
- The school has the strong support of its parents.
- Links with partner primary schools are especially effective.
- The school is well led, especially by the headteacher and deputy headteachers.
- Educational priorities are well supported by good financial planning.

#### What could be improved

- The achievement of girls, which fell well below that of boys at the end of Key Stage 4 between 1996 and 1999.
- Attainment in art is not high enough.
- The use of information technology across the curriculum is not as good as it should be.
- The punctuality of a minority of pupils gives cause for concern.
- Reports to parents should give more specific detail of what their pupils can do and what they need to do to improve further.
- The school needs more learning resources (*for example, books in the library, science equipment and video and cassette recorders for modern languages*).
- Aspects of the accommodation need improving (*the lay-out of the science laboratories, for instance*).

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

## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in 1995. Since then it has improved considerably in most of the weaker areas identified in the previous report. The leadership of the headteacher and his deputies is now a significant strength of the school. Its effectiveness is particularly apparent in the high staff morale, improved school image, increased parental support leading to larger numbers of pupils on roll and in the improved quality of teaching and learning. The school has developed effective teaching and learning strategies which maintain high expectations of pupils of all abilities and provide sufficient challenge in almost all subject areas. Effective steps have been taken to improve attendance, which is now close to national figures. Health and safety systems are much improved in, for example, science. There are forward planning procedures which link spending plans to development priorities and which include strategies to monitor and evaluate the school's cost-effectiveness. There are increased levels of technical support in information technology, but still insufficient hours in science to cover six laboratories. Pupils' progress is now assessed more systematically but the assessment information is not used as effectively as it could be to ensure that pupils achieve their full potential. Resources are still in short supply in some areas, although computer provision has improved with the influx of more and newer computers. The school's ability to identify and rectify its own weaknesses is much improved.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 year olds, based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
GCSE examinations	D	D	D	B	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E

Overall GCSE results achieved by 16 year old pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 are below the national average for all schools (*but above average for similar schools*), and the gradual rate of improvement in average total point scores over the past six years has been greater than the rate of national improvement. Improved performance of boys was the main factor in this narrowing of the gap between St Cuthbert's and the national results. The main constraint has been the poorer performance of the girls. Based upon GCSE results from the last three years (1997-99), boys at St Cuthbert's achieved just under two points lower than the national average points scores for boys whilst girls' results were more than nine points lower than the national average for girls. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, the proportions of pupils achieving the higher grades A\* - C show that results in English language were well below the national average for all schools (*above average compared to pupils in similar schools*). Mathematics and science results were below average for all schools and *well above average for similar schools*. Boys out-performed the girls in all three subjects in 1999, which is unusual in schools elsewhere.

In 1997 the school was 48<sup>th</sup> in the 100 fastest improving schools in England (*from 25 per cent to 37 per cent five A\* to C grades in two years*). The school's targets for the next two years are for 35 per cent of the year group to achieve at least five A\* to C grades at GCSE in 2000, and 39 per cent in 2001. Inspection evidence confirms the school's contention that the intake has improved, and also that teaching and leadership are much improved. The school's targets are therefore realistic ones



## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils greatly enjoy their school life. They find the work they are given to do interesting, and take pleasure in learning new things.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils are very well behaved. Last year's total of 13 fixed term and 2 permanent exclusions is broadly similar to the national average. Inspectors saw no oppressive or unkind behaviour during the inspection week, and very little that was not good within classrooms
Personal development and relationships	Personal development is good. Personal relationships are very good throughout the school community. Teachers and other staff set very good examples of interest, respect and concern. These qualities are reflected in the pupils' behaviour and attitudes.
Attendance	Attendance has improved since the previous inspection, and is now broadly in line with the average for secondary schools in England. The unpunctuality of a small minority of pupils is a cause for concern.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Pupils are almost always well taught throughout the school. The quality of teaching in one half of the 133 lessons inspected was good; a further one third was very good. One in five lessons were satisfactory. Only four were held to be unsatisfactory (*two in art and one each in mathematics and history*). This is a considerable improvement upon the last inspection when almost one in four lessons were found to be unsatisfactory.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Sufficiently broad, balanced and relevant, except, in the provision of information technology (ICT) across the curriculum, which is unsatisfactory.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. The full curriculum is available to all pupils with special educational needs. There are smaller classes for pupils who find the work more difficult, and additional support from adult volunteers and other children.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good, due to a mixture of effective one-to-one support from a support assistant funded by the local authority, and careful supervision from the school.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall. Very good spiritual and moral provision. Social provision good despite a relative shortage of personal and social education provision at Key Stage 4. Sound cultural provision, except that little is done to prepare pupils for life in the ethnic and cultural diversity of British society.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school provides a good standard of care for its pupils. It is particularly successful in promoting good behaviour. Child protection and welfare arrangements are also very good. This highly effective provision contributes to the positive climate in which good learning takes place throughout the school.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	School leadership is strongly focused on improving pupils' achievement. Leadership from the headteacher and the deputy heads is particularly effective. Subject areas are generally well managed. Pastoral leadership is good. Co-ordination of ICT across the curriculum is weak.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very supportive governing body, much better informed and more involved in decision making and in the life and work of the school, than it used to be at the time of the last inspection.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Much improved. Much more stress on the monitoring of individual pupil progress. Room for improvement in the monitoring of the work of departments.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes good use of the resources available to it.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The fact that their children like the school.</li> <li>• They have a high opinion of the present leadership.</li> <li>• Behaviour is good.</li> <li>• The teaching is good.</li> <li>• The pupils make good progress.</li> <li>• It expects their children to work hard.</li> <li>• They find the school welcoming and approachable.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The amount of work pupils are expected to do at home.</li> <li>• The specific amount of detail about how their particular child is progressing.</li> </ul>

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Inspectors agree with all their positive comments. Homework was found to be of some concern in a few subject areas (*art, for instance*). The diaries could be used more effectively by parents to communicate their concerns to individual teachers. Reports to parents do not contain sufficient specific comments about what particular pupils do well and what they need to do to improve further.

## PART B: COMMENTARY

### HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

#### The school's results and achievements

1. Standards of attainment have improved in most subject areas since the last report and are continuing to improve. Inspection evidence indicates that pupils' achievements are improving year-on-year, but also that at the end of Key Stage 4 in the last three years boys have recently outperformed girls, even in some subjects where the national difference between boys and girls' results is usually much closer or the reverse (*music and science, for example.*).
2. St Cuthbert's Year 7 classes enter the school at 11 years old with below average, but improving, proportions of pupils at the expected National Curriculum attainment levels 4 and 5 in the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Good and often very good teaching, plus the impact of determined leadership, improve this attainment by the time the pupils reach the ends of Key Stage 3 (Year 9) and Key Stage 4 (Year 11).
3. By the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999, the proportions of pupils attaining the expected level 5 in the National Curriculum tests were below the national average for *all* schools in each of English and science, and well below the national average in mathematics. When compared with the results from *similar* schools, these proportions equate to well above average in English and science and above average in mathematics. (*Similar schools are those which have similar proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals*). The school adds substantial value to pupils' achievements in all three subjects, but especially in English and science.
4. In most other subjects at the end of this key stage, pupils' attainment is below the national expectation. The exceptions are design and technology and physical education where attainment matches the national expectation, and music where standards are higher than expected for this age group.
5. In lessons seen at Key Stage 3, and in pupils' completed work, their achievement matches the standards reached in the national tests. The trend overall in the school's attainment is broadly in line with the national trend, but around two to four points per pupil lower than the national figure; in other words from two to four terms behind pupils elsewhere. Averaged over the past three years, differences between the relative attainment of boys and girls in all three of the core subjects English, mathematics and science, is slightly in favour of the girls, when the national differences between boys' and girls' results are taken into account. This is a different pattern from that found at the end of Key Stage 4.
6. Overall GCSE results at the end of Key Stage 4 are below the national average for all schools (equating to above average for similar schools), and the gradual rate of improvement in average total point scores over the past six years has been greater than the rate of national improvement. Improved performance of boys was the main factor in this narrowing of the gap between St Cuthbert's and the national results. The main constraint has been the poorer performance of the girls. Based upon GCSE results from the last three years, boys at St Cuthbert's achieved just under two points lower than the national average points scores for boys whilst girls' results were more than nine points lower than the national average for girls.
7. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, the proportions of pupils achieving the higher grades A\* - C show that results in English language were well below the national average for all schools (above average compared to pupils in similar schools). Mathematics and science results were below average for all schools and well above average for similar schools. Boys out-performed the girls in all three subjects in 1999, which is unusual to this school compared to those elsewhere.

8. In other subjects, where there were entries in 1999, the proportions of GCSE A\* to C grades were well above the national average in physical education (PE) and information technology (ICT), close to (in fact just below) average in design and technology and below average in art, geography and modern languages. In some, but not in all, subjects there is a direct correlation between stronger and weaker teaching and standards and classroom performance at Key Stage 4. For example, the stronger teaching in design and technology and PE is matched by standards that correspond with and exceed national standards. Boys outperform girls, except in modern languages where it is the reverse, and in PE (Sports Studies) where boys and girls are on a par with each other.
9. When pupils enter the school, at age 11 in Year 7, standards in language and literacy are below the national average. In particular, the literacy needs of pupils at the lower end of the attainment range require intensive support. The school is meeting these needs through its literacy provision within Year 7 `Core` teaching (*the `Core` in Year 7 includes English, humanities and religious education*) and in later years in English through the broad range of extra-curricular literacy activities. In the current Year 7, nearly half the year group made significant gains in their reading ages during their first term in the school. Nearly a fifth of these pupils made substantial gains. In the early part of Key Stage 3, pupils' written competence is boosted through well structured support in the `Core` lessons and, subsequently, in English in Years 8 and 9. Good attention is given to handwriting and spelling, both of which are subject to rapid improvement in Year 7. The attention to literacy in years 7 and 8 is proving to be successful and is enabling many pupils to engage with the full range of curricular subjects with confidence and optimism. It is too early for the full impact of this work to be felt in all year groups and subjects. Standards of literacy across the school as a whole are still below average. Many pupils need support to improve their spelling, punctuation and grammar in the subjects of the curriculum. In English, the wide range of extra-curricular initiatives is helping to raise standards and improve pupils' achievements. This is reflected in the most recent English National Curriculum test results at the end of Key Stage 3 which were well above average for similar schools. Pupils' competence as speakers and listeners is satisfactory, although the range of activities for speaking and listening in English is not reflected in other subjects across the curriculum.
10. There is only one pupil in the school for whom English is an additional language. One year after arriving in England and entering Year 10 with no command of English, she is making good progress in its use, due to a mixture of effective one-to-one support from a support assistant funded by the local authority, and careful supervision from the school.
11. Standards of numerical proficiency across the curriculum range from weak to good at both key stages. A lack of fluency with tables and hesitant mental arithmetic inhibits progress. For example, a group of Key Stage 3 pupils, when calculating the surface area of the plan of a cube, needed to make reference to a tables chart to find the value of six squared. Inspection of Key Stage 4 tests in science shows that some pupils' problems are caused by them having difficulty carrying out the necessary calculations. Measurement skills have a positive impact on pupils' performance in design and technology and science. Data handling skills are usually satisfactory and effectively used, particularly in geography. For example, Year 10 pupils, working on a project about the new Trafford Centre, show that they understand socio-economic data presented to them in a range of tables, diagrams and graphs.

12. Pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, make at least satisfactory, often good progress throughout their time at the school. Pupils in the higher band A sometimes make better progress than their peers in band B. An example of this is the varied opportunities they have for taking ICT to a higher level. The number of pupils with statements of special educational needs is lower than at the last inspection. At five per cent of the school population this is still above average. The overall number of pupils on the school's register of special needs from Stage 1 to Stage 5 is lower than might be expected nationally. This is because the school does not see learning difficulties as unusual or limited to the lowest attainers. Pupils at all levels of attainment are given some well directed extra help at various times in their school careers, without being added to the register. The most pressing concern is that 40 per cent of the current Year 7 came into the school with low reading standards for their age. Intensive and well-focused support for these pupils has resulted in significant improvements in five months for 42 per cent of the year group.
13. At first sight the widely differing relative performances of boys and girls is a cause for concern. The difference has been more pronounced at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3 and differs greatly from subject to subject, and sometimes from year group to year group. There is insufficient evidence available about the relative attainment on entry of boys and girls who left the school in the last four years. Evidence from recent end of Key Stage 2 national test scores, and from National Foundation for Educational Research test scores, shows that in the present Years 7, 8 and 9 boys' and girls' respective attainments on entry do not differ significantly. This would indicate that their relative performances should still be relatively close together at the end of Key Stage 3, and this does appear to be the case. Whatever it was causing the larger boy/girl differences may well have worked itself through the school. Interestingly, the previous inspection report indicates that in 1995 it was the performance of boys that gave cause for concern (*though not sufficient to make it a key issue*), whereas girls' performance was close to the national average; the complete opposite of the present situation.
14. In 1997 the school was 48<sup>th</sup> in the 100 fastest improving schools in England (from 25 per cent to 37 per cent five A\* to C grades in two years). One of the school's present performance targets is to be one of the top schools in the country in its group of schools with similar proportions of free school meals. The school argues that its last two Year 11 groups entered the school when its local reputation was much lower than it is at present (and results were still held at around 30 per cent). It further argues that the cohorts recruited since then have not just been larger, but have contained a larger proportion of higher attaining pupils. The school's targets for the next two years are for 35 per cent of the year group to achieve at least five A\* to C grades at GCSE in 2000, and 39 per cent in 2001. Inspection evidence confirms the school's contention that the intake has improved, and also that teaching and leadership are much improved. The school's targets are therefore realistic ones.

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

15. Pupils enjoy their school life greatly. They admire their teachers. They find the work they are given to do interesting, and take pleasure in learning new things. New entrants settle readily into the school's very friendly and responsible social atmosphere, in which they notice a good choice of activities, and that adults in the school respect them as individuals. Not least, prefects are noticeable for their politeness and good example. Pupils cannot readily suggest what improvements might be made, but younger ones regret the lack of a mountain bike club and provision for swimming.
16. Almost all pupils are keen to come to school. Attendance has improved since the previous inspection, when it was below 90 per cent and a cause for some concern, and is now broadly in line with the average for secondary schools in England (though still 0.3 per cent below it). Unauthorised absence has shrunk to under a third of what it was previously. It is now much better than the national average. Though standards of punctuality are generally good, up to 20 pupils a day are late for school, sometimes missing the first hour and a half. This tends to be caused by a variety of domestic problems, rather than by any unwillingness on the part of the pupils concerned. Such lateness regrettably limits their educational opportunities and reduces potential achievement.

17. Pupils persevere and approach their work very well and are very well behaved. They listen attentively, respond willingly to questions and prompts, co-operate together productively, concentrate on their tasks, and show thoroughly responsible attitudes to learning. Movement round the school is orderly. Pupils frequently show courtesy to visitors, and enquire if they may be of help. Lunchtime behaviour is well-mannered and pleasant. School and personal property is respected.
18. Personal relationships are very good throughout the school community. Teachers and other staff set very good examples of interest, respect and concern. These qualities are reflected in the pupils' good behaviour and attitudes. The attractive atmosphere of the school draws its essence from a considerate and thoughtful Christian ethos. Pupils' sensitivity in this respect was demonstrated at the assemblies during the inspection week. Pupils broke into spontaneous applause, midway-through, for some light-hearted singing and guitar-playing by the teacher-presenter, but the concluding, choreographed pupils' performance (by a musical 'group' accompanying dancers) was received in profound silence: their excellent presentation and theme so aesthetic and spiritual, that pupils sympathetically respected it as such.
19. Personal development is good. Pupils are encouraged to volunteer for jobs, such as litter-picking, or to join in extra-curricular activities, such as rugby football training, and do so in good numbers. The 'Wombles' theme of the inspection week led to promises by some younger pupils to improve some part of their personal environment. Pupils in every year group have the opportunity to effect changes in their school life through representation in the School Council. Their initiatives have led to the repainting of toilets and (calling in aid from the Parents' Council) to the provision at last of sufficient lockers for Year 7. Prefects (who have obtained a room of their own) take a very responsible line towards the discharge of their duties, and are keen that only those with the right qualities should be selected into their number.
20. A very few pupils do have occasional behavioural problems. Last year's total of 13 fixed term and 2 permanent exclusions is broadly similar to the national average. Inspectors saw no oppressive or unkind behaviour during the inspection week, and very little that was not good within classrooms. Pupils report that bullying is very uncommon, with misbehaviour being quickly dealt with "as it deserves".

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

21. Pupils are almost always well taught throughout the school. The quality of teaching in just under one half of the 133 lessons inspected was good; a further one third was very good. One in six lessons were satisfactory. Only four were held to be unsatisfactory (*two in art and one each in mathematics and history*).
22. Subjects with the larger proportion of good and/or very good lessons at Key Stage 3 (*judged by the impact of the teaching upon pupils' learning, their attitudes or the standards of their work*) were: English, science, design and technology, geography, modern foreign languages, music and physical education. The teacher's very good use of the technique of 'hot-seating' (*pupils have to answer searching questions in the role of a particular character*) in a Year 9 English lesson, linked to setting clear and timed objectives, led to a very marked understanding of 'Romeo and Juliet' in a short space of time. Very effective use of an animal's heart and lungs was the most noticeable feature of a Year 9 science lesson on respiration. It held pupils' attention so very effectively, leading to more secure retention of information. A Year 7 lesson on textiles stood out for the teacher's very good technique of allowing the pupils to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the properties of cotton and polyester materials. A Year 7 French lesson was judged very good because of the teachers' high expectations that pupils would communicate solely in French, leading to very good progress in developing listening and speaking skills. Teachers' singing and instrumental skills are very well used in music lessons to set standards to which pupils can aspire. A Year 8 Basketball lesson was more successful than many other physical education (PE) lessons seen elsewhere because of the teacher's very good use of different sized basketballs and heights of posts, allowing every pupil in the group to make very good progress.

23. The larger proportions of good and/or very good lessons at Key Stage 4 were in: English, mathematics, science, design and technology, geography, music and physical education. A good range of productive views were elicited from pupils in a Year 11 English lesson by very good use of the simple question, "what do you think?" A Year 10 mathematics lesson on `approximating` was noticeable for the teacher's enthusiasm and his very probing questioning skills, indicative of a thorough command of his subject. The result was whole class involvement and very good understanding of `rounding off` to the nearest whole number or decimal place. A Year 11 lesson on the periodic classification of chemical elements was successful in bringing about very effective learning because of the very productive mixture of teacher talk, pupil activity at their benches, and simple and manageable practical work. The better design and technology lessons were characterised by teachers` very thorough preparation, the well structured regimes in the workshops and other practical areas, and the very good level of challenge in the project work. The better geography lessons were those where the teacher used a variety of resources (for instance, a large photocopy of the area under study) and of teaching methods (teacher exposition, pair work, data handling), so that pupils` complete interest was maintained throughout the whole lesson. The better PE lessons at Key Stage 4 were those which made very good use of space, allowed pupils sufficient time to practise, involved pupils in the evaluation of their own learning and kept the learning enjoyable and productive. All of these factors and more, were seen in a Year 10 hockey lesson which had to be held indoors because of inclement weather.
24. The unsatisfactory lessons in art were due to the effects of the teacher talking for far too long, with a consequent lowering of pupils` enthusiasm and consequent effects on their progress. In the unsatisfactory mathematics lesson, the teacher concentrated too much upon helping individual pupils in turn, whilst too many of the class were left to their own devices for long periods of the lesson. The result was poor behaviour and lack of progress from the majority of pupils in the group. The unsatisfactory history lesson was due to this teacher's lack of specialist history knowledge, a concern the school and governors are aware of and are keen to solve with the appointment of a specialist historian as soon as they are able to. The three teachers concerned all had satisfactory lessons at other times in the week, but in these four lessons there was insufficient beneficial impact on pupils` learning, and standards of achievement were lower than they should have been.
25. The literacy needs of pupils in the middle and lower end of the attainment range are receiving intensive support through the schools` literacy provision within Year 7 `Core` teaching (*English, humanities and RE*) and, subsequently, in English through the broad range of extra-curricular literacy activities. For example, in one Year 7 class, lower attaining pupils working in pairs with one of each pair blindfolded and giving directions to the other as to how to find a surprise party was followed up with a useful writing activity. This combination of the development of speaking, listening and writing skills at a fast pace was seen to be leading to rapid progress for many pupils. The recruitment of a former primary literacy co-ordinator has strengthened even further the school`s teaching provision in the `Core` team. Elsewhere in the school, literacy is pursued for pupils of all abilities with vigour within English with other year groups and is increasingly tackled more formally within the other subjects of the curriculum. Reading materials within subject areas are well-matched to pupils` abilities. For example, in geography, mathematics and history, worksheets and support materials were seen to have been carefully adapted to match pupils` prior attainment. Literacy provision for pupils with special educational needs, and for pupils with English as an additional language, is good.
26. Except in mathematics, the teaching of numeracy is at the embryo stage in the school, and there are some weaknesses even in mathematics classes. Measuring in design and technology, data handling in geography and graphical scales in science, are all being taught well but in an uncoordinated way. A lack of fluency with tables, insufficient mental arithmetic practice, plus an over reliance on the use of calculators are examples of aspects of numeracy which need pulling together into a consistent approach across the school. The situation is not unsatisfactory but numeracy is not as well taught or well co-ordinated as literacy is.



27. The school is meeting the needs of most of its pupils well. Grouping pupils by ability enables the work to be pitched at the right level in most classes, and most teachers have additional, sometimes harder, work available to challenge further those pupils who complete a task early. Teaching strategies observed were working equally well with both boys and girls, and teachers are very aware of the need to involve both sexes in lessons. Very able pupils are well stretched. The specialist teaching to improve literacy is very good. Lessons are carefully planned, and pupils are persuaded to work at a lively pace. There are very good examples of teaching strategies which help pupils who have learning difficulties - whatever subject they are studying. Teachers share and adapt these methods. Because lessons are pitched at the right level, pupils with special educational needs enjoy making progress. They know that they are doing well and they sustain their efforts for long periods. Significantly more boys than girls receive additional support, but they are progressing equally well.
28. Pupils learn well and make sound and sometimes good progress at both key stages in almost every subject. The exceptions are ICT (*outside of the timetabled GCSE lessons*), where learning and progress are just satisfactory, and art, where they are unsatisfactory. This learning and progress mirror the good and often very good teaching found in almost eight lessons out of every ten, but are also the result of the positive attitudes of pupils, their increasingly good attendance, and the improved morale throughout the school.
29. Noticeable strengths in learning include the extent to which so many pupils have improved their reading in their first term at the school. This was due largely to the effectiveness of the initial diagnosis of their reading abilities, and to the high quality of the intensive support programme to bring them up to the expected level for their age in the shortest possible time. Learning in PE is the other strong learning area in the school. Very noticeable in PE lessons are the pace and productivity, the *rate* at which pupils of all abilities learn and make progress, and the effort and enthusiasm pupils put into their work, as a result of the good and very good teaching in eight out of the ten lessons seen. The unsatisfactory learning and progress in art lessons was tempered to some extent by the pupils' capacities to work independently on their individual projects with good levels of concentration. But they had too limited an awareness of how well they were doing, and too little knowledge and understanding of the work of a variety of artists.

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

30. Curricular provision, at both key stages, is broad, balanced and relevant and provides pupils with access to a full range of learning experiences within the National Curriculum. There is an exception to this - the provision of information technology (ICT) at Key Stage 3, where it is not taught as a discrete subject after the eight hours allocated in Year 7, and where its delivery through the subjects of the curriculum is insufficient. Other subjects receive sufficient time and coverage. The core subjects of English, mathematics and science have a balanced time allocation across both key stages. Since the previous inspection the amount of taught time each week has been increased and now exceeds the Department for Education and Employment's (DfEE) recommended minimum. Pupils are able to choose a second language - Spanish - from Year 8 but miss a proportion of their physical education lessons to do so. The Headteacher and governors would like to rectify this but the relative smallness of the school leaves them with little room for manoeuvre on the timetable. The lack of a history specialist is undesirable and puts pressure on non-specialist staff to effect curricular coverage.
31. At Key Stage 4, pupils take a full range of GCSE subjects. They receive guidance of good quality at the end of Key Stage 3 to assist them to make appropriate option choices. In addition, links with a local college have enabled the school to offer vocational qualifications and pupils also have opportunities to take various vocational 'taster' courses at St Helens College and all receive a compulsory two-week work experience placement.

32. Careers guidance is good. This, plus the work-related curriculum, follows a well-integrated process which begins in Year 7, in the 'Core' lessons, with pupils' self-assessment of their own strengths and weaknesses. This is supported subsequently through the curriculum, particularly in religious education, history, geography and science. In Year 9, careers advice becomes more formalised; support for pupils when reflecting on option choices includes a school based 'drop-in' clinic where they can seek further advice. In Year 10, joint teacher/pupil target-setting helps pupils to move systematically towards their goals, and further support is provided on a weekly basis from the school's Careers Officer. By the end of Year 11, pupils will each have received two significant interviews to help them with career choices. The Careers Officer has a base in the school and is available for consultations almost on a daily basis as well as being available to liaise with parents on Year 11 parents' evenings.
33. Subject departments plan well for curricular provision. Schemes of work are generally of good quality, reflect the demands of the National Curriculum and promote continuity of learning. The school's focus on the rapid acquisition of literacy skills in Year 7 is proving to be highly successful. Test results, together with work produced in class, show that pupils make rapid gains in reading and writing due to the structured literacy support that they receive in the 'Core' lessons. Provision to support numeracy across the curriculum is not yet as fully developed. Pupils with special educational needs receive good support in lessons. Schemes of work take into account special educational needs provision, and grouping arrangements facilitate a good level of one-to-one support for those who need it. There are individual education plans in place for pupils with special educational needs but these are, as yet, insufficiently detailed and not used to maximum effect in all subjects. Provision for pupils with EAL (English as an additional language) are good and include in-class support tailored to meet individual learning needs. Links with partner primary schools are very good – through such initiatives as the excellent Tuesday Club and the Summer School – and help to create continuity in learning when pupils move to secondary school.
34. Arrangements for pupils' personal and social education are satisfactory. Even though there is no regular timetabled slot for personal and social education (PSE) at Key Stage 4 there are effective PSE 'days' which focus on key issues such as relationships, drugs awareness, leisure, exercise and personal fitness. In Year 9, pupils receive a lesson on racial prejudice and work covers such topics as prejudice, gender issues, disability and stereotyping. Visiting support groups also make valuable contributions in such areas as road-safety, health-related issues and first aid. Pupils receive detailed sex education and appropriate guidance on drugs misuse.
35. Curricular provision provides pupils with equality of opportunity. The only area where this is a weakness is in the reduced amount of physical education for some second language learners at Key Stage 3. Extra-curricular provision is good overall. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils enjoy theatre visits as part of their English work. They extend their learning through field work in geography. Pupils in art club visit the Liverpool Walker Art Gallery. Cultural interests are well-served through provision for music, dance and drama in 'Tongues of Fire', a group comprising over 100 members which performs in school and in the community. There are also some small musical ensembles. Homework Club is an enterprising endeavour. A large number of pupils attend. There is also a broad range of opportunities to help promote learning, not least in literacy and in English. One Year 10 pupil summed up this provision succinctly when he said: 'there is a team for everything!' There are even plans to introduce golf. Sporting activities include lunchtime and after-school clubs. The equipment for basketball, which is a popular sport, was provided from a substantial Millennium Grant. The sports hall is in full use by the community every night from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. and at weekends. Provision for sport is a strength of the school.
36. The school has tackled most of the curricular issues raised in the previous inspection report. There is now increased time for mathematics; the total amount of taught time meets the DfEE's recommended minimum. Provision for special educational needs has been substantially improved. Steps have been taken to ensure that the learning needs of higher attainers are met more comprehensively. There are still minor fluctuations in time allocations to history and geography at Key Stage 3 but they do not have an adverse effect on learning or provision.

37. The school is employing a wide range of strategies to assist the development of literacy. In addition to the carefully structured teaching of reading and writing within the Year 7 `Core` lessons, eight literacy tutors carry out two one-hour sessions each week to help pupils in Years 7 and 8 with severe reading difficulties. Thirteen pupils in Year 7 with relatively high intelligence quotients, but with lower reading ages, have received special tuition to advance their reading. Plans are now in hand to extend this provision to similar pupils in Years 8 and 9. Forty parents are being trained at St Cuthbert's by St Helens College tutors to help their children advance their skills in reading and writing. The school's immediate target is for 10 per cent of all parents to be involved with their children's literacy and learning. Additional strategies which impact well on literacy include the Better Reading Strategy, Extension English, which is designed to extend higher attainers, Extra English Homework club, Enhancement English at Key Stage 4, Writing Intervention in Year 8, Tuesday Club for the pupils of partner primary schools, the spelling clinic, and the use of classroom assistants, including parents, to provide one-to-one support. Central to this additional provision is the English and `Core` staff's willingness to update skills and to acquire the most up-to-date knowledge of literacy. Across some of the subjects of the curriculum there is evidence of study skills being used to support literacy. In English and history, good use is made of outline frameworks to assist pupils' writing. Literacy pilot work has been carried out in religious education and science. In Year 9, for example, pupils in science wrote newspaper articles about Vesuvius and Pompeii. Drafting is used in some subjects but it is not used as an organisational device nor to widen the repertoire of writing activities in most subjects. The use of key words to assist pupils' understanding of subject-specific vocabulary is increasing and, teachers are using note-making patterns, such as `spider-diagrams`, to organise learning effectively.
38. The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall, despite the limited personal and social education provision outside of religious education lessons at Key Stage 4, and opportunities are missed to extend multicultural awareness in some subjects, such as art. The school is a very strong, caring Catholic community in which the individual is of prime importance. The daily act of collective worship is a very spiritual experience in which pupils and teachers are deeply involved. They are confident in their faith and in their belief in their own worth. Variations on the theme for assembly are repeated in form time throughout the week. Pupils are offered clear and profound values. They respond with impeccable behaviour. They respect 'the sacred time'. The Catholic ethos pervades the whole school. The mission statement is displayed in classrooms. Corridor displays extol the gifts of the Spirit, for example, Judgement and Courage and explain what these mean in everyday living. Most significantly, pupils and teachers try to live by these standards in the school community. The singing repertoire and listening activities in music lessons provide good spiritual enrichment.
39. Moral values are very strong within the school. Pupils are taught to be honest and fair. Teachers' expectations of them are high and they are constantly encouraged. Senior pupils are conscious of being role models and set the tone for behaviour. Pupils' are presented with moral dilemmas and their ideas are valued. For example, in geography they are asked to discuss environmental destruction and the exploitation of local Peoples. Year 8 pupils role-play the decision to seek help for a friend in trouble although in so doing they implicate themselves.
40. Relationships between pupils and between pupils and staff are very good. Pupils remember the warmth of the welcome they were given by teachers when they first arrived at the school and how they were helped to settle in. There are many opportunities for pupils to take on responsibilities and they do so very happily. For example, they represent their year group on the School Council or may be chosen to be prefects. Year 9 pupils give up their lunch hours to help younger pupils with their reading. They enjoy chaperoning the Tuesday Club when primary school children come to familiarise themselves with the school and to join in activities in various departments. The strong links with primary schools and the colleges are of prime importance in the regeneration of the school in recent years. The sense of social responsibility is also evident in subject areas. For example, in design and technology, pupils design a disability aid. In other subjects, for example, physical education, pupils are actively encouraged to develop self-reliance and to make their own decisions.

41. Mixed-year group visits to Leipzig, Boulogne and Austria provide an effective cultural dimension to the curriculum, albeit one that is largely white and Western. Little is done to prepare pupils for life in the ethnic and cultural diversity of British society. The 'Tongues of Fire' musical and liturgical ministry play a large part in local worship and much further afield in Europe. The residential building, Lindisfarne, on the school site, is well used for foreign visitors and for a 'welcome weekend' for new entrants to the school. Departments organise field trips, museum and theatre visits.

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

42. The school provides a good standard of care for its pupils. It is particularly successful in promoting good behaviour. Child protection and welfare arrangements are also very good. The empathetic, child-centred ethos stated in the school's prospectus is kindly and naturally expressed in daily practice. Pupils respond very well to the trust and integrity they discern in how the school treats them.
43. Teachers know their pupils well as individuals. Departmental procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are satisfactory. The school has developed a comprehensive, detailed database of pupil performance and each department is provided with a comprehensive profile of each pupil's prior and predicted attainments. The departments have been given training on using the data and the freedom to develop procedures that combine it with their own day-to-day arrangements for assessing pupils' attainment and progress, but these latter are at an early stage. So far, a good start has been made in English, the Year 7 'Core' and in design and technology. There is no consensus across departments that should lead to the establishment of a consistently and uniformly applied whole school policy.
44. Good progress has already been made in using assessment data, with the introduction of targets for individual Key Stage 4 pupils. These are designed to improve their achievements, identify strengths and weaknesses and any incidence of under-performance. All departments recognise the potential of using the data for furthering pupils' attainment and progress, and the degree to which departments have produced detailed plans varies from department to department. All have made a satisfactory start. A good example is in mathematics, where, in addition to establishing targets for examination grades, the department is developing a format intended to sharpen the focus of target setting by identifying detailed, mathematical targets for pupils to aim for.
45. Great emphasis is placed by the school on enhancing the culture of striving for continuous improvement and an integral part of this process has been the energetic drive to involve parents. For example, more than sixty per cent of Year 7 pupils have been interviewed, with their parents, on an individual basis to share assessment details about their children and details of predicted performance. In Year 11, effective mentoring arrangements are successful in heightening the profile of striving for success.
46. The school achieves its very good standards of behaviour through high expectations based upon mutual respect. Both teaching and non-teaching staffs are consistently well liked by pupils. Their classroom management is alert and fair. Pupils recognise the values they express. From prefects down throughout the school, pupils are themselves concerned to maintain the attitudes and behavioural standards thus portrayed.
47. Much attention has successfully been given to improving attendance. A school-based home-school liaison officer collates the data on attendance every morning. He follows up absences closely, by phone or personal visit. The result is that attendance has improved considerably since the previous inspection, though recurrent latenesses by a few are still a seemingly intractable problem. The home-school agreement pledges that parents and pupils will ensure punctuality.

48. The school has very effective arrangements for welfare and child protection. Form tutors have responsibility for the well-being of their pupils. Any emerging concerns are discussed at the monthly meetings with year managers, if not previously requiring immediate attention. Similar liaison is maintained with the very experienced pastoral deputy headteacher, who is constantly involved in the welfare of individual pupils and has designated responsibility for child protection. The local education authority guidelines are followed, and the school's policy is fully set out in the staff handbook held by every teacher. All staff know to whom to refer and what action to take.
49. The other deputy headteacher is the school's 'risk' manager. He is frequently involved in assessments of one kind or another. The health and safety policy is modern and comprehensive, and clearly lists individual teacher responsibilities on a day-to-day basis. Annual and other checks are made on apparatus and procedures. The school's first aid room is well equipped, and all seven first-aiders have recently had their first aid certificates renewed. Any special medical needs of individuals are suitably met. Care is taken to ensure that safety precautions are observed in lessons. The school's personal, social and health education provision promotes pupils' health and safety awareness well, including through the use of visiting specialists.
50. Two special features (the 'Tuesday Club' and the 'Core') indicate the school's care in encouraging pupils from feeder primary schools to become enjoyably familiar with the school's facilities and teachers before prospective entrants formally join. The 'Core' teaching arrangements ensure that during their first year pupils are taught predominantly by one teacher, in their own classroom base, whilst they acclimatise to the broader school environment. Both these features are extremely popular with pupils and parents. Tests during Year 7 indicates that the 'dip' in learning common amongst pupils making the transition from primary school to Year 7 may be much reduced through such considerate measures.

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

51. Parents are pleased with the school, and report that it has greatly improved since 1995. Most respondents to the inspection questionnaire strongly agree that their children are expected to work hard. Parents have a high opinion of the present leadership, and find the school welcoming and approachable. They are pleased with the quality of teaching and with overall standards, and remark favourably on the strong sense of community in the school. A minority of parents has reservations about the school's homework policy, and some parents do not consider themselves to be well informed about their children's progress. The inspection supports the positive views expressed by the parents. Homework was found to be generally satisfactory overall although there was some concern in a few subject areas (*art, for instance*). It was felt that the homework diaries could be used more effectively by parents to communicate their concerns to individual teachers. Reports to parents do not contain sufficient specific comments about what their children do well and what they need to do to improve.
52. Faced in 1995 with the problem of steeply falling numbers, the school has been very successful in improving considerably its public perception. It is now a popular choice among local parents. This turn-round has been achieved by several means:

### *Smartening the school's identity and purpose.*

The school set itself to raise standards of academic attainment, at the same time adopting an attractive uniform.

### *Publicising its qualities effectively.*

A professionally-produced video enables prospective parents to be given an impressive insight into the school's ethos and activities.

### *Running a mini-bus.*

This provides transport for children from local primary schools on a regular basis to use the school's facilities (the 'Tuesday Club', and other resource access).

*Converting a surplus school building into residential accommodation with its own catering facilities ('Lindisfarne House').*

This is used for a variety of purposes. Prospective entrants can get to know the school and their class-mates on a residential 'stop-over' during the summer holidays. Foreign visitors can be accommodated, assisting 'exchanges'. Groups from the local community regularly use the facilities, and can take advantage of the school's learning resources.

53. This active and highly efficient programme has greatly benefited communication with parents and potential users.
54. Parents are provided with good written information about the school through the prospectus and the governors' annual report. They are kept well informed by newsletters and other correspondence. A Parents' Council began this year, which enables communication and opinion to be shared.
55. Parents can gather information about pupils' progress through the formal parents' meetings, but it can also be sought at any time. Parents report that teachers do contact them if they have concerns, and the school prides itself on returning phone calls from parents on the same day. The well-organised school diaries are an important means of recording the work pupils are doing. The system expects pupils, parents and teachers to sign a page weekly as evidence that attention has been paid to the homework undertaken. Most parents keep abreast and follow this useful and supportive code. Parents are informed annually of the pattern of homework to be expected. Parents' evenings are rather poorly attended, with fewer than half the parents generally present. The school has begun a series of individual meetings to inform parents and their children of the results of ability tests given as a guide in estimating each pupil's future potential. This openness should be helpful to all three parties in tracking and enhancing future progress.
56. End of year academic reports give an outline of the year's work in every subject. Teachers' written comments tend to be rather broadly descriptive of attitude and progress. They do not clearly address levels of attainment specific to the subject, nor suggest with sufficient focus to what areas each pupil should give attention in order to remove weaknesses.
57. The school is concerned to assist parents to become more confident in being able to help their children. Links with parents start in inviting them to an open night whilst their children are still in their first term of Year 6 and still at primary school. This academic year these parents have been offered the opportunity to participate in a parent support programme organised with two local Further Education colleges. This is aimed at improving literacy and numeracy skills on a course employing the actual schemes of work in English and mathematics used in Year 7. A crèche is provided and take-up has been very strong (the equivalent of 40 per cent of Year 7 parents). Parents also joined the Literacy School last Summer. This was very successful, laying a foundation for the parent support programme, and resulting in some additional parent literacy helpers coming into school. The school is looking forward to building on the foundations just laid.
58. Parents support the school directly in several ways. A group of parents now provide literacy help on a regular basis. Some others assist in particular classes, such as design and technology or oversee the school library and 'Successmaker' activities. Others support sporting events. Some are engaged in activities in the Lindisfarne building. Very many potential parents come to collect their children at the end of the Tuesday Club activities. Relationships with members of staff are warm.
59. Overall, the involvement of parents makes a good impact on the work of the school, and the effectiveness of the school's links with parents, already good, is developing well.

## HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

60. Since taking over as the permanent leader and manager of the school, three years ago, after a period as acting head, the headteacher has led the school in much the same way as a senior coach leads a rugby team; by enthusing all who work in and attend the school and helping them to believe in themselves. The result has been a startling improvement in staff morale, a very noticeable improvement in the quality of teaching, a significant gain in the school's reputation, leading to a substantial increase in numbers on roll, and the firm foundation for another considerable rise in pupil attainment.
61. The headteacher is very well supported by a small and tightly knit team of deputy head teachers and a very supportive governing body, led recently, in the absence through illness of its chairman, by a very effective acting chairman, who gives a great deal of his time to working in and generally supporting the school in all kinds of ways, including taking assemblies and acting as the school's Chaplain as well as a regular 'sounding board' for senior staff. The work of the Governors has been re-vitalised in recent years. Their committees are truly 'working' committees with no hidden agendas. Governors feel involved in the life of the school, able to challenge each other, confident that their views will be taken seriously.
62. The school's pastoral leadership is strong. It is well co-ordinated by a deputy head teacher. Heads of Year meet with their teams of tutors formally on a monthly basis, and more often informally. They are committed, as everyone else in the school is, to the increasing focus on raising academic achievement in the school.
63. School development planning has improved since the last inspection at the *whole* school level. The school's plan is more of a longer term and strategic one, with success criteria and costings, as far as these are realistic. Its documented priorities take due account of those of the local authority (*for example, improving literacy and raising the standards of pupils with special educational needs*). They also concentrate upon other key areas for development at St Cuthbert's, such as making better use of assessment data and continuing to develop stronger links with the community. Departmental plans are improving but their quality is variable. They now link directly to the whole school plans (*a step forward from last time*) but some (*for example, PE*) are better than others at identifying the key areas for development in that particular subject.
64. The leadership and management of most subject areas is good, including the effective co-ordination of the teaching and learning in the Year 7 'Core' - of English, humanities, RE and PSE. Management of English is satisfactory overall, in terms of administrative and procedural matters, but there are aspects of leadership and co-ordination within the department that need further development. The co-ordination of ICT across the curriculum is weak.
65. Senior managers have a very clear vision of the ways that all departments should be working to support pupils who have special educational needs. They have delegated responsibility and funds to individual departments to enable this to happen. There is, however, insufficient monitoring of departmental provision for special needs. Departments maintain individual education plans (IEPs) and review them regularly, but there is still insufficient monitoring of pupils' progress towards their individual targets, and the quality of learning opportunities across departments. Finance for special educational needs is devolved to individual departments. How they spend it is up to them, and this is not properly monitored, either within the departments, or by senior managers.
66. The governors fulfil their statutory obligations except for the provision of ICT for all pupils at Key Stage 4.

67. The match of numbers, qualifications and experience of teachers to the needs of the curriculum is satisfactory, except in history. The school has no specialist historian on the staff. Female teachers are under represented in the senior promoted posts (*only two out of the top twelve posts*) despite accounting for almost half the teaching staff. The age and experience profiles of the teachers have been top heavy with long serving teachers for a number of years (*the result of falling school numbers and a no-redundancy policy*) but the school is likely soon to be able to expand slightly its complement of staff in the light of recent increases in the roll.
68. The school holds the coveted Investors in People Award, renewed this year. Staff development is an important part of the school's planning and is well co-ordinated by members of the senior management team. Whilst appraisal is not in the form of the Local Education Authority (LEA) model, it is effective in supporting individual teachers to meet the needs of the school. Whilst the spending on non-teaching staff overall is within reasonable balance, the number of hours of technician support in the science area remains low for the number of laboratories, whilst support for information technology has increased. The quality of service and commitment given to the school by the non-teaching staff matches that of the teaching staff.
69. Learning resources overall are unsatisfactory. Modern languages are short of course books. They have no TV or video recorder and the cassette recorders need replacing. In science there is a general shortage of practical equipment and much of the stock is outdated. History has insufficient textbooks but some very good printed materials have been produced in-house. Resources are barely adequate in maths, geography, art and English but materials for supporting reading and literacy within the `Core` are very much better than at the time of the last report. Apart from a shortage in textbooks, design and technology, like physical education, is satisfactorily resourced, and in music, resources are good.
70. Although the number of computers to pupils at 1:10 is satisfactory when compared to the national figure of 1:9, too few are distributed around the departments. This lessens their impact on learning. A small resource centre, developed next to the library is staffed throughout the day and is used to give valuable support in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy.
71. The school site is well maintained to ensure that it is a safe environment for pupils. Repairs are carried out promptly, and health and safety risks are quickly eliminated. The caretakers undertake a continuous programme of internal decoration. The school makes good use of display spaces to celebrate pupils' achievements. There are adequate play areas and recreation facilities to cater for a range of pupil interests, though the playground floods quickly once the sports field becomes waterlogged.
72. The surplus space resulting from reduced pupil numbers has been put to very good use in the specialised classroom where the `Core` lessons are taught to Year 7 pupils. In this room the display spaces are used to stimulating effect, and there is a marked effect on pupils' progress. A central block (*Lindisfarne house*) has been largely given over to community organisations, and there are plans to strengthen this contribution that the school can make to its locality.
73. There are difficulties for teachers and pupils who try to work in geography and English classrooms, and in science laboratories, where the heaters make excessive noise. The rooms used for teaching Resistant Materials also require more effective sound reduction to enable pupils to work with fewer distractions. Science teachers are restricted by the inadequate gas and electricity supplies in the laboratories. The layout of the laboratories is inappropriate for modern teaching and learning styles (*services only along three sides*) and this is limiting the opportunities for practical work that can be offered to pupils. Within the art department, teachers and pupils are restricted by the lack of space for ceramics. The areas for drying and displaying work are also too small. The library itself is poor. It is too small for a secondary school (*it reaches its capacity when it has more than 20 occupants*). There are too few books in it and the non-fiction stock is not of the necessary quality to support teaching, independent learning, or GCSE.



74. The school makes good strategic use of its resources, including specific grants and additional funding, by firmly linking decisions on spending to educational priorities. For example, equipping the design and technology (DT) area with a new and relatively sophisticated lathe whilst there were text book shortages elsewhere, was based upon a clear decision to build on strength in the DT area and because its benching was 40 years old. Administrators have responded promptly to the requirements of the latest auditors' report, which praised the careful, unobtrusive and efficient handling arrangements of the school's finances. The principles of comparison, challenge, consultation and competition are well applied to the management and use of the school's resources. The school has been successful in recent years in tapping a number of valuable sources of social regeneration funds, without which its departments would be very severely under-resourced.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

75. The governors, headteacher and staff should now attend to the following matters for improvement, some of which are already identified as priorities by the school: (as shown by \*)

- **Raise standards in art by:**

developing specific targets for improvement.

*(Paragraphs: 113 to 117)*

improving the pace and focus of much of the teaching.

*(Paragraph: 115)*

including more examples of the work of a greater range of other artists and making more use of homework to extend the work begun in class.

*(Paragraphs: 113, 114)*

- **Ensure that all pupils receive their full entitlement to ICT by:**

increasing its use within all subjects across the curriculum.

*(Paragraphs: 106 - 112)*

ensuring this provision is well co-ordinated and monitored.

*(Paragraphs: 106 - 112)*

- **Ensure that girls' achievements match the achievements of the boys in the present Years 10 and 11 by:**

identifying areas of underachievement in all pupils, but especially from the girls

*(Paragraphs: 1, 5, 6, 8, 13)*

then taking all steps necessary to counteract them.

*(Paragraph: 13)*

- **Provide sufficient learning resources, especially library books, as soon as funds permit \***

*(Paragraph: 69)*

- **Improve some aspects of the accommodation, particularly the library and lay out of the science laboratories, as soon as funds permit. \***

*(Paragraph: 73)*

### **Other weaknesses governors should take account of in their development plans:**

Improving punctuality to school for a small but persistent number of pupils

*(Paragraph: 16)*

Preparing pupils more for life in a multicultural society

*(Paragraph: 41)*

Reports to parents need to be more specific about what pupils can do well and what they need to do to improve.

*(Paragraphs: 51, 55)*

The spending of funds for SEN needs more formal monitoring

*(Paragraph: 65)*

Technician support for science

*(Paragraph: 68)*

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	133
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	33

### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection*

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0%	32%	48%	17%	3%	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*

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	644	-
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	254	-

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	31	-
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	86	-

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	15
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	21

### *Attendance*

<b>Authorised absence</b>	%
School data	8.3
National comparative data	7.8

<b>Unauthorised absence</b>	%
School data	0.7
National comparative data	0.9

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year		Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		1999	68	68	136
<b>National Curriculum Test/Task Results</b>		<b>English</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>	<b>Science</b>	
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	26	29	30	
	Girls	45	41	32	
	Total	71	70	62	
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	52	51	46	
	National	63	62	55	
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	27	19	9	
	National	28	38	23	

<b>Teachers' Assessments</b>		<b>English</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>	<b>Science</b>	
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	28	31	27	
	Girls	42	40	32	
	Total	70	71	59	
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	52	52	44	
	National	64	64	60	
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	19	26	10	
	National	31	37	28	

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	51	58	109

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	16	47	50
	Girls	15	49	56
	Total	31	96	106
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	30	88	97
	National	46.3	90.7	95.7

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	31
	National	37.8

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

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

### *Ethnic background of pupils*

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	
White	643
Any other minority ethnic group	1

### *Exclusions in the last school year*

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	26	5
Other minority ethnic groups		

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

### *Teachers and classes*

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

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	38.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.6

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

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

Total number of education support staff	3
Total aggregate hours worked per week	92

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

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.6
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	17.54
Key Stage 4	14.9

### *Financial information*

Financial year	1998/99
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	£
Total income	1,499,149
Total expenditure	1,516,339
Expenditure per pupil	2519
Balance brought forward from previous year	35,452
Balance carried forward to next year	18,262

**Results of the survey of parents and carers**

**Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	644
Number of questionnaires returned	188

**Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	51	43	4	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	54	40	3	1	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	44	48	5	1	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	39	41	17	2	1
The teaching is good.	58	37	3	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	49	33	13	2	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	70	26	2	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	80	19	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	56	33	9	0	2
The school is well led and managed.	72	25	1	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	58	39	2	1	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	46	42	7	1	3

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

### **ENGLISH**

76. When pupils enter the school, standards in English are below the national average and a significant number of pupils at the lower end of the attainment range have low proficiency in literacy. In the 1999 National Curriculum tests held at the end of Key Stage 3, standards in English were below the national average at the expected level 5 and above. However, in the higher range of level 6 and above, standards were close to the national average. When these results were compared to those obtained in similar schools they were well above average overall and very high for pupils obtaining level 6 and above. Boys performed less well than girls, in line with the national trend. However, boys' scores have continued to rise year on year. Overall, Key Stage 3 results have improved in each of the last three years (1997-99).
77. GCSE trends have been less favourable. Results both in GCSE English Language and English Literature were well below the national average at grades A\* - C. They were lower in 1999 than in the previous year and lower than at the time of the previous inspection. School data suggests, however, that these two year groups were relatively weaker than the current Years 10 and 11. Inspection evidence, together with higher Key Stage 3 national test results for the current Years 10 and 11 pupils, indicate that these pupils are on line to achieve more highly at the end of Key Stage 4.
78. In Year 7 the school gives pupils a positive start to their school careers by providing language and literacy support of high quality within the 'Core' teaching programme. The emphasis on bridging the primary and secondary phases of education by building on work carried out through the National Literacy Strategy is helping to raise standards in reading and writing very quickly. Pupils are achieving well in relation to their prior attainment. In Year 7, reading tests show that after only one term in this school the reading ages of nearly half the year group rose, with a fifth recording substantial gains. This is having a marked effect on pupils' confidence. They write for a range of purposes and audiences and have produced very good anthologies of poetry. One of the strengths in provision which is helping younger pupils to achieve well is the breaking down of tasks into manageable segments, with regular teacher intervention and support. In Years 8 and 9, pupils continue to achieve well for their abilities. Across Key Stage 3 as a whole, there are sufficient opportunities for pupils to use talk for learning, although there is a lack of speaking and listening activities in some classes. Grammar, spelling and punctuation are taught thoroughly although sometimes rather too much emphasis is placed on repetitive grammar exercises. Presentation of work is satisfactory, although the use of drafting is rather uneven and requires further refinement. Information technology is under-used and pupils are not able to exploit it sufficiently as a means of organising their writing.
79. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well. Individual education plans contain language specific targets and activities that are monitored by class teachers. Overall, pupils achieve well at Key Stage 3 and by the end of the key stage have made significant gains in all three areas of reading, writing, speaking and listening. Higher attainers receive harder material and extra challenges – factors which are significant in terms of the very good performance at level 6 and above in national tests.
80. At Key Stage 4, pupils are achieving well for their abilities. Girls perform more highly than boys in line with the national trend but boys are, nonetheless, responding well in lessons. Pupils' books and files provide evidence of full engagement with a range of GCSE texts. Pupils annotate work thoroughly, make useful notes and summaries, and write balanced essays. These activities are not supplemented by sufficiently creative responses to textual study - writing-in-role, contemporary versions of play scenes, media techniques, - for pupils across the whole attainment range. There is rather too much recourse to comprehension exercises and chapter summaries. Pupils explore moral and multicultural issues such as tolerance, racism, prejudice, disabilities through the chosen literature. As at Key Stage 3, drafting – and the marking of drafts – needs refinement.



81. Pupils read fluently, and most continue to develop confidence as speakers. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well for their abilities, and the single pupil with English as an additional language (EAL) is well supported, both through planned provision and in class where a language assistant is available to work alongside her. As at Key Stage 3, insufficient use is made of information technology to support learning.
82. Teaching is good, and often very good, at both key stages, and has a positive effect on learning. A significant proportion of the teaching, deemed to be very good, includes lesson observations made on special educational needs teaching and provision. In English, teachers invariably plan their lessons thoroughly and both classroom and pupil management are strong. Teachers have good knowledge of their pupils, which helps them to meet their individual needs. Clear explanations help pupils to learn more successfully. Teachers enjoy good relationships with pupils. Control is firm but effective and the climate for learning in classrooms is very positive. The pacing and timing of lessons is a strength and teachers are skilled at linking items of information to focus pupils very precisely on what is to be learned. Presentational skills are strong. The fact that teachers are becoming increasingly skilful in meeting literacy needs and are able to teach basic skills effectively is helping to raise standards. In most lessons seen there was a real partnership in learning. Teachers sometimes tend to over-control the learning process, with questions which demand right answers and are not open ended enough and this restricts learning. Across both key stages, but particularly at Key Stage 4, teachers do not extend the repertoire of activities for speaking and listening to increase pupils' independence in learning and to encourage them to take the initiative more often. Homework is set regularly and homework tasks are of good quality. A significant factor in the quality of learning and in pupils' achievements is the positive nature of classroom relationships. These factors make for a very favourable climate for learning.
83. Although the teaching seen in lessons was of good quality, scrutiny of pupils' work indicates that at Key Stage 3 there is some unevenness in written work, produced over time. This is due to the fact that teachers interpret some of the content in the schemes of work in different ways. Some units – for example, the unit on knowledge about language – are very open-ended and teachers need more discussion and guidance both on how to deliver them and on how to evaluate outcomes. Provision in Year 7 – through the `Core` lessons – is a model of good practice in terms of language acquisition and support. The Year 8 schemes do not take full account of the work done in Year 7 nor ensure that there is continuity between the two years. Arrangements for assessment are sound, with a good balance of short-term on-going and final assessment carried out. The marking system is not always applied evenly and the combining of attainment and effort into single marks out of ten does not always yield helpful information to pupils or teachers. There is a lack of definitive procedures for target-setting for individual pupils at both key stages and teachers do not make full use of the range of available attainment data. Grouping pupils into ability sets works well and when necessary, pupils are moved between sets.
84. Management is satisfactory overall in terms of administrative and procedural matters. However, leadership within the department does not organise sufficient opportunities for teachers to discuss and analyse current practice in their delivery of Key Stage 3 schemes; the effectiveness of various teaching approaches; issues centred on continuity and progression both within and between year groups; and how pupils' results can best be used to modify curricular practice. This process is also needed to increase the effectiveness of development planning as a management tool.
85. Curricular provision is broad and balanced and, through the Key Stage 3 schemes of work, matches the requirements of the National Curriculum. Accommodation is fit for purpose and enlivened by some very good displays of pupils' work. There are sufficient resources for English; they have been augmented by the creation of in-house materials of good quality. There are still some shortages of readers – including anthologies – and books to support pupils' personal reading.

86. Since the previous inspection, resources have improved, although ICT is still not used widely enough. Pupils with low standards of reading for their ages are now receiving excellent support, particularly in Year 7. The appointment of a teacher with primary expertise is helping to boost learning for pupils entering the school. The range of pupils' personal reading across the school is not wide enough nor is the use of drama in English. A large group of Year 9 pupils – all volunteers – act as reading buddies to Year 9 pupils. This is an excellent initiative and reflects the school's aims and its caring philosophy. Other initiatives, such as extension-English, Successmaker, Extra-English Homework Club, Enhancement English, Tuesday Club and the Summer School all help to address pupils' language needs very thoroughly. The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection and provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is stronger. The department's capacity for improvement is sound.
87. The school has centred its provision for literacy largely on the `Core` lessons in Year 7 although there are plans to expand this work more widely across other years and subjects. In terms of literacy provision the `Core` offers a model of good practice. Their teaching base is rich, both in terms of the range of language material available and in the quality of the display that surrounds pupils as they learn. Central to the school's philosophy on literacy enrichment is that the school now feels empowered to help those pupils who enter school with literacy problems and low expectations of improvement. A Summer School for primary pupils about to join the school provides a strong literacy element. Outside the `Core` provision, literacy is pursued with vigour within English and is beginning to be addressed more formally within the other subjects of the curriculum. Reading materials within subject areas are generally well-matched to pupils' abilities. For example, in geography, mathematics and history, worksheets and support materials are seen to have been carefully adapted to match pupils' prior attainment. Literacy provision for pupils with SEN and for pupils with English as an additional language is good.

## MATHEMATICS

88. The attainment of pupils in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 3 is below the national average. Test results at the end of the Key Stage in 1999, although below the national average, were the best on record, having been well below the national average in the previous three years. Test results, which are above average in comparison with pupils from similar schools, indicate an improving trend in line with the national trend. Girls' test results are slightly better than those for boys, compared with the national picture in which boys perform slightly better than girls. Teacher assessments of pupil attainment are very close to those obtained in national tests and the attainment of pupils in lessons matches recent test results. By the end of the key stage most pupils can generate and tabulate data and can interpret information presented to them in graphical and tabular form. They are familiar with the more common geometrical shapes and they can describe the various types of angles and triangles with understanding. In lessons pupils have the opportunity to practise their number skills but weaknesses and carelessness with arithmetic sometimes inhibits progress, even though pupils understand the work being done. All pupils are given experience in each area of the mathematics National Curriculum and work is tailored to meet the individual needs of pupils. For example, in algebra, higher attaining pupils confidently transpose a range of formulae and average and lower attaining pupils solve linear equations of some complexity.
89. The overall attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 is below the national average. Analysis of the last three year's GCSE examinations results indicate that pupils achieve examination grades that at least match the grades predicted by their previous results in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 and that most pupils perform as well in mathematics as they do in their other subjects. In 1999, 34 per cent of pupils gained grades A\*- C, compared with 46 per cent nationally and, over the past three years, results within this grade range have been below the national average. In each of the last three years boys have produced significantly better A\*- C results than girls. In 1999 the proportion of boys achieving A\*- C grades was only one per cent less than the national average and, in 1997, boys' results exceeded the national average by seven per cent. In 1999 the percentage of pupils achieving grades A\*- G, 96 per cent, was the same as that seen nationally. All pupils are entered for GCSE mathematics examinations and over the past three years the number of pupils achieving grades A\*- G has been broadly in line with the national average.

90. Achievement in lessons matches examination results and most pupils demonstrate that they have a satisfactory repertoire of mathematical vocabulary. By the end of the key stage all pupils demonstrate that they can employ a range of statistical techniques to illustrate and analyse statistical data and most pupils adopt a systematic approach to carrying out an investigation. Higher attaining pupils competently use interval centres to calculate the mean of grouped data, and lower attaining pupils are successful in finding equivalent measures relating to discrete data. Average and above average attaining pupils extend their algebraic skills to include the solution of simultaneous and quadratic equations, whilst lower attaining pupils regularly rehearse the stages used in finding the answers to simple equations. Because the work is arranged to meet the different needs of individual groups of pupils, they all experience appropriate levels of work in each of the National Curriculum attainment targets for mathematics. For example, all pupils use `scatter diagrams` to consider the connection or otherwise between two sets of data and the degree of formal analysis and application varies according to the particular set of pupils. As at Key Stage 3 pupils' weaknesses in mental arithmetic, rather than a failure to understand the mathematics, sometimes lead to the production of incorrect or inaccurate answers.
91. The quality of teaching in almost two thirds of lessons seen was at least good, and half of these were very good. Almost one third were satisfactory and only one lesson was unsatisfactory. Teaching was slightly better at Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. All the teachers have a good command of the subject and there is a high commitment to improving the achievements of the pupils. In the best lessons the teachers fully involve the pupils during their teaching, engender a brisk pace and set realistic, timed tasks that are well matched to individual pupil need. They are energetic and ensure that lessons have a structure that builds on previous learning and that consolidation is accompanied by the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. For example, an average attaining group of Key Stage 4 pupils was enthusiastically involved with the teacher in investigating the necessary steps to be taken in solving linear simultaneous equations. The teacher provided work that matched individual pupil need, generated infectious enthusiasm and ensured a balance between allowing pupils to work independently and giving assistance. The teacher's skills and command of the subject included an insight into the difficulties encountered by pupils and, therefore, the facility to measure their progress and promote confidence and self-esteem. The response of pupils was mature and responsible and they were able to competently discuss the extent of their progress and learning. Similarly, a group of lower attaining Key Stage 3 pupils were fully engaged by the teacher's use of a variety of strategies that captivated and sustained the pupils' interest in basic number work. The teacher's ability to understand their difficulties enabled her to promote their learning and progress. In less successful lessons there was a lack of pace and challenge because the teacher did not sufficiently involve the pupils in explaining the work and consequently missed opportunities to develop and share ideas and extend the levels of knowledge and understanding. For example, a higher attaining set of Key Stage 4 pupils, studying quadratic equations, successfully refreshed their memories of a recent lesson devoted to the topic without extending their knowledge and skills to include questions of greater depth and difficulty. Consequently, their potential for reaching the highest standards of achievement was not fulfilled and the teacher missed the opportunity to raise their sights.
92. At both Key Stages the vast majority of pupils are well motivated and they adopt a mature and positive attitude to their work with good levels of sustained concentration. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good and the atmosphere in almost all lessons is characterised by co-operation and harmony. Teachers know their pupils well and, through the provision of tailored work, those with special educational needs generally make good progress. Unsatisfactory teaching occurs when the teacher fails to engage the whole class during the initial stages of the lesson and fails to radiate any enthusiasm for the task. Consequently, the teacher has to replicate the explanations separately on an individual basis. In one such Key Stage 3 lesson, the teacher, whilst providing tuition to individual pupils, was oblivious to the fact that the majority of the remainder of the class were not working at the task set by the teacher and, therefore, neither consolidating nor adding to their knowledge and skills.

93. Although there are many examples of very good quality written work, the presentation of solutions varies from class to class. Learning is occasionally impeded by untidy written work and because it lacks structure it does not foster understanding and retention. More often, and particularly in algebra, a lack of systematic, rigorous presentation inhibits progress.
94. A good start has been made by the department in utilising the extensive database of pupil performance in conjunction with the day-to-day assessment of pupils' work. The creation of individual pupil targets is being included in the department's assessment procedures and the scope and need for further advance is recognised in the department's development plan. The use of information technology to enliven and support learning in mathematics is also a priority in the department's development plan. There is effective and planned programmes for Year 7 pupils, but the provision for other years is not structured to ensure uniformity of experience for all pupils.
95. The head of department provides clear educational direction for the subject and the department is effectively and efficiently organised. Schemes of work fully meet the requirements of the National Curriculum but do not include time scales and assessment levels. Documentation is of good quality, but the lack of insufficient detail leads to inconsistencies by some teachers in applying departmental policies. The monitoring role of the head of department is not of a sufficiently high profile to ensure that good practice is shared amongst teachers and that they all consistently apply departmental procedures.
96. Standards of numerical proficiency across the curriculum range from weak to good at both key stages. A lack of fluency with tables and hesitant mental arithmetic inhibits progress. For example, a group of Key Stage 3 pupils, when calculating the surface area of the plan of a cube, needed to make reference to a tables chart to find the value of six squared. Analysis of Key Stage 4 tests in science show that some pupils' problems are caused by them having difficulty carrying out the necessary calculations. There are many examples of pupils' experience in other subjects being enhanced because of other aspects of numeracy. Measurement skills have a positive impact on pupils' performance in design and technology and in science. Data handling skills are usually satisfactory and effectively used, particularly in geography. For example, Year 10 pupils, working on a project about the new Trafford Centre, show that they understand socio-economic data presented to them in a range of tables, diagrams and graphs. There is no systematic and co-ordinated whole school approach to developing numeracy skills across the curriculum and most departments do not have a strategy for providing the opportunities for pupils to use their numeracy skills. The development of a whole school approach to enhancing pupils' numeracy skills is already included in the mathematics department's development plan.
97. The department has made significant improvements since the last inspection. The marked increase in the quality of teaching is reflected in the improving test and examination results. The strength of teaching and the new scheme of work, developed since the last report, have combined to promote an improving trend. The priorities for ensuring that the momentum for continuing and enhancing improvements is sustained are already included in the department's development plans.

## **SCIENCE**

98. Attainment in science, as measured by point scores in the end of Key Stage 3 tests in 1999, is below the national average for all schools but well above average when compared with similar schools. The percentage of pupils reaching the expected level 5 or above is below the national average and for those achieving level 6 or above is well below. Point scores have shown a rising trend over the past three years. With the exception of 1998, the boys have consistently out-performed the girls at the end of Key Stage 3 for a number of years but a steady upward trend of the girls' results has diminished the gap.

99. The average point score in the 1999 GCSE results for dual award science is below the national average. The number achieving the higher grades of A\* - C is well below those expected nationally whilst those achieving A\* - G is slightly above. The boys perform significantly better than the girls. The trend in GCSE results has fluctuated over the past three years, the best being in 1997 and the poorest in 1998. Relative to other subjects in the school, pupils perform a little less well in science, but are now comparing more favourably than in previous years. Pupils for whom GCSE is considered unsuitable achieve good results in the certificate of Achievement in Science.
100. Observation of work and lessons in the school reflects the standards indicated in the end of Key Stage 3 tests and GCSE results (*below average for all schools but above average for similar schools*). The majority of pupils in Year 9 have a secure grasp of basic scientific knowledge but only a small number have the necessary depth of understanding to gain the higher levels. Pupils of higher prior attainment use the correct scientific terminology to describe the respiratory system and are able to relate structure to functioning. Pupils with middle prior attainment can build and explain simple electrical circuits from written instructions whilst those of lower prior attainment can accurately describe the process of erosion. In Year 11, pupils have made satisfactory gains in knowledge and developed good investigative skills, but relatively few show the depth of knowledge and understanding to gain the highest grades at GCSE. Those with higher and middle prior attainment show a very sound understanding of the way in which elements can be classified and can relate their atomic structure to the ways in which they react. Pupils with lower prior attainment recall earlier work clearly; they describe the parts of a flower and understand their functions. At all levels of prior attainment graphical work is good. It is well analysed and evaluated by the more able, whilst those of lower ability use their information technology skills effectively to represent data.
101. The quality of teaching in almost half the lessons seen at each key stage was very good, and in a further third it was good. There were no unsatisfactory lessons. Good subject knowledge enables teachers to plan their lessons effectively and imaginatively as in one Year 8 lesson where pupils, appropriately prompted by the teacher, were able to use their scientific knowledge to solve problems in a case study of renewable energy. In a Year 9 class, the process of the rock cycle became a lively animated story that captured the imagination of this group with lower prior attainment and effectively promoted their learning and understanding. Most lessons begin with a good review and reminder of previous work that involves the whole class and ensures a systematic build up in their progress. In some cases, however, too much emphasis on the review of work limits the pace of progress. Particularly significant in the teaching at both key stages is the high standard of class management seen in all lessons, teachers expecting and achieving good standards of behaviour. This is certainly not stifling, however, the very good interaction between pupils and teachers so effective in promoting self-confidence and encouraging pupils to think through scientific situations independently. The development of basic skills is interwoven well throughout the teaching of science. For example, Year 9 classes produce a newspaper article on the destruction of Pompeii as part of their study of volcanoes and Year 10 pupils use their numeracy skills to calculate the volume of gas in a bell jar when investigating vital capacity of the lungs. In general, work is well matched to the capabilities of the pupils. This is particularly true in classes of lower attainers. At Key Stage 3, for instance, specially prepared worksheets are used effectively and in some lessons good extra classroom support guides pupils with special needs through the work being done by the rest of the class. At Key Stage 4, teachers have high expectations of pupils taking the Certificate of Achievement course; consequently good work is produced by them and good progress made. Amongst some of the more able groups of pupils, expectations are less demanding and a lack of harder and more challenging work results in insufficient challenge. Throughout all year groups, good investigative practice underpins the teaching of science and, as a result, pupils' investigative skills develop steadily from Year 7 upwards. All pupils are predicting, planning, analysing and evaluating to appropriate levels of sophistication.
102. The very positive attitudes of pupils and their good behaviour in science classes contribute very significantly to their progress. They co-operate willingly with teachers, showing interest and sustaining concentration. They are able to work quietly on their own and can work efficiently and collaboratively in groups.

103. As reported at the last inspection, accommodation and resources are poor. The laboratories are in need of refurbishment; none have sufficient gas and power supplies and there are no operational fume-cupboards in the teaching areas. Noisy water pipes in some of the rooms are very distracting. One teaching area close to the laboratories has been prepared and set aside for information technology; it should provide an excellent resource when the expected computers arrive. There is insufficient science equipment and much of that is outdated. More textbooks are new but there are still barely sufficient of them. The good technician support is rightly valued by teachers but is insufficient for the number of laboratories to be covered. Leadership and management are good, although, as at the time of the last report, there is a lack of further deployment of responsibilities to others in the department. The department is well led with care and support and there is a clear sense of direction. Staff work well together to develop new ideas and assessment of pupils' progress is monitored closely. Quick, well-organised and positive reaction to assessment is helping to improve standards.
104. The department has improved on many fronts since the last inspection. A new and improved scheme of work has been introduced at Key Stage 3, and at Key Stage 4 the introduction of the Certificate of Achievement course has enabled pupils of low attainment to gain accreditation in science. Teaching is now a strength in the department; there is a wider range of teaching styles; more investigative work is taking place; independent learning is better promoted and work is better matched to ability. ICT is being used as effectively as resources allow and a standardised marking system has been developed for all day-to-day assessment. Schemes of work have improved and assessments of potential risks are now in place.
105. Areas for further development include the continued development and refinement of the new schemes of work at Key Stage 3; clearer identification of National Curriculum levels; identification of opportunities for information technology in the schemes of work; improved tracking of pupils attainment and progress using all the assessment data available; monitoring of teaching; more challenging extension work for the more able; further deployment of staffing responsibilities, and improvements in resourcing and accommodation.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT)**

106. By the end of Key Stage 3, the standards of attainment in information and communications technology (ICT) are below national expectations across the range of applications set out in the National Curriculum. Year 9 pupils have developed some capability with word processing, though this remains at a basic level and few are able to combine text and graphics in, for example, simple newsletters or brochures. They draft their stories in English lessons, though this is mainly for presentation rather than editing. Few Year 9 pupils are able to create databases or to explain the ways in which these function and the situations in which they are used. Few can use the Internet as a source of information or to communicate with others using e-mail. Few use CD-ROMs for research, though a number have used a careers database. Most pupils have used spreadsheets to model financial information but they have little recall of the terminology associated with them. The experience many had in primary school of controlling devices such as basic robot vehicles using simple commands has not been built upon. Pupils' achievement at this Key Stage is, therefore, unsatisfactory.
107. By the end of Key Stage 4, standards of attainment are high and achievement is good in the classes where pupils chose to study ICT through to full GCSE level. They are lower than national expectations for the pupils in other ICT classes, and the provision of ICT in other subjects across the curriculum is unsatisfactory. In the 1999 standard teaching assessments in ICT, 43% of pupils gained a level 5 or better. This attainment was below the national figure of 59%. In the 1999 Information Technology GCSE examinations in 1999, over 90% of pupils achieved grades which were in the A\*- C range. This was well above the national average of 52.8%. Results in this examination are generally very good.

108. In Year 11, at the end of Key Stage 4, over forty pupils take Information Technology GCSE as an option. This course supplies them with the skills set down in the National Curriculum. A number of other pupils take a course leading to certification in ICT which does not fully comply with National Curriculum requirements. They do not get a planned programme to teach them the control and measurement strand of National Curriculum ICT. A further group of pupils in this year do not experience any programme of taught ICT at all. The lack of suitable provision for the last two groups of pupils means that the school's curriculum does not comply with National Curriculum Orders in respect of ICT and that pupils in these groups attain standards below nationally expected levels.
109. In the GCSE course, pupils achieve good standards against the examination criteria. Their project work begins with clear and full descriptions of the problems they are tackling. Their analysis is good and they offer a well-considered range of possible solutions. The designs of their chosen solutions to the problems are good and they communicate them well through capable use of a range of ICT skills. Their knowledge and understanding of, for example, the resources they describe in their solutions, is good. They have a good understanding of the need to test their solutions, and their evaluations are considered and comprehensive. In the other ICT courses in Year 11, pupils develop sound skills in word processing, database and spreadsheet use. They use these skills to produce work that satisfies the relevant examination board's criteria. From discussion with Year 11 pupils who do not take the GCSE course, it is evident that their experience of ICT at the school is basic and that standards of attainment are, for these pupils, well below national expectations and overall achievement is unsatisfactory across the key stage. Most can word process and many use desktop publishing packages to produce simple publications that combine text and graphics. A number have the skills to create databases but few have had any experience of using the databases offered on CD-ROMs or the Internet for research. A few use computers to model musical compositions but the potential of software to extend knowledge and skills in art, for example, is unexplored. They have little or no experience of using computers to control or measure external events.
110. The teaching and learning of ICT across the school is unsatisfactory, largely because it is not taking place for most pupils in most year groups in the school. The teaching and learning in the GCSE information technology courses at key Stage 4 is good. The teacher has good subject knowledge that is effectively communicated. He gives pupils independence in lessons to get on with their work but is always on hand offering good quality feedback and direction. He uses question and answer well to challenge ideas and to extend thinking. He has a motivational style of teaching and pupils respond very well to him. The progress they make in covering the syllabus is good and their concentration in lessons shows good learning and a good level of commitment to the subject. The teaching of the Royal Society of Arts and the Enhancement course is sound. Teachers have adequate subject knowledge and have developed good, productive relationships with their pupils. The attitudes and behaviour of pupils are generally good. Pupils work hard during lessons. They organise their work well and their folders are well presented. They are confident and mature in the way they tackle their tasks. The lack of previous teaching of ICT does not inhibit their efforts to improve and they spend a lot of time on the machines at lunchtimes and after school developing their skills. This has a highly beneficial impact on their progress.
111. The school is tackling the lack of ICT resources and has very recently made a substantial investment in new machines. There is no detailed scheme of work for ICT across the curriculum to inform the allocation of both human and ICT resources. The school offers Year 7 pupils a short ICT course which teaches them basic skills. This extends to eight hours over the year. With exceptions such as music at Key Stage 4, there is very little ICT taught in the other subjects of the curriculum, at either key stage, to add to or reinforce the work covered in Year 7, and therefore little contribution from other subject areas to pupils' overall ICT capability. This provision does not extend to Year 8 or 9 and is meagre in comparison to many schools. It means that the opportunity is largely lost at Key Stage 3 to develop basic ICT skills which can then be used to extend learning in the following key stage.

112. Since the last report attainment in the GCSE ICT course has largely remained high or very high. However the school has made little improvement in the provision of cross-curricular ICT. Standards of attainment in ICT at Key Stage 3 have deteriorated from close to national expectations to below national expectations. The assessment procedures being trialled in Year 7 are useful and manageable but overall the assessment procedures for cross-curricular ICT remain unsatisfactory.

## ART

113. Standards in art are not high enough. By the end of Key Stage 3 attainment matches national expectations in the practical areas of the curriculum, but pupils' achievement across the Key Stage is unsatisfactory, largely because their knowledge of the work of other artists is patchy and their ability to evaluate their work is weak. Observational drawing skills are competently developed by the majority of pupils, for example, in work seen on *Hands* and in perspective drawings of the locality. Painting skills in landscape work after Van Gogh are adequate. Design work on silk landscapes is effective with some good quality finished work revealing careful attention to detail, but sketchbooks are not always fully utilised to develop a range of visual records.
114. By the end of Key Stage 4 attainment is below the national expectation. The proportion of pupils gaining A\*- C grades in the 1999 GCSE examination was below the national average. Boys' results were higher than those of girls. Achievement across the Key Stage 4 is unsatisfactory. Whilst there are examples of competent observational drawing work in a topic on *Growth*, only a minority of pupils are able to develop and translate their ideas effectively to other mediums, such as painted sectional details. Pupils' sketchbooks are rarely used to record a wide range of images. Work in folders reveals weak painting skills. In a topic on *Dreams* pupils' work displays limited imagination. In discussion, pupils have little knowledge of the work of other artists and the majority are unable to explain their ideas and the techniques they are using. Some written research is very poorly presented.
115. The quality of teaching is unsatisfactory overall, but with some good features. In all lessons, teachers demonstrate good class control and friendly, supportive and consistent discipline. This is reflected in the positive attitudes pupils demonstrate in art lessons, where they work with concentration and are willing helpers when required. Teachers provide much individual advice and encouragement which develops pupils' confidence and aids their development of technical skills. Teachers provide skilful demonstrations (for example, drawing a face in Year 7) which stimulate pupils' interest, but long-windedness leads to some loss of enthusiasm. However, lessons also lack incisive questioning to ensure that all pupils have a clear understanding of the work required of them. A lesson on *Dreams* moved at too slow a pace, wasted time in sorting out materials and provided limited challenge. The erratic allocation of homework and its lack of detailed marking and comment for improvement gives pupils a confused picture of status of the subject and inhibits pupils' progress. The Key Stage 3 assessment strategy is unclear to pupils. Teaching makes little attempt to support pupils' development of key skills in literacy and none at all in ICT.
116. Pupils are provided with few opportunities for extra-curricular work and there is insufficient display of good quality recent work to motivate enthusiasm and interest in the subject. Whilst the planned and delivered curriculum is well intentioned it misses the rich potential art contains to develop pupils understanding of other cultures. Pupils have no opportunity to generate art work using ICT.
117. Since the last inspection there has been some decline in the standards and teaching quality. Whilst an assessment strategy has been developed and there has been some increase in available three-dimensional work at Key Stage 3, accommodation in the main art room remains inadequate and spaces for display of art work about the school remain limited.



## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

118. Standards of attainment at the end of both key stages are close to national expectations. In the 1999 standard national tests, at the end of key Stage 3, over 56 per cent of Year 9 pupils achieved the expected National Curriculum Level 5 or above. This figure is similar to figures given for the preceding three years, and below the national average of 63 per cent. In their GCSE examinations over 44 per cent of candidates gained A\*- C grades. This was close to but below the national average of just over 48 per cent.
119. From data available, it is evident that ability levels have risen in the school since the last inspection, and that this year's Year 9 are likely to attain levels in the national tests which match national average figures for the proportion of pupils reaching at least level 5. Achievement throughout the key stage is sound. Pupils have a good understanding at all ability levels of the design process and apply it successfully in their work. Within a limited range of designs, they use drawings well to communicate their intentions. They produce proper working drawings and accurately apply measurement and other informative annotations to them. They modify their drawings in the light of the difficulties they confront. Their evaluations of their work are sound and often include a wide range of considerations such as safety, durability and fitness for purpose. Pupils acquire a satisfactory range of skills and a sound knowledge of tools and equipment as they use them in their projects. In textiles, for example, they use modelling techniques and templates to ensure accuracy in the production of their artefacts. In food technology they use analysis of existing products well to inform their final design ideas.
120. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is close to national expectations and achievements throughout the key stage are sound. In food technology, research is extensive and well considered. This is the case when pupils work on case studies which require information relating to special dietary needs. The subjects of their research often reflect needs that are close to the pupils' interests, such as a diabetic relative, and this often provides a richer learning experience by making it more relevant to a particular child. Planning is good and pupils sometimes use ICT to produce well-presented flow charts that help to direct their work. In Textiles there is sound use of planning boards to help generate ideas. Pupils use this approach well to explore colour and pattern combinations. They have a sound knowledge of the properties of materials including insulation, colour take up and flammability. They have good practical skills and use the machines well. They make good use of the limited ICT resources available to them to produce embroidery designs. Pupils studying Graphics Products make good use of ICT to produce drawings that are accurate and well presented. During this course they make significant progress in developing ICT skills. Their research into their projects is satisfactory and draws on a sound range of sources. They are beginning to use the Internet. They make sound use of customer surveys to guide their work and their knowledge and understanding of factors such as ergonomics is satisfactory. In Resistant Materials, pupils gain sound practical skills. In generating their ideas they often draw on ideas that are of immediate interest but this provides the motivation to do well. The presentation of the progress of their design work in their folders is sound.
121. Teaching in lessons seen in design and technology was never less than good in either key stage. In over a third of lessons it was very good. Subject knowledge is a strength of the department. It is evident in the planning of projects and in the interaction and feedback in lessons and helps to promote sound progress. Teachers use expert demonstrations well to give pupils first hand experience of skills and techniques. Teachers know their pupils well and strive to provide learning experiences that motivate them. To this end, the balance of practical and written work is good. Teachers manage lessons well. They are always well prepared and this means that pupils are able to get on with their work straight away. In the workshops and workrooms the pupils are used to well ordered regimes. This means little time is lost and hygiene and safety are maintained. Question and answer techniques are often very good and bring out responses from a wide range of pupils. This helps to give ownership of the work to pupils and to promote good progress. The challenge offered by projects is good. Two examples of this strength are the introduction of mass production techniques in Year 7 resistant materials and in the mini-enterprises in Textiles in Year 10. In both these projects pupils are given a good deal of autonomy to develop their own ideas in the group context. There is consistency in the setting of homework across the key stages and this contributes to good learning.

122. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good at both key stages. Pupils positively enjoy the subject and a good number return after school to finish off work, particularly towards the examination deadlines. They take a good level of pride in the finished products and in the presentation of work in their folders. They listen very well to instruction and this helps progress in ensuring no time is lost. Pupils work together particularly well in groups at all ability levels. They also work well independently.
123. The department is well led and works effectively as a team and this has a positive impact on standards. The work of the department is well monitored by the head of department. Since the last report the department has improved its teaching of the design process and research and investigation are now well taught. The accommodation issues that were raised in the last inspection report have been resolved.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

124. At the end of Key Stage 3, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected levels of attainment in this subject is below the national average. Results in the GCSE at the end of Key Stage 4 are below those achieved nationally and below those achieved in similar schools. In 1997 and 1998, results in this subject were lower than in most other subjects in the school. Boys' performance was significantly better than that of girls. However, in 1999 there was a considerable improvement in the percentage of pupils who achieved grades between A\*- C, although these results came from a very small number of entries. Most marked was the improved performance of girls, which almost reached the average pass rate for all comprehensive schools. In two of the last three years, all pupils entered for the examination have been awarded a pass between grades A\*- G.
125. At Key Stage 3, observations of lessons, together with analysis of current work, show that attainment is now improving and that achievement across both key stages is sound. There is no noticeable difference between the performance of boys and girls. Higher attaining pupils acquire a range of geographical skills and can use statistical techniques to understand and analyse maps. They understand the geographical meaning of specialist vocabulary, study the impact of physical processes and examine environmental problems. For example, in a very good lesson in Year 7, the teacher's provision of stimulating resources and the emphasis on specialist vocabulary enabled higher attaining pupils to describe the relative merits of urban and rural areas and to appreciate contrasting points of view. During a field trip to a local farm, teachers' good preparation and clear directions enabled Year 8 pupils to collect data on aspects of farm organisation and production successfully. They then used information technology to analyse and present their findings in eye-catching displays in the classroom. Pupils are interested in their work and are keen to answer questions in class. However, some have difficulty in producing accurate written answers. More extensive use of summaries and key words to provide a clear framework would help them to organise their information more successfully. The consistent use of informative comments on homework would enable pupils to see exactly how to improve their work.
126. Teachers' very good management of lessons at Key Stage 3, with an insistence on high standards of behaviour, enables lower attaining pupils to concentrate well and understand some of the complexities of the earth's structure. Pupils also produce imaginative work on industrial processes, using role-play to increase their understanding of production techniques. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in their learning. Their self-confidence increases with regular and sensitive support from teachers. Occasionally these pupils have individual help from a classroom assistant so that their achievements are consolidated. Pupils with special educational needs in Year 7 find it difficult to sustain their concentration and to retain their learning, for example on the nature of settlements. They are helped by their teacher's imaginative adaptation of the curriculum and the focus on key ideas illustrated by as wide a variety of activities as practicable.

127. At Key Stage 4, analysis of current work also shows an improvement in pupils' achievement. Pupils maintain their enthusiasm for this subject and display very good attitudes to their work. They establish extremely co-operative relationships with their teachers and are keen to succeed. A good example of this was seen in the decision by some pupils in Year 11 to stay after school in order to have access to specialist help from their teacher in the completion of their coursework. Higher attaining pupils extend their understanding and acquire a wide range of geographical skills. In a very good lesson in Year 10, pupils were given challenging tasks to complete as a preparation for a subsequent field trip. They applied their theoretical knowledge to aerial photographs of a large shopping complex and were able to describe the advantages and problems caused by its development. A small group of lower attaining pupils in Year 10 made very good progress in their ability to cope with the demands of their coursework. An excellent series of revision exercises, together with an excursion into the local environment to identify and record a series of urban transects, enabled these pupils to develop their practical skills and become aware of the standard of work required. Some pupils find it difficult to work independently, particularly in the production of their coursework. Teachers are working hard to overcome these difficulties so that pupils' overall examination performance can be enhanced.
128. All of the teaching observed in this department was at least good and half was very good. The two specialist teachers are very experienced, have very good subject knowledge and high expectations of their pupils. They plan their lessons well, using a variety of resources and teaching methods, so that pupils' interest is maintained. Work is marked regularly, often with helpful comments, and opportunities for extending pupils' learning by the use of homework are seized. Not all homework tasks are completed, however, and there are few signs in pupils' books of the correction of identified errors. Assessment of pupils' progress is achieved by identifying a series of tasks that are marked against criteria agreed within the department. A system whereby these marks are used to set targets, shared with pupils, is gradually being developed. The department provides very good support to non-specialist teachers so that all pupils are provided with experiences of the same quality. Restricted access to information technology limits its use in lessons.
129. The department is well led and managed and its work is well monitored. The head of humanities and the head of geography share their responsibilities successfully and co-operate very well in the day to day running of the department. They maintain their enthusiasm for the subject despite staff shortages, which at times divert them away from their specialist teaching, and having to teach with classroom equipment which is barely adequate.
130. Many improvements have been made since the last inspection, particularly in the development of opportunities for pupils to work outside the school (*fieldwork*) and the increased emphasis on pupils' working and researching by themselves. Schemes of work have been re-organised to incorporate more physical geography, textbooks have been upgraded, and there is more extensive use of geographical vocabulary in all year groups. There is insufficient setting within the lower ability groups.

## **HISTORY**

131. By the end of Key Stage 3, the proportion of pupils attaining the expected levels 5 and 6 is well below the national average and achievement overall is unsatisfactory. By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is below national expectations and achievement across the key stage is unsatisfactory. In 1999 there were no GCSE candidates. In 1998 the number of candidates entered for GCSE was too few to be compared with the national average, but all 18 candidates attained A to G grades and two boys attained A grades.

132. Achievement in history is adversely affected by pupils' poor library skills and close attention is paid to the 'literacy link', particularly in Year 7. In the best taught classes the meaning of words and the need to use precise English is emphasised. Lists of the most used historical words are posted in history rooms. Year 8 pupils compiled a medieval dictionary. Higher attaining pupils write fluently and grammatically as Year 9 individual studies indicate. Inspection evidence indicates that standards are improving, partly as a larger proportion of higher attaining pupils enter the school and partly as a result of sustained good teaching. At Key Stage 3, pupils at all levels of ability are able to select information from several sources in order to answer a question. For example, pupils in Year 8 use accounts by seventeenth century writers to construct their own 'eyewitness' accounts of the execution of Charles I. A class of pupils with special educational needs are able to use the index and contents list of textbooks to find the answers for a worksheet. Pupils are gaining historical skills and have a good understanding of the use of propaganda and censorship. Group work is effective because pupils share out responsibilities quickly and efficiently.
133. There are now GCSE groups in Years 10 and 11. These pupils build on previous knowledge to explain future developments. For example, how England changed from a rural to a urban society and why this necessitated a better transport system. Pupils ask questions and make comments about the topics being studied but are not ready to initiate discussion or to ask questions that would move the lesson along. A high proportion of pupils have a good historical understanding but do not achieve as well as they should, because of poor literacy skills. Pupils make sound progress in working co-operatively and delegating responsibilities. The Roman Feast Day for which Year 7 pupils wear togas and talk about Roman life is another imaginative way of bringing history to life. Scripts written for radio interviews with historical figures, which are then recorded and 'broadcast', require pupils to research and to write so making progress in both skills. For example, Oliver Cromwell and Prince Rupert were interviewed by Year 8 pupils after the Battle of Naseby. A Year 9 group recorded very well written accounts of their journey to new homes as evacuees. Pupils reluctant to contribute in class, happily take part in this project and show the progress they have made.
134. The improvements made are largely the result of good teaching across both key stages. Half of the lessons at Key Stage 3 were good, one in six were very good and one lesson was unsatisfactory. Two thirds of the teaching at Key Stage 4 was good, the other third satisfactory. At Key Stage 3, most teaching is clear and direct so that pupils understand what is required of them. A Year 7 class asked to consider the legacy of Rome, efficiently sorted out cards which contained, for example, information about the legal system and the influence of Latin in today's language. In the end they reversed their original opinion. As in other well taught lessons their progress in learning was checked at the end of the lesson and they were pleased with their new knowledge. Some teaching is vivid. The attention of the class is held and their enjoyment is evident. For example, a class studying the Great Fire of London became groups of reporters in a newsroom ready to receive and deal swiftly with reports on the fire delivered to them at intervals. The teaching method made the learning relevant because it was put into a context the pupils understand and find attractive. Skilful and patient questioning is a strength of the department. The teachers provide a secure framework but the information is drawn from the class. Classes are invariably well managed and lessons usually well planned. Occasionally, teaching is over-directive and pupils who have a contribution to make are frustrated. One class worked hard but to little effect because, although they knew what they were expected to do, the material they were working on needed more explanation from the teacher and the exercise was too long drawn out for them to sustain concentration. On the rare occasion when a teacher is not secure in knowledge the lesson is pedestrian and too dependent on worksheets. Since the department is keen to provide the right level of teaching for pupils with special educational needs good materials which match pupils' abilities are produced. The teaching is pitched at the right level to keep pupils fully involved. Information is simply expressed and historically accurate. Pupils understand the devastating effect of civil war upon a country. Pupils increase their historical knowledge and hone their skills. Well-organised revision lessons reinforce learning and develop examination techniques.

135. The curriculum meets statutory requirements. The GCSE syllabus will change to a twentieth century option next year as one of the strategies to attract more pupils. Access to information technology rooms during teaching time is limited by timetabling difficulties, but the department has its own computers for use by staff and pupils. Groups finishing projects have lunchtime sessions. History rooms are well kept. Wall displays and corridor displays of artefacts in cabinets are attractive and relevant. Displays of work in the Year 7 open plan area are striking.
136. The department is progressive and forward looking, committed to improving pupils' academic performance and to ensuring their enjoyment of the subject. Its work is well monitored both by the head of department and the head of humanities. Teachers are making positive efforts to attract more pupils. The introduction of more academic controversy, such as the consideration of disputes between professional historians on particular issues, could stimulate the interest of higher attaining pupils. Relationships between pupils and with teachers are very good. Courtesy and good humour is evident. A very pleasant working atmosphere is generated. There is at present no history specialist and the composition of the team available to teach history changes each year. Thorough, detailed schemes of work provide good guidance, as with a portfolio of Key Stage 3 work being built up to provide standards against which future assessments can be measured. Target setting has been introduced at Key Stage 4.
137. Since the previous inspection the use of historical sources is more effective and the department's development plan has a clearer structure, more firmly linked to whole school priorities. The use of ICT is still too limited and the recruitment of a specialist teacher of history remains a school aim as soon as circumstances allow.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

138. Pupils' attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 is below national expectations as reflected in teacher assessment results, but the 1999 results are an improvement on previous years' results. GCSE results in French in 1999 were well below the national average in the proportion attaining at least grade C, but 99 per cent of a large entry of pupils attained grades A\* - G, with an increased number of pupils obtaining grade D. Girls attain higher standards than boys, in line with the national trend. The small number of pupils who opt to do Spanish as a second modern foreign language attain standards which are commensurate with their age and experience.
139. Achievement across key Stage 3 is satisfactory overall. At Key Stage 3, listening is the best developed skill because pupils hear the foreign language spoken frequently in lessons. Most pupils, including those with special educational needs, understand the gist of what their teacher is saying to them in the foreign language and they can identify main points and specific details when they hear recordings of native speakers. Many pupils can use familiar vocabulary and phrases for basic communication but many have difficulty in retaining knowledge and they lack the confidence to speak spontaneously from memory. Few pupils speak French with really good pronunciation but pronunciation in Spanish is reasonably good. Most pupils show understanding of short texts and dialogues made up of familiar language but the range of reading is limited to coursebooks and worksheets. Most pupils copy and combine words and phrases accurately and by the end of the key stage higher attainers produce short pieces of writing in which they convey information and opinions in simple sentences.
140. Achievement across Key Stage 4 is satisfactory overall. Higher attaining pupils show understanding of short narratives, conversations and extracts of spoken language spoken by native speakers drawn from a variety of topics. They are used to their teachers using the foreign language consistently in the management of lessons. Many can respond spontaneously with reasonably good pronunciation but few show confidence and independence in using the foreign language outside controlled classroom situations or attempt longer utterances from memory. Many pupils show understanding of their class textbooks but there is little evidence of independent reading. Higher attaining pupils produce accurate pieces of redrafted writing of good length on a range of topics.

141. Two thirds of lessons seen were good and almost equal proportions of the rest were very good and satisfactory respectively. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen. Teachers have very secure knowledge and understanding of the language(s) they teach. A strength of many lessons is the confidence and consistency with which teachers use the foreign language extensively both as a medium of instruction and for classroom interaction, enabling the pupils to make sound progress in their understanding of the spoken language. This is a significant development since the last inspection. There are more opportunities for pupils to communicate in French, although in some lessons insufficient time is devoted to intensive oral practice aimed at speaking spontaneously from memory. Teachers have very high expectations of pupils, including those with special educational needs, and they set challenging but appropriate tasks. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives and contain a series of linked activities involving a combination of skills. Teachers make good use of a range of resources although there is little evidence of information technology being used as an integral part of learning. Teachers have good relationships with their pupils to whom they offer frequent praise and encouragement.
142. The rate of learning in lessons is good. This is because most pupils display positive attitudes to learning a foreign language and because they respond well to the support they receive from their teachers. Pupils are well-behaved, co-operative and courteous in lessons. Most participate willingly, often enthusiastically, in a variety of language activities and they sustain good levels of concentration and perseverance. In some lessons a minority of pupils become restless and lose concentration but teachers manage classroom behaviour well to ensure that pupils' progress in lessons is not retarded by unacceptable behaviour or attitudes.
143. The curriculum for modern foreign languages is broad and balanced and fully meets statutory requirements. Assessment procedures for pupils following the GCSE modern language course at Key Stage 4 are satisfactory but pupils are not sufficiently involved in assessing their own work at Key Stage 3.
144. The department is managed and administered by an experienced linguist who provides sound leadership and educational direction for a hard-working team. The department handbook contains details of policies and working procedures but, as was the case at the last inspection, arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the work of the department remain too informal. The staff of full and part time qualified linguists are well-matched to curriculum needs. The accommodation is good and there is a cheerful environment for learning languages. Learning resources are still inadequate. For example, the provision of good quality course books is unsatisfactory thereby restricting the scope for homework tasks and opportunities for independent study. There is no TV or video recorder in the department and the cassette recorder is in need of replacement.
145. The department has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection. Strategies to raise standards are taking effect, such as a greater emphasis on the use of the foreign language in lessons. There are, however, areas where there is a need for further development; namely assessment procedures at Key Stage 3, the more formal monitoring and evaluation of the work of the department, learning resources and regular access to information technology.

## MUSIC

146. The standards of attainment towards the end of Key Stage 3 are above that expected for this age group. Pupils develop very good listening skills which informs their performance and composition work. The majority recognise and explain changes in music such as instrumentation, rhythm and harmony and relate these to mood. They use these skills to good effect in their compositions. Achievement is satisfactory at this Key Stage. In Year 9 work on a given brief, pupils confidently work in groups on a percussion piece and develop and refine their ideas with evident thought and imagination. All pupils manipulate keyboards and maintain their part in ensembles. Singing work is assured. A minority lack confidence in evaluating their ideas.

147. Of the small cohort taking the GCSE examination in 1999 the proportion achieving A\*-C grades was below the national average, but all candidates achieved at least grade G. Boys results were higher than those of girls. The standards of attainment towards the end of Key Stage 4, in the work seen during the inspection, are at least in line with national expectations, with several pupils above the national expectation. Achievement is also satisfactory at this Key Stage. The majority of pupils have good levels of general musicianship. Listening skills are well developed and pupils can identify and articulate a range of technical details including rhythm, key, harmonic change, instrumentation and style-period. They perform with interpretative skills appropriate to their levels on a range of instruments, including guitar, voice, clarinet and bagpipes. The majority can devise effective compositions in a popular song format, often with sophisticated syncopation, and write up their ideas in neat notation. Some use ICT to generate interesting ideas and to provide printed scores.
148. The quality of teaching is at least good at both key stages and at Key Stage 4 it is very good. Teachers are well-qualified musicians with confident performing skills which are fully utilised to inspire and motivate pupils. The use of clarinet and trumpet in aural training is particularly effective in developing keen listening skills. Teachers' singing and keyboard skills are also fully used in class lessons and set standards to which pupils can aspire. In a Year 9 composition lesson the teacher set high expectations using a pictorial brief as stimulus and breaking the lesson into short sections demanding evaluative feedbacks and progressive performances. This ensured concentrated skills development from all pupils. Teachers set high standards of behaviour and are friendly, supportive and consistent in their approach. As a result, pupils demonstrate very good attitudes to the subject and are keen to learn. Assessment and homework are well planned and pupils have a clear understanding of their competencies and what is needed to improve them. Teachers play their full part in also helping to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills as part of their teaching of music.
149. The subject is well led, including effective informal monitoring of the teaching in the department. The curriculum is effectively devised to ensure that all areas of the subject are fully integrated in all lessons to produce a well-rounded musical education. Class work is enhanced by a range of extra-curricular groups, concert and visit opportunities. The *Tongues of Fire* ensemble has a large membership and is a credit to the school. The quality of music making provided in assemblies is exemplary. All these activities significantly impact on the quality of pupils' personal experience.
150. There is an adequate range of resources and pupils benefit from the performing spaces provided by two good-sized classrooms. ICT is not used sufficiently to enhance the music curriculum at Key Stage 3.
151. Since the last inspection music has consolidated its very good standard of teaching and there has been some increase in pupils' standards of attainment. Opportunities for the study of world music remain modest.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

152. The attainment of all pupils by the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 is in line with national expectations. Many pupils by the end of Key Stage 3 achieve higher than expected, and by the end of Key Stage 4 the proportion of pupils exceeding the national expectation is far greater.
153. Examination courses are a very strong element of the Physical Education (PE) curriculum. GCSE results show a very significant improvement since the last inspection. The A\*-C pass rate rose from 65.4 per cent in 1997 to 86.7 per cent in 1999. A notable feature of this success is a 100 per cent A\*-C pass rate in 1999 for girls. There has been 100 per cent A\*-G pass rate for the last two years from an entry of one quarter of the whole year group. The proportion of either A\* or A Grades is well above the national average, as is the A\*-C rate.

154. Pupils across Key Stages 3 and 4 are achieving higher levels than expected. The achievements of boys and girls is on a par with each other. However, pupils with special educational needs (SEN and/or English as an additional language (E.A.L.) achieve better than expected due to the department's documented and successfully implemented policy of including them in all activities. The consistency of achievement across the key stages is an improvement on the last inspection, as is the consistency now being achieved with the teaching and learning.
155. Teaching is a strength of the department at both key stages. There were no unsatisfactory lessons at either key stage. Of the ten lessons seen, two were satisfactory, three were good and five very good. This has a great impact on the productivity in the lessons, enhances the learning environment and promotes significant pupil achievement in all lessons. Teachers are secure in their knowledge and understanding of the subject, and in their teaching of physical skills. The effectiveness of their teaching styles and methods is good. This is very apparent in the quality of the skills the pupils learn and develop. This was demonstrated in a Year 11 rugby lesson by the impressive way in which the boys tackled, ran, passed and handled the ball. The high level of skill development was also apparent in a Year 10 mixed, indoor hockey lesson where the accuracy, control and speed of passing were to a well above average level high level. At Key Stage 3, Year 7 pupils are beginning to compose sequences of movement on the floor and apparatus, and pupils in both Year 7 and 8 express their more creative side in dance lessons where the theme of clowns is explored. Teachers' high expectations, combined with their enthusiasm and very good management and control of classes, produce lessons where pupils work very hard and extend their intellectual and physical capabilities a great deal. This was apparent both in a Year 8 mixed basketball lesson, where the pupils were defining skills, and in a Year 10 core games lesson, where rugby and hockey skills were proficiently demonstrated with enthusiasm and effort. All lessons have good pace. Lesson aims are met and high levels of productivity are achieved. The vast majority of pupils, of all abilities, learn and make good progress in all lessons. This is apparent, for example, in the rate at which pupils develop skills, gain in knowledge of Health Related Issues, as seen in a Year 11 GCSE theory lesson, and in their understanding of body movement.
156. The department is developing effective assessment procedures centring on individual pupils' abilities to plan, perform and evaluate. This process is helping teachers to know what their pupils are capable of, at the same time as helping pupils to become independent learners and to display initiative in all activities at Key Stage 4 and in dance and gymnastics at Key Stage 3. This is an encouraging development and an improvement on the last inspection.
157. The very good range of extra-curricular activities and fixtures are a strength of the department. They are open to all and are appreciated by pupils and parents alike. Many pupils go on to gain school and town representative honours. This gives higher attaining pupils an opportunity to maximise their potential, which then assists the other pupils to progress further in the lesson situation, in particular the more able and talented pupils.
158. Pupil's attitudes to learning are very positive throughout the school. Pupils are very well behaved, enthusiastic, demonstrating real enjoyment for the subject (*the department's foremost aim*). The pupils levels of attention, concentration and co-operation are most commendable. Relationships between pupils and with staff are very positive, which all adds to a positive, productive and effective learning environment.
159. The curriculum meets statutory requirements at both key stages. Time allocation is tight at Key Stage 4, which makes it difficult to cover all National Curriculum requirements in the mainstream PE lessons. There is a wide range of activity in the GCSE programme. A reason for the high success rate, because the wide choice promotes the pupils strengths. Dance and Judo lessons take place in the evening. Detailed schemes of work are in place. The department is well managed and organised. All policies and procedures are well documented. There is clear educational direction and vision. Department aims are being met. Staff are good role models, work well together, are very committed and giving generously of their time. The newly qualified teacher is well supported. Staff in-service training reflects quality rather than quantity. The accommodation is good and displays featuring pupil achievement enhance the learning environment. This is a very good department which has the capacity to move forward.



160. Good improvements since last time include: clearer assessment procedures and a costed department development plan with clear allocations of responsibilities. There is a broad range of activity at both key stages, which is an improvement since the last inspection, when there was too much games. Health and Safety procedures are in place, although risk assessment data needs to be more evident in the department's documentation.