

INSPECTION REPORT

DOWNEND SCHOOL

Downend, Bristol

LEA area: South Gloucestershire

Unique reference number: 109321

Headteacher: Mrs H Penge

Reporting inspector: Mr M Dobson
5898

Dates of inspection: 27 – 30 March 2000

Inspection number: 186398

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

© Crown copyright 2000

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

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 - 19

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Westerleigh Road
Downend
South Gloucestershire

Postcode: BS16 6XA

Telephone number: 01454 862300

Fax number: 01454 862301

Appropriate authority: Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr D Stevens

Date of previous inspection: November 1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mike Dobson	Registered inspector	Sixth form	What sort of school is it?
			How well are pupils taught?
			How well is the school led and managed?
			What should the school do to improve further?
Glyniss Tyrrell	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development.
			How well does the school care for its pupils?
			How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Rod Spinks	Team inspector		The school's results and pupils' achievements.
			How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
Ann Malcolm	Team inspector	English English as an additional language	
Phil Clayton	Team inspector	Mathematics	
Christine Thompson	Team inspector	Science	
Lorraine Small	Team inspector	Design and technology	
Tony Berkeley	Team inspector	Information technology	
Steve Jones	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
Dave Perrett	Team inspector	History	
Steve Rogers	Team inspector	Geography	
John Thirlwall	Team inspector	Art	
Geoff Thomas	Team inspector	Music	
Chris Matthews	Team inspector	Physical education	
Paul Bellingham	Team inspector	Religious education Equal opportunities	
Gill Henderson	Team inspector	Special educational	

		needs	
--	--	-------	--

The inspection contractor was:

Staffordshire and Midlands Consortium

Mr I H Jones
Kingston Centre
Fairway
Stafford
ST16 3TW

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

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

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7 - 12
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	13 - 16
The school's results and achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?	16 - 18
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?	18 - 21
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	21 - 22
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS	23
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	23 - 26
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	26 - 28
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	29 - 34
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	35 - 59

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Downend is a large 11 - 18 mixed comprehensive school situated on the outskirts of Bristol. It has recently been designated a Technology College. There are 1435 pupils on roll, of whom 157 are in Years 12 and 13. In some sixth form courses students are educated with students from four other schools in a consortium with a local college. The current admission number is 258 and the school is over-subscribed. Almost all pupils are of white United Kingdom ethnicity and a very small proportion speak English as an additional language. Approximately 14% of pupils are on the register of special education needs, of whom 35 have statements. Of the pupils on the register many have emotional and behavioural difficulties. Just under a third of the school's population comes from across the border in Bristol. Because of changes in the admissions policy this number has reduced in 1999. In the three years before 1999 pupils entered the school at age eleven with levels of prior attainment in National Curriculum tests below the national average. In 1999, attainment at age eleven more closely matched the national average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The achievement of pupils aged 11 – 14 is broadly typical and standards at GCSE are close to the national average. Only a small amount of teaching is unsatisfactory, and in more than six out of ten lessons observed it was good or better. The requirements of the National Curriculum are met. Because of the consortium with other schools students can take a wide range of Advanced level GCE or GNVQ courses. Tutors and heads of year know their pupils well, and the amount and quality of information provided for parents is good. Downend is an effective school which provides satisfactory value for money. Governors and senior managers have a clear vision of how the new technologies can improve pupils' learning, and are enthusiastically committed to the school's specialist status.

What the school does well

- Good teaching is a strength of the school, and not confined to a particular year group or subject. Teachers have good subject knowledge, plan effectively, have high expectations, use a wide range of classroom strategies and manage pupils well.
- Pastoral support for pupils is good, and the emphasis on personal development is a strength of the school. Most pupils come to school eager to learn and to participate in lessons. They are well behaved, polite to each other and to adults, and show respect for property.
- There are particular strengths in the breadth and range of sixth form courses, including vocational education.
- The recent refurbishment of science, humanities and the learning resource centre and the building of the sixth form block have had a positive impact on the quality of provision for pupils' learning.
- As a result of its successful bid for specialist school status, the school has invested effectively in information technology as a tool of learning.

What could be improved

- There are inconsistencies in the quality of teachers' marking and their comments in pupils' books. Many pupils do not know how to improve their work or the standards they might achieve.
- Pupils' attendance in some upper school classes sometimes falls below 90%, and some older pupils are not regularly punctual.
- Some of the accommodation and resources, particularly on the lower school site, are unsatisfactory and some lessons take place in non-specialist rooms. The present arrangements for the school day on the split site and the present timetable make heavy demands on staff and pupils.
- The use of information technology is inconsistent across the different subjects, and its planning and delivery are insufficiently monitored.
- Some of the school's development plans are imprecise, some targets are cautious, and the quality of teaching is not systematically monitored through classroom observation.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in November 1995. The quality of teaching remains a strength of the school. The school has not been able to sustain the rapid rise in examination results between 1993 and 1995. At GCSE standards have been rising more slowly than previously and more slowly than nationally; at A-level standards continued to rise until 1997 but then dropped back.

The key issues, which were small in number, have been addressed. Arrangements to determine funding for faculties have been revised; curriculum requirements in design and technology and religious education have been met.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with				Key
	all schools			Similar schools	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
GCSE examinations	C	C	C	C	well above average A average B above average C below average D
A-levels/AS-levels	C	D	D		well below average E

In Years 7 to 9 pupils' achievement is broadly typical. They are on course to attain or exceed the nationally expected standards in all subjects. They have the appropriate knowledge and understanding in the different subjects; they have the underpinning literacy and numeracy skills. This judgement is based on a scrutiny of work seen, observation of lessons and conversations with pupils.

Over the last three years overall standards at GCSE have been close to the national average. The trend, although rising, has been rising more slowly than nationally. This is because fewer than average pupils gained the highest grades A* and A. In 1999 the proportion of pupils who gained 5+ GCSE A*-C grades was above the national average and well above the average for similar schools. Particularly good results were obtained in history, geography and design and technology. Recent improvements are likely to be maintained. This judgement is based on lesson observations, scrutiny of work and conversations with pupils.

At A-level students' average points score is below the national average. If account is taken of their GCSE attainment prior to entry they achieve at least what might be expected. Results in a variety of GNVQ courses are good.

The school publishes targets for pupils' performance at GCSE. The inspectors' view is that these targets are cautious and insufficiently demanding. The school has already begun to build up a detailed bank of information about pupils' attainment and progress. Insufficient use is made at present of the resource to raise expectation and aspiration.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Most pupils come to school keen to learn and to participate in lessons and other activities. They are interested in their work and concentrate well.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Most pupils are well behaved, are polite to each other and to adults and show respect for property. Behaviour around the school is good. There is a small minority of pupils whose behaviour is challenging, and sometimes disrupts lessons.
Personal development and relationships	This is a strength of the school. Pupils appreciate opportunities to show initiative and take responsibility. They discuss experiences articulately and often show mature attitudes. Tutors know them well and pupils value their advice before making choices about courses or careers.
Attendance	Attendance overall is satisfactory and there has been some recent improvement. In some classes, particularly Years 9-11, attendance falls below 90%. The school feels that figures are particularly affected by an identified group of pupils.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

In English teaching seen was almost always sound and in half the lessons it was good or better. In mathematics teaching was good. In science teaching seen was always at least satisfactory and in three quarters of the lessons it was good or better.

Good teaching is a strength of the school. It is not confined to a particular subject or key stage. 95% of the teaching seen was satisfactory or better; 64% was good, very good or excellent; 5% was unsatisfactory. The skills of literacy and numeracy are well taught. The teaching in school meets the needs of its pupils, including those with special educational needs. Pupils' achievements are at least satisfactory. Their progress is restricted for several reasons. They are not set clear targets about how to improve. Insufficient use is made of homework. Information technology is insufficiently used to help learning. Most important their progress is inhibited by the poor accommodation and resources at lower school, complicated by the difficulties of the split site.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school curriculum for all pupils meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. The time allocated to the different subjects is appropriate and the full programmes are taught effectively. The range of courses in the sixth form is very good.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory. Arrangements for teaching are satisfactory; some teaching is excellent; most pupils leave school with GCSE qualifications.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for personal development is a strength of the school. The quality of care for the individual is good. Provision for pupils' moral and social development is good; their cultural understanding is satisfactory. Provision for spiritual development is not always satisfactory. Assemblies do not always provide an opportunity to reflect on broadly Christian values and time is not taken in registration for reflection. Within lessons spiritual development is satisfactory, but not consistent across subjects.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Pastoral care is a strength of the school. Tutors know their pupils and their circumstances well. Pupils and parents feel they can turn to the school if they have concerns or anxieties.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The senior managers have a clear vision of the future opened up through specialist school status, but some management practice is unsatisfactory because it lacks rigour and precision. There is insufficient evidence from their minutes that governors have appraised the work of the headteacher and her deputies and set them performance targets. Within job definitions for faculty co-ordinators there are lists of tasks and responsibilities but no directly related criteria by which they are held accountable.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are enthusiastically supportive of the school, fulfil their responsibilities, and are important players in shaping the future of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school has a rich store of information about pupils' progress between key stages, but does not yet use it effectively to plan courses and classroom strategies. The school has policies to improve provision and raise standards but reports to governors do not regularly evaluate the quality of teaching.
The strategic use of resources	The refurbishment of the upper school site has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning, as has the recent acquisition of information technology equipment. Some accommodation and resources on the lower school site remain unsatisfactory. The school manages the budget carefully. Governors understand and apply 'best value' principles; finances are in good order and systems efficient.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They feel comfortable about approaching the school with a problem. • Recent improvements to buildings and faculties. • Teaching is good and staff are approachable. • Incidents of bullying are quickly settled. • Profiles of pupils' achievements are helpful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistencies in how tutors follow up issues of attendance, punctuality and permission to leave the site. • Homework is too variable up to the age of 14, and there is too heavy a load of GCSE coursework. • Some parents feel they are not kept well informed. • Some parents feel they do not know about the range of activities outside lessons.

Inspectors were able to endorse all of the strengths identified by parents in their questionnaires and at the parents' meeting. Inspectors agree with concerns raised by parents about homework and the school routines to monitor punctuality or attendance. These concerns have become issues the school has to address in order to improve further, and will feature in the governors' action plan. Inspectors feel, however, that information for parents is good, and that the school works hard to keep parents informed.

It has to be noted that this survey is based on a small number of returned questionnaires. Only a small number of parents attended the parents' meeting.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

- 1 In 1999 in National Curriculum tests the percentage of pupils who gained the expected levels in English and science at the end of Key Stage 3 was below the national average, but close to it in mathematics. The percentage gaining the higher Level 6 was close to the national average in all three subjects. In comparison with similar schools standards in all three core subjects were below the average. The trend of the last three years has been below the national trend, with a slight decline.
- 2 Inspectors, however, now judge that pupils' achievement in Years 7 to 9 is broadly typical of what is expected for pupils of that age. They base their judgement from an analysis of work seen in lessons, from a detailed scrutiny of past and present, and from discussions with pupils themselves. Achievement in English is in line with what is expected; in mathematics it is in line but already improving beyond that; in science it is close to what is expected. In information technology standards are typical of what is expected of fourteen year olds. Overall a significant majority of pupils are on course to attain or exceed the nationally expected standards in all subjects by the end of the key stage.
- 3 In the 1999 GCSE and GNVQ examinations, pupils attained standards which were above the average for the percentage attaining 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C and close to the average for the percentage gaining 5 or more GCSE grades A*-G. The average points score for pupils, both boys and girls, was close to the average. In comparison with similar schools the percentage of pupils attaining 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C was well above the average and the other measures close to the average. Over the last three years standards on all measures have been close to the national average and the trend has been rising but more slowly than nationally. Fewer than average pupils attain the highest grades A* and A.
- 4 In the 1999 GCSE examinations attainment in English was close to the national average in language but significantly above for literature. Pupils generally gained higher results in English than in the other subjects they took. In mathematics attainment was below average for the proportion of pupils attaining grades A* to C but above average for those attaining grades A* to G. In science the proportion of pupils attaining the full range of grades A* to G and the higher grades A* to C was above the national average. Boys' attainment in science was significantly above the national level, although girls did less well. In the other subjects of the curriculum attainment is more varied. Particularly good results were obtained in history, geography and design and technology. In geography significantly more pupils attained the highest grades A* and A, than was found nationally. In religious education pupils attained standards in the full GCSE course which were below the national average whilst in the short course they attained standards well above the national figures. In modern foreign languages pupils attained standards which were in line with the national averages overall, but girls did less well than found nationally whilst boys did well in French. Standards in physical education were generally in line with the national picture although girls

attained lower standards than the boys did.

- 5 From observation of pupils' work in lessons in Years 10 and 11, a scrutiny of past and present work, and discussions with pupils themselves, inspectors judge that the recent improvements are likely to be maintained. The proportion of pupils on course to attain standards at the end of the key stage in the A*-C grade rate is judged likely to increase. Achievement is good in history, geography and design and technology; in English, science, physical education and modern foreign languages it is average; in mathematics and art it is still just below what might be expected.
- 6 In the sixth form in the 1999 GCE A-level examinations, students' average points score was below the national average, as it has been since 1997. Numbers of students in some groups has been small. If, however, account is taken of students' attainment in GCSE examination prior to entry to the sixth form they achieve at least what might be expected. There is a wide variation between different subjects.
- 7 Pupils who have taken national assessments and tests entered the school with below average levels of attainment. In particular there have been fewer than average higher attaining pupils. The evidence from standardised tests for pupils at present in Years 8 and 9 shows a similar pattern. At Key Stage 3 pupils make satisfactory progress to attain standards just below national averages. Progress at Key Stage 4 is good so that pupils attain standards above the average for similar schools. The average points score at GCSE remains below the national average because of the lack of A* and A grades. Students in the sixth form make good progress when account is taken of their GCSE grades on entry.
- 8 Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and attain the targets set for them. Many attain a GCSE qualification by the end of Key Stage 4 and there are opportunities for their attainment to be recognised through other accredited courses.
- 9 Pupils' achievements are at least satisfactory because of the good teaching they receive. Their progress is restricted, particularly at Key Stage 3, for several reasons. In many subjects pupils are not set clear targets so that they do not know what they have to do to improve. (The school has made a start on this development but it is a priority). Insufficient use is made of information technology in several subjects to help pupils learn independently and insufficient work is set to be done at home. The poor accommodation and resources at lower school, complicated by the difficulties of the split site, have a negative impact. Finally, the school sets targets for pupils' attainment at the end of key stages based on a range of data including cognitive ability tests. In the judgement of inspectors the targets are cautious and insufficiently challenging, particularly for mathematics.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

- 10 At Key Stages 3 and 4 most pupils come to school keen to learn and to participate in lessons and other activities. They display an interest in their work and concentrate well. They are well behaved in the classroom, polite to each other and to adults and show respect for property. Behaviour around the school is good. There is a small minority of pupils who come to school and lessons late; they do not settle to work and

they disrupt learning for others. The numbers of exclusions is high (but not excessive) because some pupils have been excluded several times.

- 11 Pupils appreciate opportunities to show initiative and to take responsibility. Lower school pupils enjoy being asked to think and learn for themselves in their lessons while Year 9 pupils appreciate their day as receptionists in the main foyer of the upper school. Pupils also work as responsible members of a school council. Pupils also appreciate their involvement in producing the school magazine. Pupils displayed the ability to organise their own work and to work independently within lessons during the inspection. Students regularly visited the well stocked library to undertake focused, independent work either in lessons or out of school.
- 12 Pupils were able to discuss their experiences at school articulately and most were able to recognise their own strengths and weaknesses in particular subject areas. In some lessons pupils displayed the ability to discuss and consider ideas and to accept other people's points of view. Pupils often show mature attitudes to controversial issues. There was no evidence of bullying observed during the inspection and most pupils felt that it was not a serious problem at school.
- 13 In those sixth form lessons observed, attitudes and behaviour were never less than good and sometimes excellent. Students showed interest in their work, offered sensible opinions and asked and answered questions intelligently. They were extremely polite to each other and to adults, including visitors. In many lessons observed, students displayed the ability to plan and organise their own work and were able to study without supervision when required. Students form constructive relationships with one another and with adults and are able to reflect on social and moral issues. For example, a group of students giving a presentation on their findings in connection with a GNVQ health and social care project displayed mature and sensible opinions about various controversial subjects.
- 14 Most parents who attended the parents' meeting felt that behaviour at the school is mainly good, with some concern expressed at the standards outside school at lunchtimes. The majority of parents who returned questionnaires are happy with behaviour although a significant minority disagreed.
- 15 The average figure for attendance across the school in the autumn term was just below 92%. Attendance in some tutor groups is very low. Figures for the lower school are satisfactory but in the upper school the attendance last term in almost one third of tutor groups was less than 90% and in one group it was as low as 82%. The rate of unauthorised absences in the upper school was also high and exceeded 7% in two tutor groups. The school and the educational welfare officer feel that the figures are particularly affected by a group of pupils from a neighbouring education authority. Data were not available to confirm this opinion. Absence or non-participation was particularly obvious in some physical education lessons. Punctuality at the upper school is also unsatisfactory. A minority of pupils arrive late in the morning and drift into registration or assembly throughout the session. Many pupils leave the site at lunchtime and again a minority arrives back late in the afternoon.
- 16 The school has worked hard in previous years to address these issues which were

raised in the last report. There are obvious difficulties in the management and organisation of a large school where staff have to leave tutor groups to go to start lessons on a different site. The difficulties are recognised, but the evidence from the inspection is that the agreed routines to check punctuality and attendance are not rigorously and consistently enforced. The school recognises also that there is a small minority of disaffected pupils, and has made appropriate plans to address their needs. These plans have not yet been put in place.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

Teaching

- 17 The quality of its teaching remains a strength of the school. In 1995 the quality of teaching was sound or better in 89% of lessons observed, and good or very good in almost half of them. Good teaching was seen in all subjects and year groups. In this inspection 95% of lessons were judged satisfactory or better. Out of more than 160 lessons inspected 35% were judged good and a further 27% very good or excellent. Again good teaching was not confined to a particular year group or subject, including the sixth form.
- 18 This good teaching has its basis in teachers' confident knowledge and understanding of their subject and how to present it in the classroom. This good subject knowledge shows itself in different subjects. In modern foreign languages teachers use the target language consistently and confidently. In English teachers can inspire students with their infectious enthusiasm for literature. In several subjects in the humanities their command of the subject material enables them to help pupils appreciate different sides of an argument. It often develops, as in design and technology and science, from the shared sense of purpose in the subject team.
- 19 Teachers' confidence in their subject is then complemented by good teaching of basic skills. For example, in history, geography and modern languages, low attainers in particular use writing frames and word banks to develop confidence and expertise as writers. In design and technology pupils use writing frames in the design and evaluation process, but also learn how to read numerical information in tables and charts.
- 20 This good teaching grows out of effective planning and shows itself in effective classroom methods. Teachers use clear explanation and skilful questions to whole classes to help them, particularly in history and geography, make links, devise hypotheses, and reflect on causes. In English teachers skilfully integrate reading, writing, speaking and listening through a mix of whole-class and small group work. In information technology lessons, teachers use demonstrations to the whole class but in addition they, and sometimes other students, tutor individuals to help them become confident, independent users of the new technology. A consistent feature of these good lessons is a clear structure and logical progression. There are lessons like this in all subjects. Good lessons usually begin with a clear statement of objectives which are revisited at different points and re-emphasised in the final summary. There were particularly good examples of this seen in mathematics and information technology.

- 21 Other consistent features of good teaching are the high expectations teachers have of their students. This shows itself in the demanding tasks set pupils and the supportive mentoring of individuals to help them achieve high standards. There were successful examples in business studies and GNVQ courses.
- 22 A consistent feature of good teaching is good management of pupils' behaviour. In the majority of lessons the atmosphere is orderly, efficient and purposeful, characterised by good humour, the use of praise, and a concern for the individual. There is evidence also that the skilful teaching of information technology skills allows individual pupils in science and humanities to improve the quality of their learning.
- 23 Within the learning support department teaching seen was always satisfactory and sometimes excellent. The activities set pupils with special educational needs are sufficiently challenging. Learning objectives are identified and shared, and individual help is targeted effectively. Teachers' work is complemented by support assistants who work with individuals and support them in class. Good behaviour strategies are employed, but a small minority of pupils require a high level of adult intervention to stay on task. In general relationships between students and adults are very good, so that attention and motivation are sustained. The high levels of structure and support in these lessons results in some students lacking opportunities to extend their own ideas and taking greater responsibility for their own learning.
- 24 In those lessons where teaching is judged satisfactory and in the small number of unsatisfactory lessons the above strengths are balanced or outweighed by weaknesses. Examples of weaknesses are instructions which lack clarity, work which does not challenge, lessons which drift without a sense of urgency, insufficient challenge for high attainers and insufficient support for low attainers. Other weaknesses are unsatisfactory conclusions to lessons, particularly if there has to be a ten minute 'cover', too much time spent on tasks such as colouring or pasting, and writing tasks (such as note making) where students have not been given a clear model of how to undertake the work.
- 25 There are, however, several underlying weaknesses evident in many lessons. Teachers' use of ongoing assessment is unsatisfactory at Key Stage 3. In general teachers' comments in pupils' books do not show them what they have to do to improve. Targets are not consistently used. Where there is a marking policy it is used inconsistently and pupils do not understand the codes. There is little evidence in pupils' books of National Curriculum levels being used to help pupils understand what they should be achieving or how to improve. There are some examples of better practice at Key Stage 4 but they are in the minority. In design and technology course work there is evidence of diagnostic comments and pupils' evaluation, in English GCSE course work there are comments against clear assessment criteria, in GNVQ assessments students are shown clearly how they can improve.
- 26 The second weakness is the use of homework. About a third of parents who responded to the parents' questionnaire felt their children did not get the right amount of homework. The evidence from conversation with pupils is that there is inconsistency (even in the same subject) of how much is set and when. Few schemes of work detail homework tasks. In pupils' books it is not evident what is done in class

and what at home. The use of the planners is sporadic. The evidence from lesson observation is inconsistent. There are examples of appropriate homework tasks but too often homework, if set, is to complete work begun in class. These weaknesses in assessment, marking and the use of homework detract from the generally good levels of teaching in the classroom. They result in pupils typically making rather slower progress than might be expected from their generally positive response to the substantial levels of good teaching they experience.

Learning

- 27 Apart from the weaknesses noted in the last paragraph, there is a clear correlation between the quality of teaching and the quality of learning. There is some evidence that where the lessons lack pace, variety and challenge, pupils lose interest and standards of behaviour deteriorate. Such lessons are not confined to any one subject, but there were examples of lower sets in mathematics where teachers' lengthy expositions resulted in pupils' loss of concentration and consequent poor behaviour. In general, across both key stages and sixth form, students made good progress in their knowledge, skills and understanding within a subject in more than 60% of lessons seen, and satisfactory progress in almost all. They make better progress when lessons have pace and variety based on teachers' careful planning and depth of knowledge. There is evidence also, particularly in information technology and design and technology (but not confined to these subjects) that where students acquire the skills in information technology they need to become independent learners the quality of their learning improves. Across subjects there is no consistent policy in use of information and control technology as a tool for independent learning.

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

- 28 The school provides a curriculum for all pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 which meet the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum. The time allocated to the various subjects is soundly balanced and ensures that the full programmes are taught effectively. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 includes an element of choice for pupils, and an effective range of procedures for advising them on choices has been established. These are judged to be very good by pupils and parents. The school does not, however, systematically survey uptake of subjects in Key Stage 4 in order to plan for the future. It does not analyse and report issues such as the following. 'Why do few high attainers take drama?' 'Why is no music running in Year 10?' 'Why do some pupils find the written demands of vocational courses different from what they expected?'
- 29 The school works well in co-operation with four other schools and a college in providing for sixth form education. Students have access to twenty-seven different GCE A-level courses and a number of GNVQ courses. These courses are delivered across the schools and the college; and students fully support this approach. They recognise that they have a wider range of subject choice than normally found in school sixth forms. Entry to the sixth form and the choice of subjects is well managed and students are well supported. The management of the consortium is effective and the co-operation between the different institutions is good.

- 30 There are a wide range of extra-curricular activities most of which are well supported. The wide range includes competitive sports teams for boys and girls, a drama club, musical groups (bands etc.), a science club, Eco-warriors as well as homework clubs. All these activities enhance and enrich pupils' learning experiences and sustain their positive attitudes towards school.
- 31 The school provides good support in the subjects of the curriculum for the ongoing development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. There were some good examples seen of the use of writing frames in history and geography in Key Stage 3; and pupils regularly used their mathematical skills in science and design and technology. There were good examples of how information technology can be used to improve the quality of pupils' learning in science and humanities, but little in music and English.
- 32 There is a good, well-delivered programme of personal, social and health education, which provides elements of sex and drug education. This programme is delivered through the weekly tutorial lesson for all pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4. Within this programme a structured careers element is included and pupils in Year 9 were particularly appreciative of the support this programme gave them in making their subject choices for their GCSE programme in Key Stage 4. For pupils in Year 11 the programme for moving into the sixth form consortium is very effective and the numbers of students joining the sixth form is increasing. A good range of support and advice on further and higher education opportunities is provided for sixth form students.
- 33 The curriculum is delivered through a timetable which has thirty periods per week. Within the planned programme there are some double lessons which last for an hour and forty minutes. These double periods are too long for effective learning in some cases, and pupils often have difficulty sustaining their concentration for the whole time. This is particularly noticeable in physical education and science. In addition on both sites of this split-site school, ten-minute 'travel cover periods' have been introduced to enable staff to move from one site to the other to teach. Whilst such movement is kept to a minimum, where it occurs it reduces specialist teaching time for some pupils on both sites and negatively affects the progress these pupils make. The teachers do work hard to overcome the difficulties of setting work for ten minutes at the start or end of a lesson but pupils' work rate and concentration are clearly affected. This procedure impacts upon the education of pupils in all year groups including the sixth form.
- 34 Pupils' groupings within the timetable also affects their education. There are instances of setting in some subjects, which then affect the grouping of pupils for other subjects. For example, pupils in Year 10 who select physical education as a GCSE optional subject are unable to follow the course to take the higher-grade GCSE examination in mathematics. Within the timetable there are also a significant number of split classes where two teachers share the teaching of a set or group. This reduces the effectiveness of teachers and also reduces the progress pupils make. It is especially noticeable in mathematics in Years 7 and 8.
- 35 Senior managers do not monitor sufficiently the impact of decisions about the timetable and its structure on the progress pupils make and the standards they achieve

in the subjects of the curriculum. This lack of analysis is particularly important with regard to the ten minute travel cover programme. Although most pupils are only affected a few times each week, their overall teaching time is significantly reduced, and there is some evidence of a negative impact on pupils' behaviour and concentration.

- 36 The school has a published programme for homework in all year groups. Pupils have planners in which to record their homework. However, the use of homework to support learning is very variable. For pupils in Key Stage 3 homework is not set regularly in all subjects. For pupils in Key Stage 4 there is a contrast between the limited amount of ongoing homework and the high GCSE coursework commitment for some pupils. There is no effective system for monitoring the amount or quality of the homework set for pupils in Key Stages 3 or 4. In the sixth form ongoing work to support work in lessons is regularly set and appropriate time scales given for completion, which develops students' capacity for self-study.
- 37 The provision for pupils' spiritual development is not always satisfactory. Where assemblies are held they are variable in quality, and opportunities for pupils to reflect upon broadly Christian values are inconsistent. The school does not provide for an act of collective worship each day for all pupils and tutor time is not systematically organised to allow pupils to pause and reflect. There are, however, many opportunities within lessons for pupils to develop their spiritual understanding. Teachers expect pupils to make personal responses to the work they are doing and to recognise the actual or intellectual beauty of the subject material presented. For example, in a science lesson on food pupils were expected to consider both religious and lifestyle choices regarding diet and express a personal view. In religious education lessons the programme covers six main religions and pupils have opportunities to study the beliefs of others and to explore their own. Within lessons spiritual development is satisfactory.
- 38 The school has a strong moral code, and pupils are expected to both know right from wrong and to behave accordingly. There are many opportunities for pupils to explore moral issues and decisions within the curriculum. For example, in religious education lessons in Year 9 pupils explore the moral issues concerning human rights and in physical education the importance of fair play is part of most lessons. Provision for moral development is good.
- 39 Pupils' social development is good. Pupils have many opportunities to work co-operatively in lessons such as in science practical work and teachers often use group - work as part of their teaching strategy. Pupils often collaborate to produce joint responses to ongoing work in music. In the sixth form students regularly present their own ideas to the rest of the group and then discuss their findings in great detail. Pupils respond well to one another generally around the school and respect each other's views. They are polite and caring towards one another. There are some good opportunities for pupils to consider issues of citizenship in some lessons; and some good examples were seen in geography.
- 40 Provision for cultural development and understanding is satisfactory. Pupils have opportunities to study six religious traditions in the religious education programme. In many lessons reference is made to other cultures, for example, the study of African and

Indonesian music, consideration of Indian culture in English and a study of French and German lifestyles and food in modern foreign languages. Pupils learn about their own local area and trips and visits extend their knowledge and understanding of their own and other cultures.

- 41 The school has developed some good links with local industry, which involve mostly technology and information technology. Most pupils have opportunities for work experience and during the inspection some sixth form students on a GNVQ course were on work experience. This give pupils good opportunities to learn about and develop their understanding of the world of work.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

- 42 Pastoral support for pupils is good. Each pupil and their family background is well known by their tutor and head of year. Pupils are happy that they would know whom to turn to with any problems. Most parents feel that their children are happy at school. Tutorial and personal and social education lessons are sometimes well used as occasions to discuss personal and wider issues.
- 43 Arrangements for child protection are appropriate. The designated person is one of the deputy headteachers. She has received training in this area and liaises closely with the appropriate outside agencies. Some members of staff are not aware of the identity of the designated person, but would approach a member of senior staff if they had any concerns. Information in the staff handbook is very limited and supply staff do not receive any guidelines regarding child protection procedures, but members of staff new to the school receive information as part of the induction process. There has been no recent staff training in this area.
- 44 The school is aware that attendance rates in some tutor groups are unsatisfactory. They work closely with the educational welfare officer to address this but there are, in the school's view, some difficulties in liaison with the neighbouring education authority. The school actively discourages the taking of family holidays during term time, through letters, information in pupil planners and a system of completing request forms which is deliberately time-consuming and complicated. Attendance registers are usually completed correctly, although there are some instances of family holidays longer than the permitted ten days being marked as authorised absences. The number of pupils arriving late both in the morning and after lunch contributes to difficulties in identifying the number of pupils actually present at registration periods. Some parents also feel that the school does not contact them quickly enough regarding absences.
- 45 The school has systems in place to promote good behaviour and a programme of sanctions to deal with unacceptable standards. These systems are not, however, used consistently across the school by all staff, and some pupils interviewed were well aware of this. There are inconsistencies in the quality of registration periods. Some tutors used the time well to discuss pastoral and school issues, but some tutors did very little. No tutorial was observed in which there was opportunity for reflection on spiritual issues. There are no systems to monitor the quality of tutor time. There are inconsistencies in teachers' performance when they have to cover a lesson for ten minutes to allow a colleague to travel to another site. Some parents who attended the

parents' meeting felt that they were not clear about the values promoted by the school, although expectations of pupils' attitudes and behaviour had been identified in the recent home/school agreement. Most parents feel that any bullying is dealt with swiftly and efficiently.

- 46 A significant number of pupils on the register of special educational needs have emotional and behavioural difficulties. There are strong links between the special needs co-ordinator and heads of year to make appropriate arrangements and give the high level of adult intervention they need in order to minimise disruption. The school plans to appoint a mentor to work with these pupils and their families.
- 47 The school has established efficient procedures to address matters of general health and safety. There are fire drills once a term and emergency equipment is tested and maintained regularly. Accident books are completed regularly and there are regular risk assessment tours to determine any particular hazards. The business manager also liaises frequently with the caretakers on both sites to deal with day-to-day problems. Several minor health and safety hazards were pointed out to the school by inspectors and these are being addressed. Several members of staff have received first aid training. Some parents who attended the parents' meeting expressed a concern that there are insufficient checks as to whether pupils have parental permission to be off-site at lunchtimes.
- 48 Tutors take seriously their responsibilities for monitoring pupils' academic performance and personal development. The quality of care for pupils is a strength of the school. Pupils also appreciated the quality of advice they received before making decisions about choice of subjects in Key Stage 4, or choice of courses in the sixth form. Reports to parents show a perceptive understanding of pupils' academic progress by their teachers. Tutors are at an early stage of using information from standardised tests to raise pupils' aspirations of what they might achieve, and of setting them academic targets.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

- 49 Most parents are supportive of the school. As part of the inspection a survey of parents and carers was carried out, but only 13% of questionnaires were returned. Of those returned most felt their child likes school, make good progress, and is being helped to become more mature and responsible. There was concern from some parents about the insufficient amount of work to do at home. At the parents' meeting some parents felt that homework was inconsistent and not marked effectively.
- 50 The amount and quality of information provided for parents are good. There is an informative prospectus and the governors' annual report to parents gives clear information about recent events at school. There are, however, a number of statutory omissions from this report, including sufficient detail about action taken by the school since the last inspection. Most parents feel well informed about how their child is

getting on at school, although a significant minority disagree with this view. After examining evidence provided by the school and after discussions with members of staff, the inspection team is of the opinion that information about progress is good. Written reports are detailed and often give thoughtful advice. There is a good programme of formal meetings for parents to discuss these reports and any other matters. There are useful pupil planners which are intended as a regular means of communication between the school and parents but their use is sporadic, more successful in the lower school than the upper. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are kept thoroughly informed and involved in reviews of their children's progress.

- 51 The school pays careful attention to letters and cards sent to the headteacher or staff, whether of praise or concern. They do not, however, systematically survey parental opinion about the quality of the education they provide.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

- 52 The previous report complimented the innovative, supportive leadership of the headteacher, and good support from governors. It noted, however, less satisfactory leadership by some middle managers.
- 53 Strategic oversight remains good because of the continuing hard work by governors, headteacher and staff. A vision for the school and a statement of values are, for example, clearly set down in the preamble to the school's development plan. The prospectus invites parents to share that vision and sign up to the statement of values. The plan begins with targets to improve pupils' attainment and the progress they make, to develop the curriculum, to enhance resources, to clarify structures and communication, and to improve students' welfare. These targets are appropriate for this school at this time. The bid for specialist school status adds statements about "technologically enriched learning" and "innovative use of technology". The original aims are expanded in planning sheets from each faculty, and the additional aims from the specialist school bid in plans from mathematics, science, design and information technology. All this is good practice and carefully worked through.
- 54 Some of that strategic vision is reflected in good operational practice. The school's emphasis on pupils' welfare is substantiated in lesson observations. In two-thirds of lessons observed, pupils' attitudes and behaviour were considered good or better. Leadership is evaluated as strong and management as skilful in several subjects, including design and technology, music, physical education, religious education, geography, history, mathematics and modern foreign languages.
- 55 Some operational practice lacks sufficient rigour and precision. Faculties operate with a good deal of independence. Some, like science, have a clear sense of shared purpose; others, like the arts, are a convenient grouping of similar subjects. Senior managers act as consultants to faculties to help them move forward and agree targets for improvement. Formal communication is satisfactory. Minutes are kept in working groups and faculty meetings and notes from meetings between faculties and senior managers indicate points for action and staff responsible. There is an emphasis on informal communication to share information and good practice. There is a lack of

structured evaluation. The school faces intractable difficulties in managing the logistics of the split site against the need to make the timetable and curriculum more efficient. External consultancy is likely to be engaged. The school has made important plans for improvement in the organisation of the school day and the structure of the timetable, but has not built into those plans from the beginning how they will be evaluated. Within the school's overall development plan, targets and success criteria often lack precision and it is unclear when, how and by whom they will be evaluated. Within the development plan, which is part of the bid for Technology College status, targets are more precise. Within job definitions for faculty co-ordinators, there are lists of activities and tasks which they should undertake, but they are not directly related to success criteria by which, as managers, they can be held accountable.

- 56 Governors are enthusiastically supportive of the school, excited by the possibilities of specialist school status, and eager to build links with the different faculties. The chair in particular has entered into the day to day operations of the school. The governors have established an appropriate committee structure with delegated responsibilities so that full debate can take place in smaller groups. Only recommendations which have been properly scrutinised come to the full governing body. They have in place all the procedures to fulfil their responsibilities in respect of curriculum and financial planning and the school's responsibility to care for pupils. They fulfil their statutory responsibilities, except that there is insufficient evidence from their minutes that they have appraised the work of their headteacher and set her performance targets. They have set tasks for the deputy headteachers to complete and specified the expected outcomes, but have not set down measurable success criteria.
- 57 As part of its responsibility to monitor and evaluate its performance, the school is committed to building up a detailed bank of information about each student's attainment and progress. That computerised process is well under way, is accessible to all staff, and the possibilities of how to marshal and interrogate that evidence are being actively explored with both subject teams and year tutors. It is seen by senior staff as a means to challenge teachers' and students' assumptions and expectations. It is good practice.
- 58 The school has also completed a detailed analysis of examination results with each faculty; it has accumulated information about the value the school adds as students move between key stages or between GCSE and A-level. Again this is a rich store of information, but faculties are at varied stages of using this information in planning improvements in what they teach or how they teach it. The action plan from English is an example of good practice to be shared. Most plans remain vague about how improvement will be measured; and there are no clear systems by which evaluations are to be reported.
- 59 In order to share good practice in teaching, action plans from faculties within the school development plan have included opportunities for senior managers and members of different subject teams to visit each other with an agreed observation schedule. The school does not yet, however, monitor the quality of teaching systematically and formally. The school intends to do so once the national regulations and guidelines are in place, but the present lack of rigour and precision are a weakness.

- 60 The school manages its budget carefully, and has recently appointed a business manager to free senior management for other tasks. Governors understand the 'best value' principles and have used them before making major spending decisions in information technology. Finances are in good order, and systems efficient. The recommendations of the last audit (about detailing information on pupil numbers and the inventory) are being implemented. The school is, however, concerned that when all resources, staffing and premises costs were met in 1998/99 it had only 4% of its income available for development and innovation. In these circumstances the recent move to specialist status has financial attractions. The school has to operate on two sites that are some distance apart. Governors consider the split site allowance insufficient to fund the necessary duplication of resources. They realise that the income per pupil is high compared with similar schools, as is investment in learning resources, but rightly argue that the demands of the split site eat into these advantages. The contact ratio is high and governors are concerned by the demands on staff to travel between sites. Sixth form provision is extensive but does not drain resources.
- 61 There are short-comings in accommodation which have an adverse impact on the quality of teaching and learning, some of which remain from the previous inspection. At upper school the refurbishment of science and humanities (plus the creation of a sixth form block) has had positive advantages, but accommodation at lower school in several subjects (notably mathematics, geography, music and design and technology) is unsatisfactory. Physical education facilities are unsatisfactory. In science and music too much teaching takes place in non-specialist rooms. Groups of subject rooms lack a clearly defined identity.
- 62 Staff are all appropriately qualified. The school has recently had as a policy to appoint committed subject specialists to move the curriculum forward, and has appointed also some part time staff in order to extend the range of post-16 subjects. The school has a costed in-service programme matched to the priorities of its development plan and seeks to evaluate the impact of its training. The newly qualified teachers have an induction tutor and after classroom observations, are set targets for improvement. The recent creation of a training room with information technology facilities is an important innovation in a school with specialist status where the use of information technology is weak in some subject areas.
- 63 The school achieves standards which are satisfactory. If account is taken of their prior attainment, pupils generally make at least sound progress; and their personal development is a strength of the school. Almost all teaching is at least satisfactory, and about six out of ten lessons are good or better. Arrangements for care and guidance are sound, and information for parents is good. The school has made satisfactory progress since the last report and looks forward to the advantages of its new status as a Technology College. The school is committed to equal opportunities. There are some counter balancing weakness. The school manages its budget carefully but has not overcome the difficulties imposed by the split site and some deficiencies in accommodation and resources. There are difficulties with the organisation of the curriculum and the structure of the timetable. The school is judged to provide satisfactory value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

64 Downend is an effective school with more strengths than weaknesses. In order to build upon recent improvements the governors, headteacher and other key staff should seek to:

- i) Continue to improve the quality of accommodation and resources. This should include an annual action plan which shows what improvements are planned, how they will be financed, how best value will be achieved, and how the improvements on standards will be evaluated. [9, 61, 78, 108, 134, 155, 165]
- ii) Improve the effectiveness of all plans at whole school and faculty level in order to raise pupils' standards of achievement. This should include specifying in the plan:
 - who does what, when, and to whom they are accountable;
 - how information will be shared with those who need to know;
 - how the quality of teaching will be monitored in that development in order to share good practice;
 - measurable success criteria which can be monitored and, where appropriate, included in job definitions;
 - the time scale for the production of the evaluation report to governors. [9, 28, 55-59, 102]
- iii) Improve the effective use of lesson time. This should include:
 - minimising the number of travel cover periods and monitoring the quality of teaching and pupils' behaviour in those which are unavoidable;
 - consulting widely on different options for the arrangement of the school day and construction of the timetable, implementing one option for a given period, and having in place previously agreed means to evaluate the impact of the decision;
 - improving provision for less motivated older pupils. [33-35, 45, 118, 156]
- iv) Improve the teaching of information and communication technology across the curriculum. This should include:
 - extending the in-service training programme for all subject specialists;
 - requiring each faculty to show in its curriculum plans how and where information technology skills are taught;

- monitoring the implementation of those plans and evaluating the impact on standards in the subject through reports to governors.
[9, 27, 142, 173]
- v) Improve the implementation of whole school policies on homework and marking, assessment and target setting. This should include:
- monitoring the implementation of homework policies already agreed through surveys, questionnaires and consultation with parents;
 - requiring each faculty to show in its planning what homework is set, and monitoring its quality;
 - revising present policies on assessment and target setting so that both faculties and all students know their targets and progress towards them.
[25, 26, 35, 84, 114, 115, 152]
- vi) Improving pupils' punctuality and attendance. This should include:
- monitoring the effectiveness of registration time;
 - monitoring the completion of registers and the follow up of absences;
 - analysing the level of unauthorised absence and, where appropriate, seeking co-operation with the other local education authorities to make improvements.
[15, 44]
- vii) In addition, the school should take steps to ensure that the statutory requirements for a daily act of worship and the teaching of religious education in the sixth form are met. [37]

The numbers in brackets relate to the main paragraphs of this report where these issues are mentioned.

65 PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	197
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	51

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
6	22	35	32	4	1	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1278	157
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	135	N/A

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	35	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	205	1

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	22

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	23
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	32

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.4
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.3
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	1999	135	120	255

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	60	85	66
	Girls	80	67	52
	Total	140	152	118
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	55 (46)	60 (54)	47 (49)
	National	65 (65)	59 (59)	56 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	22 (20)	32 (29)	18 (23)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	79	74	86
	Girls	91	65	69
	Total	168	139	155
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	66 (56)	55 (55)	61 (66)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	24 (22)	25 (18)	26 (25)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	102	107	209

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	50	89	95
	Girls	55	104	105
	Total	105	193	200
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	50 (47)	92 (88)	96 (92)
	National	46 (45)	91 (90)	96 (94)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	37.4 (34.6)
	National	37.8 (36.8)

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	6
	National	N/A

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	33	18	51

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	14.7	11.5	13.5 (16.3)	1.8	1.7	1.8 (2.2)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (17.6)	2.7	2.8	2.8 (2.8)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	27	100%
	National		N/A

International Baccalaureate		Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all they studied	School	0	0
	National		N/A

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	15
Indian	7
Pakistani	18
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	6
White	1382
Any other minority ethnic group	5

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other	4	
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	77	8
Other minority ethnic groups	12	

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	83.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	10
Total aggregate hours worked per week	210

Deployment of teachers: Y7– Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78.1
---	------

Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	24.8
Key Stage 4	23.5

Financial information

Financial year	1998
----------------	------

	£
Total income	3,392,724
Total expenditure	3,358,361
Expenditure per pupil	2,499
Balance brought forward from previous year	112,077
Balance carried forward to next year	146,440

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1435
Number of questionnaires returned	193

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	32	57	9	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	39	48	9	2	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	14	58	17	3	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	16	50	23	9	2
The teaching is good.	20	60	8	1	11
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	20	51	22	5	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	41	49	5	3	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	42	48	6	1	3
The school works closely with parents.	18	48	20	6	9
The school is well led and managed.	27	53	8	2	10
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	28	59	8	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	20	39	17	4	19

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

ENGLISH

- 66 In the three years before 1999, pupils entered the school with levels of prior attainment which were below the national average for English. At the end of Key Stage 3 in National Curriculum tests the percentage of students attaining Level 5 or above has been in recent years below the national average and below average in comparison with schools with similar intakes. In GCSE examinations at the end of Key Stage 4 the most recent results for English are close to the national average for English and above average for English literature. In spite of some fluctuations, the average performance in GCSE English and English literature in the previous three years has remained slightly above the national average, though by a smaller margin than that recorded at the last inspection. Results in A-level English literature have remained below average, continuing a trend noted in the last inspection report.
- 67 The English faculty responded to the 1999 results with an effective action plan which appears to be having an impact on standards. Attainment in lessons at the end of Key Stage 3 is now close to national expectations for pupils at this stage. In speaking and listening activities, pupils contribute confidently and fluently and, when given the opportunity, can speak appropriately and use Standard English. Most pupils read confidently and with understanding. Strong responses to literature, including Shakespeare, characterise work at this key stage. For example, in a Year 9 top set class, pupils were able to comment on the dramatic impact of a scene from *'Romeo and Juliet'* and in a bottom set were able to discuss the feelings of the main character in Anne Fine's *'Flour Babies'*. The best narrative and descriptive writing is often based on an analysis of a particular genre, shown in the successful building up of suspense in some well-structured ghost stories. The quality of non-fiction writing is weaker. Newspaper reports, for example, often do not include essential information in their opening paragraphs and are sometimes written in an inappropriate style. In some classes, there is too great a discrepancy between the quality of coursework assessment pieces and everyday work, and control over paragraphing and technical accuracy varies and is sometimes dependent on individual teachers.
- 68 At the end of Key Stage 4 attainment matched or exceeded national expectations in most of the lessons seen, mainly top and middle sets. Many pupils are confident in discussion and often mature in their expression, for example, in discussions in a top Year 11 set about the effects of metaphor in a poem and in a middle set about the arguments for and against banning boxing. Written assignments on set texts are well-organised and presented, show good knowledge of the text and, especially in the work of more able pupils, demonstrate the ability to discuss language using appropriate critical vocabulary. Weaker students, in writing about set texts, generally structure and present their work carefully though their insights are less well-developed and their style of writing less assured. In the sixth form, the addition of an A-level language course to the existing English literature provision has doubled the numbers studying A-level English. Students in A-level groups can sustain discussion of challenging topics and the quality of their independent research is high. A good example was one student's investigation of differences in the pronunciation of English by non-native speakers.

- 69 By the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4, able pupils make good progress in English. However, the progress of middle and low attaining pupils is more variable with some teachers more successful in inspiring, supporting and challenging pupils than others. Pupils with special educational needs generally make progress commensurate with their abilities and some make good progress. There is some evidence that progress in Year 8 slows down in response to insufficiently challenging work, but improves again in Year 9.
- 70 Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are generally good. They are rarely less than satisfactory. Most have positive relationships with their teachers and each other. They are confident in asking questions and in volunteering answers. In a few middle ability groups, however, pupils need constant checking to keep on task and occasionally show a lack of self-discipline which offers a challenge to the patience and authority of the teacher.
- 71 In the great majority of the lessons observed, teaching was sound or better and in over half of the lessons it was good or very good. It was rarely less than satisfactory. In successful lessons teachers prepare and plan thoroughly; they use a variety of approaches to learning in well structured, well paced activities; they question skilfully so that pupils have time to reflect and then extend their initial answers; they share with pupils the objectives of the lesson. In the best lessons they have an infectious enthusiasm for the subject which motivates and inspires pupils. Where teaching is less successful, although still satisfactory, less is expected of pupils and the use of a limited range of teaching strategies sometimes means pupils are less actively engaged in the work. Sometimes this involved the setting of writing tasks without making explicit what pupils need to do in order to achieve a high standard. There is little evidence of redrafting skills being taught and pupils are uncertain about what they should do with the spellings their teachers have corrected.
- 72 The curriculum meets the demands of the National Curriculum for English and all pupils of all abilities benefit from it. Assessment policies are clear and generally well-observed. However, while marking is usually conscientious, some teachers are more successful than others at setting clear targets which will help pupils to improve their work. Few opportunities are offered for pupils to develop information technology skills in their English studies.
- 73 The leadership of the English faculty is sound. With support from the senior management team and members of the faculty, issues raised in the last inspection report have been addressed. There have been improvements in teaching, in assessment and in the quality of the English curriculum offered to pupils with special educational needs. Though some progress has been made, work on improving non-fiction writing remains a priority for the faculty at Key Stage 3 and more rigorous monitoring procedures are needed to ensure consistency of practice.

Literacy

- 74 Work on literacy across the curriculum has begun well, stimulated by a successful

summer school. Pupils read reasonably fluently and confidently and are developing reading for information skills. Standards of writing across the curriculum are satisfactory, and good in geography, where writing is particularly well-supported. While key words are identified in several subjects to help pupils with the spelling of technical terms, the marking of spelling is not consistent across the curriculum.

Drama

- 75 Standards at Key Stage 3 are unsatisfactory. Pupils do not develop the maturity and basic skills to cope with the expected improvisation and discussion of emotions. Results at GCSE since the last inspection have fluctuated, with 43.5% grade A*-C in 1998 and 84.2% grades A*-C last year. Group sizes and gender balance within groups have also varied from year to year. GCSE pupils are of a wide ability; the most able maintained character and role, used the voice well, had good perceptions of the use of space, gesture and audience and were able to improvise successfully in small groups. Very few pupils, at any key stage, were able to command a large space. Sixth form results are broadly typical, with a predominance of grades C-E. The present Year 12 students are also of mixed ability, with some students struggling to read at sight with accuracy or understanding.
- 76 At Key Stage 3 teaching is satisfactory. In the good teaching there are shared objectives, consistent use of control signals, sensitive, effective interaction and explanations, and stimulating subject matter. There are, however, no monitoring procedures to ensure that those who teach very little drama have the same expectations, and are able to use the same conventions and procedures so their pupils reach the same standards.
- 77 Teaching at GCSE and A-level is very good. The teacher has a very good knowledge of the subject, plans effectively and has produced a well thought out series of workbooks and schemes. Expectations of pupils are high, teaching methods very effective, and management of pupils very good.
- 78 The subject is well led and there is a range of extended curriculum activities. Learning and attainment are, however, adversely affected by the accommodation problems on both sites.

MATHEMATICS

- 79 In the 1999 Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests the numbers who gained the standards expected for 14 year olds was just below the national average and below the average for similar schools. More boys than girls attained that standard. In lessons observed, however, many pupils' achievement matched what is expected for their age. Pupils in Year 9 were confident in trigonometry in the higher groups and in middle groups showed an impressive ability to design statistical experiments to test an hypothesis. Until this year more pupils than the national average entered Key Stage 3 with results in National Curriculum tests below that expected for their age. Most make at least satisfactory progress. In Years 7 and 8, more able pupils too often repeat material from their primary school and this restricts their progress. Some pupils make limited progress because lessons lack pace and clear structure.

- 80 At Key Stage 4 the number who gained A*-C grades was below the national average. The numbers who gained A*-G grades was above the national average. More pupils are entered for the examination than happens nationally, which is admirable policy, but their average points score is declining. Pupils' achievement in top sets is very good, but their achievement in some middle and low sets is unsatisfactory. Achievement for these pupils is unsatisfactory because they find it difficult to sustain concentration when lessons are poorly structured, lack pace and do not engage their interest.
- 81 Students' A-level results are a major strength of the subject. Over the past four years there has been a 100% pass rate, and the proportion who gain grades A/B is well above the national average. If account is taken of their GCSE scores on entry these students made good progress. In lessons there was evidence of good achievement when, for example, students used information technology skills to establish standard algorithms for themselves.
- 82 The quality of teaching is inconsistent. At Key Stage 3 it is good overall, but even here there are inconsistencies in quality across the faculty; at Key Stage 4 it is satisfactory, but again some unsatisfactory teaching was observed; in the sixth form it is good. Where teaching is good teachers have a good subject knowledge and established warm and supportive relationships with pupils. Teachers helped their pupils make most progress when learning objectives were shared at the beginning of lessons, and when they summed up together at the end what they have learned. Good provision is made for pupils with special educational needs either in withdrawal groups or sets which are smaller than average. Teachers are particularly good at supporting pupils who find difficulties with the skills and knowledge of the subject. In the unsatisfactory lessons long expositions at the beginning of the lesson meant that pupils could not remember the details presented, lost concentration, and there were some instances of poor behaviour.
- 83 There are difficulties with the organisation of the subject. In Year 8 there are some split classes which means in some cases differences in teaching style and different expectations of pupils. On some occasions a non-specialist has to take part of the lesson because of cover arrangements for teachers to travel to the other site. On some occasions little work is completed in these parts of the lesson.
- 84 There have been improvements since the last inspection and there are strengths in the faculty. Number work is very good; algebra is strong across the key stages; the pupil database is well used. The head of department leads effectively and has a clear understanding of the issues she has to address. These include the setting of homework which, in some exercise books, is infrequent and unidentifiable. Another issue is the quality of marking, because in some cases comments are restricted to presentation. Pupils are not shown what they have to do next in order to improve. The quality of teaching is not systematically monitored in order to share good practice and minimise what is unsatisfactory.

SCIENCE

- 85 Overall, attainment in science is in line with standards expected nationally.

- 86 When the results of the National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 are averaged out over the past four years, 1996 to 1999, pupils' attainment has been broadly in line with the national average. In 1999, the percentage of pupils achieving the standards expected of them nationally was below average and also below the average attained by pupils in similar schools. The percentage achieving higher grades was close to the national average. There is little difference in the attainment of girls and boys. When their teachers assess pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 the pupils' results are close to the national average.
- 87 Attainment at Key Stage 3 seen during the inspection was generally in line with the national average. However, the evidence of attainment is mixed. Observation of pupils in lessons and discussions with pupils show attainment to be in line with national expectations. Written reports vary in quality but are satisfactory overall. Recent staffing changes and the strategies in place to effect improvement at Key Stage 3 should, in the medium term, ensure that pupils' results in the end of key stage tests are in line with national expectations.
- 88 Standards are high at Key Stage 4. The percentage of pupils gaining an A*-C grade in GCSE Science-Double Award has been above the national average for the past three years. One hundred per cent of pupils entered for GCSE achieved a pass grade. Both boys and girls achieve higher than the national averages and boys' attainment is very good: the percentage of boys achieving an A*-C grade is 57.4% compared with the national average for boys of 46.7%.
- 89 Standards are high in the sixth form. This is shown by the percentages of passes and of A and B grades attained in GCE A-level science examinations; these are above national averages when biology, chemistry and physics are considered together. Value added analysis of science A-level results over the past four years shows that pupils have achieved higher grades than have similar pupils, in other schools, in biology and physics but lower grades in chemistry. Scientific investigation in biology is very good.
- 90 The science faculty has made good progress since the last OFSTED inspection in 1995. The standards have improved in A-level physics, where pupils have achieved 45% A and B grades and 100% pass rate over the past four years. The most able pupils in Year 9 now achieve an average number of higher grades in the national tests. The quality of both teaching and learning is now consistently good in contrast to 1995. The faculty's information technology resources are good at the upper school site and satisfactory at the Lower school; information technology is now well used to enhance learning in science. In addition attention is now given to the application of science and the nature of scientific ideas. In 1995 the skills of scientific investigation were not uniformly developed across all areas of work and year groups. During this inspection some very good teaching of investigation skills was seen but this is not yet reflected in written work at Key Stage 3. The number of laboratories has been increased.
- 91 The quality of teaching is a strength of the science faculty. All teaching seen was satisfactory or better with 76% being good or better and 52% being very good or excellent. At Key Stages 3 and 4 teaching overall is good. It is very good in the sixth form where all lessons seen were good or better and 71% were very good or excellent.

- 92 All teachers' knowledge of their subject and of the way pupils learn is sound or better. They plan their work thoroughly, identify what they intend pupils should learn, and plan and manage activities to achieve these learning objectives. A wide range of teaching and learning strategies, including the effective use of information technology, are used to motivate and educate pupils. Teachers plan a variety of activities to maintain interest during the long 100-minute lessons. All teachers draw attention to the key words to be developed and encourage use of scientific vocabulary. Where appropriate they apply numeracy by interpretation of data and by calculations using equations. Pupils are grouped in ability sets for science, and teachers adapt skilfully what they teach for different sets. Pupil-teacher relationships are often very good and all teachers have high expectations of behaviour. All teachers show that they like pupils and enjoy teaching. Teachers ensure that safe working practices are followed. Teachers question skilfully and ask a range of questions, of which some test recall of facts and others require extended answers. They prompt and probe to help pupils to clarify and extend their thinking. They use what pupils say and do to make assessments of their attainment. Nearly all the lesson plans seen included homework designed to build on or reinforce what pupils were to learn in the lesson; a Year 8 homework task to write an essay 'I am a carbon dioxide molecule' stimulated some very good work linking respiration and photosynthesis.
- 93 The high proportion of very good and excellent lessons had features in common. The teacher's passion for the subject was illustrated in an A-level physics lesson on the photoelectric effect which held students spellbound. An example of the use of creative and imaginative approaches was seen in a Year 7 lesson where the teacher's role-play of an investigation elicited an eager response from pupils who identified all the things which would be necessary for them to achieve accurate results and ensure a fair test. Teachers create an environment in which it is safe to express personal viewpoints, to compare these with scientific evidence and to reflect upon different interpretations. For example, pupils in a sixth form group looked at evidence for evolution of elements and made very carefully considered personal responses; pupils in a Year 7 class described, with reasons, different models of the way we see things, before carrying out some experiments on light. Another feature of very good teaching was the way the teacher combined excellent knowledge of pupils with a skilfully planned sequence of activities which built upon each other and led towards challenging learning goals. For example, pupils in a bottom set Year 10 class developed a good understanding of variable resistors and how they are used in the home. A top set Year 11 class, seen in the second half of a 100-minute theory lesson, was still keen to engage in tasks in which they applied their knowledge and tested their understanding and, at the same time, built up a set of coherent notes on homeostasis.
- 94 No unsatisfactory teaching was seen but there were three lessons where, despite the teachers' planning and the resources available, learning was not as effective as it could have been. This was for reasons other than the skill of the teacher. In one lesson, a dominant and persistent attention seeker held up progress in the introduction to the lesson and this slowed down the pace of learning. A second lesson was one planned by the class official science teacher who also marks the pupils' books; a second teacher takes over for the second half of the double lesson but she does not know what levels of achievement pupils have demonstrated in the first half and so cannot build on what

has gone before. The third lesson was the second half of a double where the teaching was very good and the topic was one which interested the pupils but the lower band Year 11 group were tired towards the end of a demanding 100 minutes.

- 95 All of the laboratories are tidy and well organised. There are science keywords on the walls and attractively mounted displays of pupils' work of good quality. In some laboratories there are large displays representing models, for example, of the structure of a leaf. In the corridors there are framed displays of project work such as a whole class project on the moral, social and economic factors that affect the siting of a chemical plant.
- 96 Most marking of written work is satisfactory; teachers identify mistakes and write encouraging remarks. There are few written comments to help pupils to improve their work but pupils are clear that teachers make oral comments. Not enough support is given to help pupils frame questions to answer or to write rigorous and complete conclusions when they carry out scientific investigations.
- 97 The progress in learning made in science lessons generally depends directly upon the quality of teaching; learning is good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in the sixth form. Pupils' progress is assessed by end-of-topic tests and informal mentoring takes place to encourage and support improvement. In all key stages all pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and more able pupils, make satisfactory to excellent progress in lessons related to their prior attainment. During the week of the inspection, there were no observable differences in the progress made by boys and girls. Across the years and different areas of science, pupils are acquiring new knowledge and increasing their understanding of theories and processes. They respond well to challenge and apply intellectual, creative and physical effort in their work so that they work at a good pace and are productive in lessons. They answer questions and also ask questions which show that they are testing their understanding by relating new knowledge to existing understanding of science concepts. In practical lessons they organise themselves efficiently, work sensibly and safely, then clear away with minimum fuss. They show an interest in their work and they are encouraged and supported as they learn to think for themselves.
- 98 The department is meeting the requirements of the national programmes of study for science and the GCSE syllabus. The schemes of work provide well-sequenced programmes enabling pupils to progress, but most do not provide enough support for teachers to ensure consistency through the school. They do not always include key words, learning objectives that clarify what knowledge pupils should gain or skills they should acquire, how work is to be differentiated for different groups of pupils, integration of the use of information technology and scientific investigations, or suggestions for homework. Because of the skill of teachers, and the support for the newly qualified teacher, the lessons taught do not mirror the schemes of work and these points have not been identified as weaknesses during the inspection.
- 99 The percentage of time allocated to science is satisfactory throughout the school. The science teachers feel that double lessons (100 minutes) for science reduce the effectiveness of their teaching and there is some evidence for this. Despite the increase in the number of laboratories since 1995, 25% of Year 9 lessons are taught out of a

laboratory; this is because, since January, the number of Year 9 science classes has increased in order to decrease class sizes. Science teachers have welcomed the latter. No lessons out of a laboratory were seen during the inspection so no comment can be made on the use made of these lessons. Despite the old furniture in some of the laboratories, teachers make them satisfactory learning environments. The faculty's information technology resources are good at the upper school site and satisfactory at the lower school. Nearly all science classes in Years 7 and 8 are split between two teachers; pupils' written work and lesson observation show that this can lead to confusion for some pupils and to less effective learning.

- 100 There have been considerable changes in staffing in the science department since the last inspection. Despite the many changes the members of the science faculty form a team who enjoy working together, united by scientific and pedagogical expertise and a commitment to raising the standards in science. They demonstrate this by: preparing and teaching interesting and exciting lessons; teaching extra revision lessons; running a Science Club and Eco-Warriors at lower school; preparing their own resources; creating attractive displays of pupils' work and science keywords in the laboratories; organising a week-long Year 9 Science Fair with visits out of school, visiting speakers and project work. The laboratory technicians provide efficient and effective technical support.
- 101 The management of the science faculty is sound. Science national test and exam results are analysed in order to evaluate the faculty's performance. There is no formal programme of monitoring and evaluation based on observation of lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work. The faculty's development plan in the Technology College Initiative bid accurately identifies the faculty's strengths and weaknesses (except for the variability of scientific investigation) and suitable action is planned. Appropriate steps have been taken to address under performance in the Key Stage 3 tests.
- 102 To further improve learning the faculty staff need to agree a policy for effective teaching and learning in science which is reflected in comprehensive schemes of work which provide support for new staff and supply teachers as well as experienced staff. They also need to carry out a systematic programme of monitoring and evaluation of the work of the department. To support the work of the science faculty the senior management team needs to ensure that the timetable does not include split classes at Key Stage 3, that there are mainly single lessons for science in Key Stages 3 and 4, and ensure that there is in-service training on classroom observation and the scrutiny of pupils' written work.

ART

- 103 Overall standards of attainment are in line with national expectations. By the end of Key Stage 3 they are at least in line with national expectations, and are good in Year 9 where work in sculpture, ceramics and printmaking are particular strengths. Most pupils learn about artists and craftworkers in relation to their own practical activities, although not all lessons observed explore this context sufficiently. Drawing however, seen in sketchbooks and project work lacks technical skill. The standards reached by the end of Key Stage 4 in the GCSE in 1999 are below national averages for A* to C grade passes, but appear to be in line to exceed past performances this year. Sculpture

and graphics are strong in Year 10, where students respond enthusiastically. Drawing from direct observation is again not strong although drawing for other purposes is competent in preparatory work. Project work is well planned and researched. Girls' and boys' examination performances are statistically equal, although 50% more girls were entered for the examination. In 1999 the small number of students entered for A-level gained a pass grade. The present numbers in Years 12 and 13 are much higher, and their attainment is either good or very good. Their project work is thoroughly researched, and explores colour, tone and texture from a variety of stimuli with skill and panache. Observational drawing explores line, shape and tone with skill and confidence.

- 104 Since the last inspection the percentage of pupils gaining A* to C grades in the GCSE has improved considerably, but in 1999 it was still below the national averages. The number of post-16 students in 1999 was small, and their A-level grades were lower than in 1995. Since 1998 the numbers of post-16 students opting to study art to A-level has increased. Pupils at all key stages continue to show competence in drawing for research purposes and have developed new skills in three-dimensional construction work. Pupils continue to respond well to guidance. They show an understanding of the challenges and an ability to research and investigate different aspects of their work. Since the last inspection there has been a change of head of department, which has strengthened the three-dimensional curriculum. Relationships between staff and students remain good, and staff continue to provide beneficial extra-curricular opportunities.
- 105 The standard of teaching is good overall. Staff work hard to ensure that students understand the objectives of each lesson, the best of which include practical demonstrations, good questioning techniques and appropriate visual and contextual stimulus. Pupils are presented with a variety of two and three-dimensional challenges in a range of appropriate materials. Lessons are well organised for practical activities, and meet the needs of pupils and students of different ages and abilities. Teaching is particularly effective when staff are working with individual pupils. Discipline is low-key and effective, with good relationships established between staff and students.
- 106 Pupils at Key Stage 3 make good progress in developing practical skills for a variety of purposes. Year 9 pupils exploring surface textures enjoy experimenting with mono-printing and refining their ceramic models, while pupils in Year 8 investigate recycled materials in the manner of Picasso to produce good quality animal sculptures. Work is less successful where the lesson objectives are unclear and there is a lack of contextual reference material. Students at Key Stage 4 make sound progress and have the opportunity to develop personal projects within a controlled framework, the best of which show a thorough approach to researching the topic and utilising information from the work of artists, designers and craftworkers. Less successful work is over-reliant upon copying images from different sources with limited personal interpretation. Post-16 students are given the opportunity to respond creatively to a wide range of starting points, the best of which utilise strong observational drawing as a part of the initial investigation, and where they are encouraged to use an expressive approach to images and materials. They make excellent progress.
- 107 Pupils' attitudes to work at Key Stage 3 differ considerably. In Years 7 and 8 some

pupils have difficulty settling down to the task and responding to instructions, whereas pupils in Year 9 have a diligent approach to their work, and relate well to each other and their teachers. At Key Stage 4 a minority of students disrupt lessons with immature behaviour, but most are diligent and capable of independent actions which have a positive effect on the quality of their work. Post-16 students work well as a group. They are friendly, courteous and articulate, and work well with each other and with staff. Independent research informs the development of their work, and they respond well to advice and guidance.

- 108 The curriculum has particular strengths. It contributes to pupils' social development because they are expected to work together, sharing ideas and resources in an unfussy manner. It contributes to students' cultural development because they have opportunities to visit galleries and teachers in most lessons refer to artists working in a variety of materials and genres. Subject workbooks are well presented with broad statements about National Curriculum requirements. There are areas to be improved. The programmes of study for Key Stage 3 are built around themes and do not focus sufficiently on the skills, knowledge and understanding pupils are expected to acquire. The assessment of students' work does not focus on their knowledge and understanding. There are no criteria for the award of marks and grades. Pupils and students do not produce any self-evaluation. The literacy policy does not focus on the full range of speaking, listening and writing opportunities within art. There are a variety of displays, but work is not annotated to reinforce the specialist language and lesson objectives. Teaching and learning are not formally monitored to ensure consistency of good practice. The quality of accommodation and resources have a negative impact. In the studios there is a limited amount of visual resource material on open display. Furniture is old and worn; floors, sinks and drainers are in poor condition. Health and safety directives are not strictly followed. Information technology facilities are limited, but what is available is well used for research purposes.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

- 109 At Key Stage 4, the proportion of design and technology GCSE, A* to C grades is above the national average and above the results of similar schools. The results show that there has been a significant improvement in the overall design and technology grades over the last three years. In specific subjects, the A* to C grades in food, resistant materials, graphics and textiles were above the national average with systems and control and electronics being just below. 1999 show that the girls outperform the boys in their attainment of A* to C grades. A* to G grades in all the design and technology subjects are above the national average.
- 110 At Key Stage 3, teachers' assessments of the pupils' work show that standards match national expectations for fourteen year olds. These results indicate that the attainment of girls is higher than that of the boys. Inspectors' judgements match these results. At the end of Key Stage 3, pupils show an ability to analyse and draw conclusions using existing products. They gain a wide range of basic skills in designing and making products of good quality in food, textiles, resistant materials, graphics and electronics. The electronics course is now well established as part of Key Stage 3. In Year 9 pupils

are able to design and make a printed circuit board using a specialist computer program to support their design skills and then test their circuits. With the support of their teachers, pupils make a range of alarms using a variety of sensors. In graphic design, they are taught a range of two and three-dimensional drawing skills. Some pupils are beginning to apply these skills in other areas of design and technology work. In Years 7 and 8 however, the opportunities for pupils to use the design process is more limited. As a result they are less independent in the way they work compared to other pupils at this stage. In Year 9 pupils are able to generate a range of ideas, develop, make and evaluate their work. They are encouraged to plan their ideas using drawings and notes to explain each stage of development. In food technology pupils are well supported in planning their work using structured worksheets. They generate and use numerical data in the form of charts, graphs and food calculations to produce very good end products. In general pupils successfully gain appropriate skills, knowledge and understanding. However, both higher attaining pupils, who need their learning extended, and lower attaining pupils, particularly those with poor literacy skills, do not benefit fully from all lessons due to the limited range of learning resources and teaching strategies used with mixed ability groups. Teachers are aware of the need to differentiate the work to suit the needs of individual students and some do this well. There are, however, not enough opportunities for teachers to share good practice with those who are less experienced.

- 111 The curriculum in design and technology is well planned and there is a fair balance of experience for pupils in all material areas. There is good coverage of food, graphics, electronics and particularly of control technology, which is well taught within the department. However, in examination groups girls still tend to choose food and textiles and boys take resistant materials and electronics.
- 112 In the main pupils at Key Stage 4 make good progress over the two years. It is evident that the new resources gained recently as a result of becoming a Technology College, have had a good impact on learning in the classroom. Pupils produce projects that show they understand the process of design and are able to develop work of very good quality. Overall GCSE results have improved significantly over the last three years. Higher attaining pupils are able to apply a wide range of investigative skills and apply accuracy and depth to the development of their designs in all material areas. Lower attaining pupils are able to design products well suited to the course and are supported by their teachers to complete work of good quality.
- 113 Teaching is good overall and in some lessons very good. The department is well managed and benefits from a strong team approach. Teachers are well planned and organised for lessons and pupils of all abilities gain from lessons that are well taught. Teachers use interesting methods enabling pupils to understand difficult knowledge. This was seen in a Year 9 electronics lesson when the teacher encouraged pupils to act out the sequence for programming a traffic light system. Pupils form good relationships with their teachers and the pace of lessons is appropriate. There is a planned revision program for Year 11 pupils consisting of a variety of tasks to sustain the interest of the pupils and to consolidate the learning. This program includes answering questions from past papers and timed tasks. It also uses information from the departmental website which has been created by the teachers in the school.

- 114 Since the last inspection, the main issues have been addressed in terms of resources and the curriculum now meets statutory requirements. There is a system in place to monitor the progress of pupils and this is beginning to have a positive effect on standards. The information gathered from this however is still underused. Each pupil is not yet set improvement targets related to the subject. This could enable pupils to become more involved with their learning. There is a good environment, with displays of work to celebrate success of pupils. The accommodation and resources are of a good standard and are subject to increased development as part of the school's Technology College status. Although the upper school site benefits from a high level of accommodation and resources the textiles, food and resistant materials rooms in lower school are too small for the large groups that are taught in them. This affects pupils' progress. All teachers maintain high standards of hygiene and safety within the subject and technician staff contribute effectively.

GEOGRAPHY

- 115 Standards of attainment in geography have risen since the last inspection. Pupils achieve standards above national expectations in both Key Stages 3 and 4. By the end of Key Stage 4, levels of attainment are well above the school and national averages. In 1999, 65% of pupils gained GCSE passes at grades A*-C and no pupil attained less than a grade E. The results are very favourable compared to other subjects in the school. The attainment of boys is particularly high. In 1999, 33% of boys who entered for the GCSE examination gained passes at grades A* or A, nearly three times greater than the national average. By the end of Year 13 students attain standards in line with those typically found. These good results reflect the high expectations and standards set by a committed team of geography teachers, and are substantiated by the evidence from inspectors.
- 116 By the end of Year 9, most pupils are able to discuss ideas and have a good understanding of geographical vocabulary suitable for their age. Year 9 pupils produce good quality assignments and develop strong enquiry and research skills. One assignment in Year 9 contributes significantly to the pupils' information technology capability. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 develop very good understanding of physical and human processes in geography. They are also able to interpret information from graphs, maps and photographs. Low attaining pupils in both key stages achieve well in lessons. The developing uses of literacy support strategies such as writing frames and word banks enables pupils to improve their basic skills in geography lessons. At A-level, students generally achieve well in the majority of lessons. By the end of Year 13, students have a good understanding of field study and statistical analysis techniques and apply this well to their independent A-level study. Occasionally, more able students in the sixth form achieve below their capability due to the low challenge of work set for them. Across all key stages and in the sixth form, poor attendance in some lessons impacts adversely on progress. Pupils' achievement and progress are limited in those lessons where the teacher leaves ten minutes before the end to travel to the other school site, as some pupils' work rate drops off or stops at this point.
- 117 The quality of teaching is a clear strength of the geography department. It is good at Key Stage 3, and at Key Stage 4 and satisfactory in the sixth form. There is a need to

monitor its quality to share the very good practice present and to minimise the inconsistent quality between teachers, particularly in Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form. High expectations, pace and challenge are features of the good geography teaching. In the best lessons, teachers use questioning techniques skilfully and challenge pupils to think. This is very effective in enabling pupils to develop their ideas and increase their understanding, and is a consistent feature of Key Stage 4 geography lessons. Low attaining pupils are well supported and the developing use of literacy support strategies is effective in helping them make good progress. Higher attaining pupils are usually extended, but there are inconsistencies at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form. The marking and assessment procedures used by geography teachers are inconsistent. The humanities department assessment policy is not being consistently applied and pupils do not always understand the assessment codes they receive.

- 118 Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in geography lessons are nearly always very good or excellent. Behaviour is generally well managed. Most teachers are effective in keeping pupils on task and engaged in learning. Praise and rewards are used effectively and this motivates students. Most geography teachers make learning fun, and this results in positive attitudes from pupils to their work. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to work in pairs and groups, and to present ideas to the whole class. This is effective in engaging and motivating pupils. Behaviour and attitudes to learning deteriorate when a 'travel cover' teacher occasionally takes over from the geography teacher ten minutes from the end of a lesson. The use of information technology in Year 9 motivates pupils. This needs to be extended to include Years 7 and 8.
- 119 The geography department is well led and managed. The subject leader involves colleagues in decision-making and evaluating curriculum planning and provision. There is developing and increasingly effective analysis of pupil performance data. The curriculum is well planned and the provision for field studies is good. There is awareness on the part of the subject leader of the need to develop systems to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning, the quality of the work of pupils and teachers' marking and target setting. Systems to do this are currently poor. They need to improve in order to identify and share the many strengths of individual geography teachers. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' cultural and social development.
- 120 Since the last inspection there have been significant improvements in the quality of accommodation for Year 9 to 13 geography lessons. Accommodation for Year 7 and 8 geography pupils is poor. Library and information technology provision is satisfactory for Years 9 to 13, but unsatisfactory on the lower school site for Years 7 and 8.

HISTORY

- 121 Overall standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 and 4 are above the national expectations. Standards of attainment in the sixth form are in line with those typically found.

- 122 By the end of Key Stage 3 the percentage of pupils attaining at or above national expectations is high when compared to national figures. As happens nationally the percentage of girls attaining the higher grades is higher than that for boys.
- 123 The pupils' standards of attainment in lessons observed, in their exercise books and work folders and in discussion match the high standards above. There is no significant variation between boys and girls. By the end of Year 9 higher attaining pupils can select, organise and write about historical events drawing upon an extensive body of knowledge and understanding. They are able to explain how things change over time, to analyse reasons why events such as the Great War occur and are able to use historical terminology such as imperialism, militarism, with accuracy and understanding when producing extended writing. Pupils with below average attainment are able to ask questions of and extract information from historical sources. They can question how reliable historical sources are when trying to learn about the past.
- 124 By the end of Key Stage 4, overall attainment is above average and this is an improvement since the last inspection report. In 1999 the percentage of pupils attaining grades A*-C was well above the national average. The percentage of pupils attaining grades A*-G was also slightly above the national average. The average GCSE point score for boys was slightly above the national average but slightly below the school average. Girls' attainment is higher than boys. The average GCSE point score for girls was significantly above national averages but in line with average scores in the school. Both the schools' own internal performance data and comparisons with national figures show a sustained improvement in attainment over the past few years. For example, since 1996 the percentage of pupils attaining grades A*-C has risen from below to well above national averages.
- 125 Most pupils in Key Stage 4 classes have a sound knowledge and understanding of the main events and periods of history being studied for GCSE. Pupils demonstrate a growing confidence in note taking techniques. Using key points, flow diagrams and charts they are able to examine the significance of important events such as The Depression in the 1930s. Many pupils display a good understanding of how to use sources to aid historical enquiry. The work of Year 11 pupils illustrated significant progress in this respect as they studied international relations between Russia and Czechoslovakia during the Cold War.
- 126 The standards of attainment observed in lessons, in work files and in discussion with the pupils suggests that the department's targets for raising attainment, especially for boys of below average attainment, are likely to be met.
- 127 By the end of sixth form courses students' attainment has been well below national averages. The small number of students entered for public examination in 1999 achieved pass rates well below the national averages and no students attained the higher A and B grades which matches their prior GCSE performance.
- 128 However, standards of attainment observed in the inspection week are more in line with what is typically expected of students studying for sixth form examinations. Year 12 students display increasing confidence in note taking techniques including the use of glossaries to identify key terms to aid understanding and recall of information. They

also display good awareness of the skills needed to answer historical questions that, for example, investigate the readiness of Germany and Russia to engage in the Great War and produced written answers that provide understanding of how to analyse the impact of events such as Stolypin's land reforms. However, many of the Year 13 students lack such confidence in their work. Overall, the evidence seen in the inspection indicates that the department is moving towards achieving their targets for raising students' attainment at the end of the key stage to levels predicted by the school.

- 129 The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. All teaching observed was at least satisfactory. However, there was variation in the quality of teaching within each key stage and across key stages. For example, in Key Stage 4 teaching quality varied from very good to satisfactory whilst in sixth form lessons it was consistently satisfactory. Pupils make good progress in their learning at Key Stages 3 and 4, and sound progress in the sixth form.
- 130 Effective teaching was exemplified in a Year 10 lesson studying the role of The League of Nations. The teacher used good subject knowledge, effective support pitched at the appropriate level of need for the pupils, skilful questions that were designed to challenge all the pupils in the class and set targets that the pupils understood. Consequently, all pupils, including those with special educational needs, showed interest in their work and made good progress in understanding how to analyse cartoons as a source of historical evidence. Similar qualities were seen in a Year 8 class of more able pupils studying aspects of the Agricultural Revolution. In this lesson the teacher used clear planning and preparation that had identified the learning needs of the class, made effective use of a teacher-produced resource to support pupils in developing extended writing skills and made good use of a previous homework exercise. As a result the majority of the pupils were able to demonstrate a growing confidence and understanding of why enclosures took place and why some people might have considered the process to be unfair.
- 131 Where the observed teaching seen was less effective, the teachers' use of lesson time slowed down the rate at which pupils learned. This was particularly evident in sixth form lessons such as a Year 12 class studying Russian and German preparations for The Great War. The students were set work that provided appropriate challenge and the teacher used appropriate strategies to assist with the learning. However, for each activity the students were given too much time to complete the task and therefore they did not learn at a rate commensurate with their understanding and ability. Other factors that restricted the quality and effectiveness of the teaching were illustrated in a Year 7 mixed ability class studying the reasons why William won the Battle of Hastings. The teacher's explanation of the tasks lacked clarity and neither the tasks nor the materials were adapted to meet the needs of all the pupils in the class. As a result pupil progress was restricted because they waited for the teacher to move around the class to speak to each small group and clarify the instructions.
- 132 In all key stages pupils' attitudes to learning are generally good. Positive teacher-pupil relationships, effective teaching and teachers' knowledge of the pupils are factors that help to promote positive pupils' attitudes. A Year 10 class studying the factors that explain why Hitler came to power in Germany exemplified these features. In this lesson the pupils behaved very well, worked well with other pupils and showed

initiative in devising hypotheses that they then tested against the evidence in trying to establish what was the most important factor that explains the rise of Hitler to power. In a few lessons, some pupils' concentration was not sustained for the whole of the lesson. Where this was evident pupils working in pairs or individually were given too long to complete tasks or the teacher's explanation of tasks lacked clarity. Examples of this were seen in a class of below average attaining pupils in Year 9 studying trench warfare and in a Year 7 mixed ability class studying the Battle of Hastings.

- 133 The development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education in history is satisfactory. A good example of pupils being encouraged to reflect upon their learning is provided for all Year 9 pupils in their written work on the conditions of slaves. A good opportunity to consider moral issues is reflected in the work of Year 10 GCSE pupils writing to the American president presenting a case for his intervention to help abolish the Ku Klux Klan. However, further opportunities for the pupils' personal development should be developed.
- 134 There has been satisfactory progress made since the last inspection report. The lack of specialist history classrooms on the lower school site continues to cut down teaching time and limits the opportunities to promote a positive image of the subject. The department has established a clear framework through which teachers can assess pupils' work and monitor their progress against national criteria. There are examples of effective individual teacher records that help to set targets for improving pupils' performance. However, these are not consistently used by all teachers for all pupils across all key stages. Opportunities to share lesson objectives more explicitly with all pupils and for pupils to reflect and evaluate their learning need to be extended. The department has made good progress incorporating the use of information technology to support pupils' learning in history.
- 135 Teaching and learning are not yet systematically monitored and evaluated to help identify good practice, develop greater consistency of practice and further raise standards.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

- 136 At the end of Key Stage 3 fewer pupils, according to teachers' assessments, gain the standards expected for their age than is found nationally. That percentage is, however, improving. There have been no GCSE examination entries to permit national comparisons. In the sixth form few students have been entered for A-level examinations and results, both for numbers gaining A-B grades and A-E grades, have been low. GNVQ students at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form achieve the required standard in information technology as a key skill.
- 137 The evidence from classroom observation and scrutiny of work is that standards of achievement are good, and the consequence is that in the medium term performance at the end of Key Stage 3 is judged likely to improve. Pupils show responsible use of general skills including using network directories to store work. Pupils develop increasingly autonomous use of information technology. They make choices about the best method to apply in Year 7 database work or carry out research about which software or designs to use in a Year 8 project on fizzy drinks. They enjoy and succeed

at web page design in Year 9. Similarly standards at Key Stage 4 are good. Students find scope, challenge and opportunity for originality and creativity in some highly developed web based projects and the use of developed graphics and animation.

- 138 There have been significant improvements since the last inspection. All aspects of the National Curriculum programmes of study are now covered, including control, measurement and modelling, often in other subjects. A good example was the teaching of data capture in science. The quality and range of learning opportunities has improved through the introduction of identified information technology lessons in Key Stage 3, and a good mapping at Key Stage 4 of information technology across the subjects. The senior management team recognises the need for further debate about the construction of the information technology curriculum. The quality and quantity of resources has improved since the move to Technology College status. The management of the subject has improved through the appointment of a senior teacher.
- 139 The quality of teaching was good or very good in more than nine out of ten lessons. Subject knowledge and experience is a strength. In particular staff are committed to fostering pupils' skills as independent learners. Pupils are encouraged to make their own choices and decisions about software or methods of investigation in database work or use of surveys or design of web pages. Basic skills are well taught, particularly when pupils are expected to use those skills to solve a problem. Pupils used a thesaurus to search for a more appealing name for a fizzy drink they want to market, and improved their numeracy in the Year 7 music database when they ordered records and produced charts.
- 140 Standards of behaviour are good because teachers plan well and maintain pupils' interest. Teachers' expectations are high and they expect pupils to make progress. They employ a variety of teaching methods from the use of demonstration (very effective in one Year 9 lesson) to the use of peer tutoring in the sixth form. More opportunity could be given for oral work in which pupils reflect on what they have learnt. Teachers plan to use time effectively in order to maintain pupils' interest. Support staff, both technician help and special educational needs assistants, are a strength of the faculty. (Just occasionally special educational needs support staff take over the keyboard or mouse when the pupils need to experiment!) The use of homework is inconsistent. Informal monitoring is good but assessment is not systematically used to show pupils what they can do to improve or to plan what they have to learn next.
- 141 Pupils make good progress in the acquisition of the relevant knowledge, skills and understanding. They make considerable intellectual effort and, particularly in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, show real creativity. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and sometimes, for example, in a Year 11 key skills lesson, do better than expected.
- 142 The subject has made good progress since the last inspection and to prepare for its crucial role within a Technology College. There are, however, inconsistencies in the provision of information technology across the curriculum at Key Stage 3, and the school lacks a plan for progression in information technology skills from Years 7 to 9. The school recognises it requires a co-ordinator to build upon what has been achieved

and develop further information technology in every subject.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

- 143 Attainment at GCSE is in line with the national average. In 1999 46% of pupils gained a grade A*-C, a slight decline in comparison with previous years and 50% in GCSE German, an increase over 1998 but slightly below the national average. The percentage of boys achieving A*-C in French is higher than the national average whereas in German boys achieve below the national average.
- 144 Entry numbers at A-level are low, three candidates in 1999. Entry numbers have since increased (Year 13 German cohort 1998-2000 totals 10 candidates) and early indications for uptake of A-level courses from 2000 seem high.
- 145 Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 has been below national norms but standards observed in lessons and the scrutiny of pupils' work indicate an improvement for 2000. Standards in the current Years 7, 8 and 9 are above average in lessons observed. Pupils listen attentively to tape recordings and are able to pick out key information. They participate willingly in oral work, the more able capable of expressing opinions. They are able to elicit information from texts containing unfamiliar language and write accurately in French and German using a variety of tenses.
- 146 At Key Stage 4, standards in lessons observed were average. Pupils understand more involved dialogues on tape. Less able pupils cope well with structured role-plays in oral sessions, middle ability pupils justify opinions about healthy life styles and the more able extend discussion on a visit to the cinema to incorporate views on the recent Oscars ceremony. Pupils cope well with more extended written texts, some authentic in nature, and the more able write extended pieces on a variety of topics including holidays and future plans, using a range of tenses. Pupils need to be encouraged to use the target language more actively in lessons for real communication purposes.
- 147 In the sixth form, standards are high. Pupils are able to interpret accurately listening comprehension tasks at near normal speed, and offer opinions in fluent French and German on a variety of topics including law and order and abortion. They read authentic texts with confidence, picking out key information and write fluently and increasingly accurately on background literary topics and general issues.
- 148 Overall satisfactory progress has been made in most areas since the last inspection. The average standards of achievement have been maintained in Key Stage 4. More imaginative tasks including the use of writing frames have been introduced. Planning includes a better balance of all four skill areas, and the incorporation of authentic reading materials. Satisfactory progress has been made on most of the issues identified in the last report, with one exception. The lack of sufficient specialist accommodation has a detrimental effect on teaching and learning.
- 149 Teaching in Key Stage 3 is good and sound at Key Stage 4. Most lessons have clear objectives, pace and a sense of purpose. Teachers use skilful questioning techniques which are differentiated, explain tasks clearly, set time limits for tasks and review learning objectives at the end of lessons. They make consistent use of the target

language and support pupils in their use of French and German to ask for help and resources. Planning includes good coverage of all four skills areas, and allows pupils to participate fully in lessons, for example, in performing role-plays about buying ice-cream in German and presentations on visits to the cinema in French. In these lessons pupils make good progress in acquiring the skills and knowledge they need. Clear links are made with the school's literacy strategy, pupils being made aware of formal and informal modes of address and grammatical terminology such as cognates.

- 150 Some teaching is characterised by a late or slow start to lessons often as a result of the ten minute cover arrangement, a lack of pace or challenge and a reliance on low level activities particularly in writing such as matching-up exercises. In such lessons pupils are reluctant to use the target language actively and do not participate fully in their learning.
- 151 Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language play a full part in the lessons and make evident progress. Whilst there is a need to differentiate more fully some of the writing tasks in mixed ability Year 7 groups, teaching generally meets the needs of pupils of different ages and capability due to the setting arrangements and the variety of accreditation offered by the department.
- 152 To achieve further improvement the department should monitor systematically the quality of teaching and learning to ensure that the standard of teaching is uniformly high in all lessons and inconsistencies minimised. Classwork needs to be assessed more formally by using National Curriculum levels to assess what pupils can or cannot do and to set them targets for improvement. This information should be used to track pupils' progress in Key Stage 3 and raise standards overall.

MUSIC

- 153 Attainment at Key Stage 3 is broadly typical overall, and by the end of Year 9 matches what is expected nationally. They develop well in Year 9 as performers on keyboards, displaying attention to fingering and accurate rhythm. Listening skills are mostly good, despite inadequate resources. Most pupils retain knowledge of key words as well as of styles, instrument names and the basic note and rest values. Thus they make good progress in acquiring appropriate skills and knowledge.
- 154 GCSE results since the last inspection have been excellent with all of those entered securing a grade C or above except in 1998. Last year, all candidates achieved an A or A* grade. However, there are presently no music groups at Key Stage 4. Given the success of GCSE results in the past, the department needs to analyse why there are no classes at present and why there is only one A-level candidate, who is taught as part of a consortium arrangement.
- 155 There has been improvement since the last inspection. Listening is more focused in Year 7, with well-planned questions that challenge all abilities. The listening material in the inspection was stimulating, interesting and enjoyable. Teaching has also improved and the satisfactory attainment and behaviour of pupils is a reflection of the commitment of the music staff to develop an ethos of work and respect. However,

significant factors reported as unsatisfactory or affecting standards in the previous report have not been addressed. Accommodation is unsatisfactory on the lower school site where some lessons are not taught in the music room, which itself is uninspiring and badly lit. Displays and posters have to be mounted on the sloping ceiling; CD/cassette players are of poor quality and are inadequate for detailed listening. During the inspection it was particularly difficult to listen with accuracy for imitation, instrumentation and the harmonics of a prepared piano. Accommodation is adversely affected on the upper school site. The use of the music and drama block for examinations results in the teaching of music, including peripatetic lessons, in non-specialist areas within the school for a significant number of weeks each year.

- 156 Despite the criticism in the previous report of how Year 9 teaching was organised, the arts faculty has chosen to continue these arrangements in order to reduce class sizes. This has resulted in even more teaching in non-specialist rooms. The combination of Year 10 and 11 classes after school has ceased because there is no GCSE music at all. The options system now places music against nine other subjects. These shortcomings adversely affect the pupils' learning and attainment. The school should now support the faculty in addressing these issues as a matter of urgency.
- 157 At the last inspection, teaching was sound or good in the majority of lessons. In this inspection it was at least satisfactory in all lessons seen, with two-thirds being very good or better. Teaching is very well planned and at its most successful when the natural talents of the teachers are exploited. A Year 9 class succeeded in a non-specialist room due to a well-planned and imaginatively delivered lesson on 20th century music. Classroom management is very strong and the vast majority of pupils remain focused throughout lessons due to some clever classroom strategies based on experience and knowledge of the pupils. Pupils of all ages work better when it is made clear to them what they will do in a lesson, what they have achieved so far, and what they have to do to improve their grade. The thorough planning, knowledge of pupils and commitment to practical music lessons, even in the non-specialist rooms, have a significant and positive impact on learning. Teaching meets the needs of all pupils and teachers are well aware of the various special needs of their pupils, including the gifted.
- 158 The National Curriculum requirements are met with plenty of attention to multi-cultural music. Key words are reinforced with accurate spelling, sometimes with cards on the wall and frequently with examples. The teachers do well to support their pupils despite the lack of support in any lessons for those with special educational needs. There is little use of information and communication technology and its provision and use need to be addressed immediately in order to meet the needs of the new curriculum. Access to appropriate hardware and software, as well as the Internet, should be a priority of the department. Pupils' progress is monitored at the end of modules, but there is no consistent use of this information to plan what is taught next. There is no formal monitoring of teaching within the faculty.
- 159 The department is well supported by peripatetic teachers, particularly in the delivery of extra-curricular activities. These are provided in a range of genres but attendance is low for a school of this size. The split site makes more provision difficult as well as hindering talented younger musicians from joining senior ensembles without the transport provided by their parents. The department is well led in general but the arts

faculty lacks a coherent vision of its place within the whole curriculum. It needs guidance from the head and governors. The department is enthusiastic and continues to provide opportunities for concerts, trips to musical events and seasonal performance opportunities in the local community. The link with primary schools through the junior music festival is of immense value. The paucity of accommodation and resources has an adverse effect on the provision of music.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

- 160 By the end of Key Stage 3 most pupils attain standards in line with national expectation. Some boys demonstrate standards beyond the national expectation in games activities in which they perform advanced skills under pressure, and at pace. In Key Stage 4 most pupils who participate also attain standards in line with national expectation. Some boys and girls are working beyond the national expectation in games activities where they apply strategies for attacking and defending as a team. Non-participation and absence, although variable, is higher than in Key Stage 3. The first set of GCSE results are below the national average and most pupils, especially girls, did less well in physical education than in other subjects.
- 161 Since the last inspection standards achieved by most pupils have remained the same. The quality of teaching in Key Stage 4 has improved and assessment procedures are now well established in both key stages. Pupils engage in learning tasks, sustain concentration and co-operate readily in lessons. They respond well and sometimes very well to staff although some girls become frustrated when the pace of lessons is too slow.
- 162 The quality of teaching is at least satisfactory and frequently good or better. Teaching in Key Stage 4 has improved since the last inspection. In the best lessons teachers' planning identifies specific learning objectives that are shared with pupils. High expectations and appropriate pace ensures sustained effort by pupils. This leads to learning and achievement that is recognised and celebrated. Where teaching is weakest planning lacks detail, the pace of lessons is slow, tasks do not challenge all pupils adequately and non-participants are not integrated into learning activities. This reduces opportunities for pupils to consolidate existing and develop new knowledge, skills and understanding.
- 163 The curriculum for Key Stages 3 and 4 meets statutory requirements. In Key Stage 3 the dominance of games, especially in the girls' curriculum, restricts opportunities for learning in other areas of activity. In Key Stage 4 good use is made of local facilities to broaden the curriculum and create pathways between school and community although pupils' travel arrangements need to be reviewed in order to ensure that teachers' duty of care is adequately discharged. The curriculum in both key stages needs to be reviewed (with due regard for Curriculum 2000) to ensure greater breadth and balance and to encourage greater participation of pupils. In GCSE physical education the use of single periods for practical activities such as badminton provides a sharp focus for learning that results in very effective use of time. The blocking of the GCSE physical education course against a top mathematics set discourages some of the most able pupils from selecting the subject.

- 164 The leadership and management of the faculty are satisfactory. Well established working procedures incorporate school aims and ensure that pupils are aware of assessment criteria. The absence of a formal system for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning reduces opportunities for identifying and sharing good practice among all members of the faculty. There is a strong commitment to the provision of extra-curricular activities among staff.
- 165 The standard of teaching, changing and showering accommodation on both sites is poor. The run back on the tennis courts is inadequate and the sockets for the posts are not covered. These factors, together with the absence of office accommodation for members of the faculty militate against improved standards.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

- 166 Overall attainment in religious education is in line with the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus. At Key Stage 3 pupils have a good knowledge of formative events in the traditions they study, such as Easter, and understand how religious symbols convey particular beliefs. They are able to use technical terms appropriately, and to apply their learning about religion to other areas of life, such as care for the environment, personal hopes for the millennium, and human rights issues. Achievement is particularly good when there is appropriate challenge to go beyond the acquisition of facts and to make connections between different aspects of learning, reflecting on the wider significance of the work they are engaged in.
- 167 At Key Stage 4, recent achievement in the full GCSE course has been below national averages, although it has been commensurate with pupils' abilities. In the new short GCSE course, however, the number of students achieving higher grades (A*-C) is considerably above national norms. Course work shows a good level of understanding and evaluation. Where standards are high, students ask and pursue searching questions, for instance, about the significance of baptism for Christians, and handle key concepts with confidence. Those who choose not to be entered for the GCSE examination generally make satisfactory progress, but their understanding and application to work remains at a more superficial level. Many, however, have formed clear and positive personal values on issues such as racial equality, and make mature observations, for example, about the fear of difference as a factor in racial discrimination.
- 168 In the sixth form, recruitment to A-level courses has been poor and achievement modest. Students who have opportunity to follow the non-examination course in religious education in Year 12 reach appropriate standards, but the majority of students in the sixth form do not make suitable progress beyond Key Stage 4.
- 169 Since the last inspection, pupils' progress in religious education has improved overall with the introduction of the short GCSE course. There has been some additional provision of non-examination religious education in the sixth form, but this is not available for all students and still fails to meet statutory requirements. At Key Stage 3 a revised curriculum has achieved a sharper focus on Attainment Target 1 (the spiritual dimension of religion), and the quality of learning continues to be good in the large majority of lessons. The quality of teaching continues to be good overall.

- 170 All teaching seen was at least satisfactory, with the majority good or better. There is clear evidence of some very effective teaching across Key Stages 3 and 4. Where this happens, staff show enthusiasm, good skills of communication and interaction with pupils, careful preparation, effective support strategies, and efficient classroom management. Lesson objectives are consistently and clearly stated, giving pupils a sense of direction and continuity in their learning. They are encouraged to build on what they know and to make connections between the different religions they study. There is an open learning atmosphere where pupils can express personal views confidently, and where diversity of outlook is respected. Pupils behave well in lessons and show mature attitudes to controversial and sensitive issues. In some classes, however, they show reserve in dealing with more open questions, and they are not always sufficiently challenged to initiate their own questions and observations.
- 171 Strategies are employed to include all within the scope of the lesson, and when necessary materials are specially adapted for the less able, and techniques such as writing frames are used to develop their literacy skills. Both boys and girls are included effectively in questioning and discussion. There is, however, a marked gender imbalance in the teaching staff and in recruitment to examination courses. The needs of pupils of minority ethnic backgrounds are effectively addressed, and their contribution to others' learning is valued. Classroom and corridor displays are effective as a learning medium. Key words are brightly displayed and posters challenge pupils with reflective questions and ideas. Occasionally, there are missed opportunities to deepen the understanding of the most able. In lessons observed, for instance, little reference was made to source material for further research or reading, and sometimes new terminology (e.g. 'anti-semitism', or 'Maundy') was introduced without adequate explanation or engagement.
- 172 The department is trialling approaches to assessment which include individual records for each pupil, with negotiated targets for improvement. There are also some examples of self-assessment strategies, where pupils identify what they know and can do. These are moving in the right direction, but at present criteria for identifying progression are too broad and unsystematic and there is a need for staff development in this area.
- 173 Fieldwork and computer technology are under-developed within the curriculum. Some pupils do their own investigations of religious buildings, and there are occasional visits, for example, to a Hindu Temple, but this is not a regular part of the teaching programme for all pupils. Some students make effective use of computers for project work, using home or other school resources, and there are plans to develop a web site, but information technology is not yet strategically embedded in the work of the department.
- 174 Religious education makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development and the department is on course for further improvements.

THE SIXTH FORM

- 175 The sixth form is a strength of the school even though numbers are comparatively

small. Numbers entered for two or more A-levels have risen to 31 in 1999. In the 1999 GCE A-level examinations students attained standards below the national average. Students' average points score had risen steadily between 1994 and 1997, but then declined. The difference between the school's average point score and the national score has also widened in 1999. The percentage of candidates who gained A-B grades increased steadily from 1991 but then dropped back from 1997. Numbers entered for Advanced GNVQs has declined from 16 in 1998 to 10 in 1999, but the average points score remains above the national average, and a strength of the course is its high retention rate.

- 176 Students, if account is taken of analyses from the A-level information service project (ALIS), make satisfactory progress. In 1999 there was no difference between the average points score they achieve and the score predicted them from their GCSE results. The 1998 analysis shows a similar picture. There are, however, significant variations between subjects. In biology, physics, mathematics and English literature there is clear evidence in 1999 that students have accelerated their progress and achieved more than expected. Although numbers in the cohort are small the picture repeats itself over the period 1995-99. Scrutiny of GNVQ portfolios shows how students improve their personal organisation, their written and oral comments, their abilities to investigate, analyse and evaluate, as well as their specialist knowledge. They know how to improve their grades.
- 177 Students make this progress because of the teaching they receive. In the course of the inspection 34 sixth form lessons were observed and in three quarters teaching was good, very good or excellent. There are comments in each subject report. In A-level lessons students are motivated by the teachers' passion for a subject, and by opportunities for independent research they can present to their peers. They are thoroughly prepared for examination. In GNVQ courses teachers show, in addition to an appreciation of the methodology and assessment criteria, a tenacious determination to make some students exceed their own expectations of themselves. They provide different learning environments through work experiences; they give opportunities for collaboration but also monitor individual progress; they use information technology skilfully. Members of the GNVQ course team, like the senior managers of the school, want to raise the profile of the programmes as an alternative but equally demanding sixth form route. Their students share that commitment. All students receive counselling and information, which they value, about pathways post 18.
- 178 The school, through a consortium with four other schools and a college, provides access to 27 A-level course and GNVQ programmes in business, leisure and Tourism, health and social care. Students appreciate the breadth of choice. Their induction is well managed and students value the quality of support they receive. The consortium itself is effectively organised and its operation is good. The consequence is sixth form provision which, from the evidence of the school's own analysis, does not drain resources from elsewhere. Students respond well to the breadth of curriculum combined with care for the individual. They are involved in work, ask and answer questions intelligently, polite, articulate and thoughtful about controversial issues. They are a credit to their school.