

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **St Michael's Church of England High School**

Chorley, Preston

LEA area: Lancashire

Unique reference number: 119795

Headteacher: Mr R H Hardwick

Reporting inspector: Mr J W Ashton  
4492

Dates of inspection: 17<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> January 2000

Inspection number: 186529

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Astley Road Chorley Lancashire
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs F M Armstrong
Date of previous inspection:	January 1996

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Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mr J W Ashton	<i>Registered inspector</i>		The school's results and achievements: How well pupils are taught? Leadership and management.
Mrs D Granville-Hastings	<i>Lay inspector</i>	Equal opportunities.	Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development. How well the school cares for its pupils? How well the school works in partnership with its parents? Curricular opportunities offered to pupils. (support)
Mr G Leech	<i>Team inspector</i>	English; Drama; Media Studies.	Literacy.
Mr D Ebbage	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics.	Numeracy; Assessment and monitoring.
Dr D Benstock	<i>Team inspector</i>	Science.	
Mrs S Innes	<i>Team inspector</i>	Design and technology.	
Mr B Hodgson	<i>Team inspector</i>	Information and communication technology.	The quality and range of opportunities for learning.
Ms Charlotte Goodhill	<i>Team inspector</i>	Modern foreign languages.	
Dr J Cosgrove	<i>Team inspector</i>	History.	Spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision.
Mr A Paver	<i>Team inspector</i>	Geography.	Staffing, accommodation and learning resources. Strategic use of resources.
Mr J Pickering	<i>Team inspector</i>	Art.	
Mr R Whiteley	<i>Team inspector</i>	Music plus (drama).	
Mr J Challands	<i>Team inspector</i>	Physical education.	
Mr R Parry	<i>Team inspector</i>	Special educational needs.	

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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

St Michael's is a mixed Church of England comprehensive school. Its age range is 11 to 16, it presently has 1047 pupils on roll and is over-subscribed. All but six of its pupils are white and there are no pupils on roll for whom English is an additional language. On entry to the school, an above average proportion of the pupils has already reached the expected levels of attainment for this age group in English, mathematics and science. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is broadly in line with the national average for secondary schools. There are 43 pupils with statements of special educational needs. A majority of these pupils have a specific learning difficulty. Around one in ten of the pupils are eligible for free school meals, compared to a national average of around one in six.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

St Michael's is a happy, welcoming and thoroughly successful school. Standards are high in almost every curriculum area. Teaching is good and much of it is very good. The school's ethos is one of a thoroughly Christian, very hard working and effective learning community. It is well led and managed and provides good value for money.

### **WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL**

- Standards of attainment are above the national average in almost all subjects.
- Standards of literacy and numeracy are high.
- The school has a strong Christian but also a rigorous academic ethos.
- The quality of teaching is at least good in eight out of every ten lessons.
- The quality of pupils' learning is exceptionally good (*especially the pace and productivity of work, and pupils' self-knowledge of how well they are doing*)
- Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and attendance are all very good.
- Leadership and management are strong, especially the monitoring of individual pupils' attainment (*any underachievement is tackled very quickly*)
- The provision for pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is strong.
- Pupils are safe and very well cared for.

### **WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED**

- Standards of attainment should be higher in information and communication technology throughout the school (*equipment is out of date, not well enough deployed and not used sufficiently in the teaching of other subject areas*).
- PE standards are not high enough at Key Stage 3 (*Years 7 to 9*), due largely to a lack of focused leadership in the department.
- Some aspects of the curriculum (*the length of lessons, size of some teaching groups, design and technology options*).
- Some aspects of the accommodation for science, design and technology, music and drama.

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

## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has maintained above average standards and improved even further the good quality of its teaching and of its leadership. Improvements have been made in the key issues identified at the last inspection: It has developed very effective strategies for evaluating the progress and achievement of its pupils, which are models of their kind. Departmental priorities are now integrated much more systematically with the school's overall development aims than they used to be. The structure and content of the school's curriculum have improved in many respects. The school has a good capacity for even further improvement.

## STANDARDS

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

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

Key	
<i>well above average</i>	A
<i>above average</i>	B
<i>average</i>	C
<i>below average</i>	D
<i>well below average</i>	E

Overall GCSE results in 1999 were higher than those in 1998, reversing the gradual decline in total results, year on year, which threatened to bring the school's average down to closer to the national average figure. Improved performance of girls was the main factor in the reversal of the trend. When compared to the overall GCSE results in similar schools in 1999, pupils at St Michael's are performing above average in terms of average points score. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, results in English language are well above the national average with the proportion of the highest grades A and A\* nearly twice the national average. Attainments in mathematics and in science are also well above their respective national averages. Girls outperformed the boys in English and mathematics, but boys matched the girls' performance in science. Achievements in class, and in work seen in pupils' books, matches that of the national test and examination results. The school's target for the forthcoming year (to increase pupils' average GCSE points scores from 40 to over 42 points) is challenging but achievable, given the high quality of the teaching, the very positive attitudes to learning of the pupils, and the school's effective leadership.



## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very positive indeed. Pupils come to lessons with a thirst for knowledge and a willingness to learn.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour around the school and in lessons is very good.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Relationships between staff and pupils, and between pupils themselves, are of a high quality, creating a supportive and caring atmosphere in which pupils feel secure and comfortable.
Attendance	Attendance at the school is very good. In no year group does the attendance rate fall below 94 per cent. Punctuality is good. Most pupils arrive on time and lessons begin promptly.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Pupils are well taught throughout the school. The quality of teaching is good, and much of it is very good, in almost every subject in the school. Half of the 180 lessons inspected were seen to be good and a further three in ten were very good, occasionally (*in modern languages*) excellent. One in five lessons were satisfactory and only two were held to be unsatisfactory (*one in boys' physical education, the other in design and technology*). The result is that pupils at St Michael's learn well and make at least good progress in every subject except information and communication technology, at both key stages, and boys' physical education at Key Stage 3. Particular strengths in learning include pupils' levels of interest and concentration, and the pace and productivity of their work. Pupils' knowledge of the level of their own achievement is also a significant strength. Pupils not only demonstrate high levels of interest in lessons, but also take great care in completing homework to a good standard.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad but with some issues to do with continuity, time allowances and length of lessons. There are no areas of the curriculum which do not meet statutory requirements.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. They have full access to the curriculum and the extra-curricular opportunities, suitably smaller classes for those with learning needs, and the opportunity to move to classes where levels are higher as their attainment improves.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good spiritual, moral and social and cultural provision. 'The pursuit of excellence in the context of Christian faith and values' pervades everything that takes place in the school.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school provides a very good level of care and support for all its pupils, including the very good monitoring of individual attainment, which is a particular strength of the school.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher has a very clear vision of the direction in which the school should continue to move. This vision is backed up by very hard edged and effective systems for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, a major factor in the maintenance of the school's high standards.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body is effective both in the way it supports the work of the school and in how it remains in touch with its many strengths and possible areas for further development.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes very good strategic use of its resources, including specific grants and additional funding, by firmly linking decisions on spending to educational priorities.

The match of the numbers, qualifications and experience of teachers to the needs of the curriculum is good. There is a judicious blend of youth and experience on the staff. The quality of the school's middle management (*the large majority of whom are women*) is generally good. The school holds the coveted Investor in People Award which has recently been renewed. Leadership and management of Learning Support are good. The governors fulfil their statutory obligations.

Resources for learning are good in most departments and are very good in science. At the time of writing, the supply of information and communication technology (ICT) equipment in the school is just satisfactory, but with many out of date machines, some of which are ineffectively deployed. (*Eighty-four new personal computers are to be delivered to the school shortly after the inspection*).

There is insufficient accommodation to match all the curricular needs of this popular and over-subscribed school (*two new classrooms and extensions to four science laboratories are about to be added to the school*). There will still be no suitable accommodation for drama and that for music is too small.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only five, out of the 450 parents who responded, disagreed that the school was well led and managed.</li> <li>• Over 96 per cent think that their children are making good progress at the school and would feel comfortable approaching the school with a question or a problem.</li> <li>• Ninety nine per cent think that the school expects their children to work hard and achieve their best.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some parents thought their children did not like school.</li> <li>• Others were concerned that the school was not setting the right amount of work to do at home (<i>too much</i> said a good number of parents).</li> </ul>

Inspectors agreed with parents' positive comments, but disagreed with the implication that pupils did not like this particular school or that it was setting too little or too much homework. Interviews with 30 pupils (*six from each year group*) produced unanimous agreement that they *loved* St Michael's school and a large majority of them said that they received *just the right amount* of homework.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and achievements**

1. St Michael's Year 7 classes come to the school with above average proportions of pupils at the expected attainment Levels 4 and 5 in the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Good and very good teaching, linked to very positive pupil attitudes and well organised leadership, sustains this high attainment and in most cases improves it by the time the pupils reach the ends of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.
2. At the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999, the proportions of pupils attaining the expected Level 5 in the National Curriculum tests were well above the *national* average for *all* schools in each of English, mathematics and science. They remain above the national average in English even when compared to similar schools, but are well above average for *similar* schools in both mathematics and science. (*Similar schools are those whose pupils have similar social circumstances*). The school adds value to pupils' achievements in all three subjects, but especially in mathematics and science. In almost all other subjects at the end of this key stage, pupils' attainment is above the national expectation. In physical education (PE) and in information and communication technology (ICT)), however, attainment only matches the national expectation. In the case of physical education, this is because of less than good and occasionally unsatisfactory teaching of boys' physical education and less than effective co-ordination of physical education as a whole. In information and communication technology it is due to poor hardware, lack of subject specific software, sometimes unavailability of computer rooms, and lack of clear whole school and departmental guidance to organise information and communication technology activity in a way that would enhance learning in other subjects.
3. In lessons seen at Key Stage 3, and in pupils' completed work, their achievement matches the standards reached in the national tests. Averaged over the past three years, St Michael's girls outperform the boys at this stage in English but not in mathematics and science. The trend overall in the school's average points score for all core subjects is broadly in line with the national trend, but around two points per pupil higher than the national figure. In other words, standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 at St Michael's are consistently improving year on year at the same rate as standards are improving nationally.
4. Overall GCSE results at the end of Key Stage 4 are higher than the national average for all schools, but they were further ahead at the time of the last inspection than they are at present. The trend in average GCSE points scores has fallen in recent years against a rising national trend. However, between 1998 and 1999, this trend was reversed, and the GCSE points score increased at a faster rate than the national rate of increase. Improved performance of girls was the main factor in reversing of the trend. When compared to the overall GCSE points scores in similar schools in 1999, pupils at St Michael's are performing above the average.

5. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, results in English language were well above the national average, with the proportion of the highest grades A and A\* nearly twice the national average. Attainments in mathematics and in science are also well above their respective national averages. Girls out-performed the boys in English and mathematics, but boys matched the girls' performance in science, as they also did at the end of Key Stage 3.

6. In all other subjects where there are entries, the proportion of GCSE A\* to C grades was either above or well above average, equating to above average when compared to the results of similar schools.

7. Standards of literacy are high, largely because of the success of the school's strategies for developing it across the school. Pupil listening is generally active and sustained, with specific tasks set in history, languages, mathematics and music. Pupils use well the good range of writing opportunities, from notes to extended pieces. They go beyond merely factual responses in history, and they write personal descriptions of their own bedrooms in Year 9, after only four terms studying French. There is a good input from staff to improve pupils' vocabulary, particularly the introduction and explanation of technical terms, though the practice of having keyword lists on classroom walls is not universal, and it appears that pupils have difficulty with some science vocabulary. The practice of drafting has improved the quality of expression in information and communication technology, modern languages, history and to a limited extent in science.

8. Numeracy is strength across the school due to concentrated and co-ordinated work over the last few years. Good examples of its use are even seen in personal and social education lessons, when pupils calculate the number of units of alcohol in various drinks measures. Mental activities, lasting five to ten minutes, regularly form part of mathematics lessons; these have added stimulus to learning basic skills and have helped pupils to develop logical thinking and confidence in using number. Standardisation of approaches, for example, writing large numbers in blocks of three, has taken place, thereby enhancing the understanding of place value. In science, pupils make good use of graphs and percentages in practical work; problem solving takes place in calculations on electricity; pupils use graphs and 'lines of best fit' in data handling; older pupils use calculators sensibly, but more mental calculations could be performed by pupils. Numeracy skills are used to good effect in geography practical work, including tallying, pacing, measuring temperature, rainfall and wind speed. Grid references, latitude and longitude, flat maps showing a spherical earth, and maps compared to aerial photographs give pupils practice in shape and space. Numeracy in design and technology is effectively supported when teachers insist on accuracy in measuring and making materials, which in turn enables pupils to make products which fit together well and look good.

9. There are no pupils in the school for whom English is an additional language. Pupils of all abilities make at least satisfactory, often good progress throughout their time at the school, apart from in some lessons, where the problem is one of too leisurely a pace, since the lessons are so long. An instance of this was seen in science, with the highest ability set in Year 8, when too large a proportion of the very long lesson was spent on the teacher's introduction and safety instructions, before the pupils were able to begin the relatively straightforward practical work.

10. Pupils with special educational needs consolidate their language and vocabulary skills.

In a series of lessons, a Year 7 class acquired the skills of autobiographical writing. They ordered their initial ideas on a 'spider diagram' and a time-line, and then moved to writing about particular periods in their lives in paragraphs or 'chapters'. Mostly they use grammar and punctuation well in their final drafts. Spelling is a difficulty for a number of these pupils. Handwriting is generally cursive and legible. Pupils use their literacy skills well across the curriculum. For example in history in Year 8 they write confidently of Henry VIII's conflict with the Pope. Pupils use number across the curriculum. For example, they weigh different ingredients to determine the composition of muesli in food technology. In mathematics they understand subject terms and apply them. Pupils in Year 8 name different types of angles, such as obtuse and acute; they make mental calculations with money proficiently. Older pupils know a variety of geometrical shapes and the meaning of symmetry, and they use tally charts to determine frequency. In a Year 10 German lesson, their knowledge of the language was used to match questions and answers correctly, and give answers orally in reply to the teacher's questions.

11. Higher than average proportions of both girls and boys achieve the higher grades A\* to C at GCSE. Girls outperform boys in overall GCSE results at St Michael's as they do elsewhere. However, St Michael's girls often out-perform girls nationally by more than St Michael's boys out-perform boys elsewhere. There are one or two exceptions. For instance, unlike the situation elsewhere, in 1999, girls do not outperform boys in science, and the boys vie with girls in music. It is clear, however, that the school's overall results would become even better if the boys could be persuaded to vie with the girls in every subject. The school has done, and continues to do, considerable work to counteract gender effects, including whole staff in-service training sessions. A major focus in the school's lesson observation system is to watch for any possible gender effect of differing teaching strategies. One of the school's development aims sums up one particular approach well when it advises teachers to: *'use praise subtly with regard to gender issues, boys want praise desperately but in private'*.

12. The school's agreed performance targets are challenging and achievable. There is no complacency about pupils' achievement in this school. Results year-on-year are analysed and debated. Individual underachievement is picked up and dealt with very effectively very quickly by very good monitoring systems.

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

13. Overall, the attitudes, values and behaviour of pupils are very good and a clear strength of the school.

14. Pupils' attitudes both to learning and to the school are very good. Pupils show interest in their work, sustain concentration and are willing to apply themselves to the tasks set. They come to lessons with positive attitudes and a willingness to learn. They ask and answer questions readily, join in discussions and contribute well during lessons. Most pupils are confident, good-humoured and relaxed. They are generally enthusiastic about their lessons. For instance, in design and technology, where they come up against imaginative and exciting

challenges (such as designing board games and pocket games). In music, Year 8 pupils were obviously delighted with their joint music-making using percussion instruments. In German lessons, Year 7 pupils were totally involved and engrossed, and desperate to be picked to demonstrate their new-found skills. There are good opportunities for collaborative work through group discussion in most subjects, particularly in drama and personal and social education.

15. Behaviour around the school and in lessons is very good. Pupils understand the code of conduct and are supportive of one another in lessons. Their understanding of the effects of their actions on others is clearly demonstrated. They socialise well outside the classroom and the atmosphere is good-humoured and calm even when busy. Anti-bullying information is given a high priority throughout the school in tutorial time, assemblies and personal and social education lessons. Pupils report that there is little bullying and, if it arises, it is generally dealt with quickly and sensitively. Pupils have a strong sense of loyalty towards the school, and there is very little litter, graffiti or vandalism

16. Relationships between staff and pupils, and between pupils themselves, are of a very high quality and create a supportive and caring atmosphere in which pupils feel secure and comfortable. Pupils are valued both as individuals and for their contribution to the daily life of school. They respect each other's feelings and are supportive of each other in lessons. Pupils are very polite and friendly, and welcome visitors into their school.

17. During the last academic year there were two permanent exclusions and 23 fixed term exclusions involving a total of 15 pupils. This is slightly below the average for a school of this size. So far this academic year, there have been 12 fixed term exclusions. Exclusion is the final stage in a clear, structured approach to dealing with unacceptable behaviour and is not a sanction that is used lightly. All exclusions are fully documented and parents are involved at all stages.

18. Pupils' personal development is very well fostered through the personal and social education programme in which pupils are encouraged to think about their own attitudes and about wider social issues. Pupils' confidence and self-esteem are very high, due to the commitment of the staff and the promotion of Christian values throughout the school on a daily basis. Many pupils take part in drama and musical productions within school and further afield. There are a large number of lunchtime and after school clubs and activities, which are well supported despite many pupils having a bus journey home. Year 10 pupils act as mentors for lower school pupils and help to support their learning or act as a friendly ear. Each tutorial group elects a pupil to be its representative on 'Forum', which gives pupils a chance to voice their views and opinions. The school supports a number of international, national and local charities, and fund-raising activities are often co-ordinated by the Forum. In this way, pupils develop an awareness of the misfortunes and problems of others. Planners are used diligently by all pupils to help them to organise their work and time, and all pupils are now involved in evaluating their own performance in subjects and setting themselves targets to aim for.

19. Attendance at the school is very good. For the current academic year, the attendance rate for the whole school is 95 per cent, which is well above the national average, and higher than it was at the time of the last inspection. Unauthorised absence is very low. In no year group does the attendance rate fall below 94 per cent. These high levels ensure uninterrupted learning for most pupils, which contributes to their high achievement. Close liaison with the education welfare officer has helped to reduce unauthorised absences to a low level. Pupils register with their tutors in the morning and afternoon, and most subject teachers take registers each lesson. Registers are marked accurately and there are clear guidelines to ensure staff record absences correctly. Punctuality is good. Most pupils arrive on time and lessons begin promptly.

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

20. Pupils are well taught throughout the school. The quality of teaching is good, and much of it is very good, in almost every subject in the school. Half of the 180 lessons inspected were seen to be good; a further three in ten were very good, and occasionally (*modern foreign languages*) excellent. One in five lessons were satisfactory and only two were held to be unsatisfactory.

21. There were very good lessons at both key stages in every subject except information and communications technology (ICT). Subjects with the larger proportion of good and very good lessons at Key Stage 3, were English, mathematics, science, modern foreign languages, history, information and communication technology, geography, design and technology, music and girls' physical education. At Key Stage 4 the larger proportions of better lessons were in English, mathematics, art, geography, history, modern languages, music and in both boys and girls' physical education. The larger proportions of only satisfactory teaching were in boys' physical education at Key Stage 3, and in design and technology, information and communication technology and science at Key Stage 4.

22. The most successful lessons are those where the teaching has the greatest impact upon pupils' learning. For instance, language teachers use the foreign language extensively or exclusively, enabling pupils to make very fast progress in their understanding of the spoken language. In English, a good variety of teaching methods maintains pupils' interest and keeps up the pace of lessons. Almost every lesson contains a carefully judged combination of reading, writing, listening and speaking, which stimulates active response from the pupils. Creative approaches in mathematics stimulate pupils' interest and help to develop their number skills very well. For example, a very successful strategy is to ask pupils to stand at the beginning of a lesson, close their eyes and concentrate on mental calculations, which sometimes involve both geometry and arithmetic. Other mathematics lessons use cards and mathematical bingo games to good effect. Because of very skilful use of historical sources, pupils in Year 9 history lessons understand that protestors at Peterloo were presented as either *a docile crowd cruelly set upon by troopers* or *a hostile mob being legitimately restrained by the forces of law and order*. Music teachers, when they join in the music making, adding a tune or improvisation over the pupils' performances, give a greater sense of purpose to the exercise and increase the quality of the pupils' learning.



23. The unsatisfactory lesson in boys' physical education was the result of too pedestrian a pace and of activities not being well enough presented to the class. In the unsatisfactory design and technology lesson, the task was too mundane for the pupils concerned, and there was a lack of clarity in the lesson aims. Pupils could rightly have inquired why they were doing this particular task. The teachers concerned both had satisfactory, sometimes good lessons, at other times in the week, but in these two lessons there was insufficient impact on pupils' learning, and pupils made less progress than they should have done in the lessons. In one of the two lessons (*physical education*), a minority of pupils' behaviour was allowed to hinder the learning of the majority.

24. The satisfactory lessons were judged less than good because they lacked the sparkle seen elsewhere, or because, in addition to having significant strengths, they had a number of important weaknesses. For instance, there was too little variety in a long English lesson, the objectives of a physical education lesson were not clear enough, or the teacher asked questions in a science class, then answered them before the class had the chance to respond.

25. The skills of literacy are well taught throughout the school, especially in English where there are reading lessons for the lower-attaining halves of Years 8 and 9 who do not take French, with regular testing of reading ages to monitor progress. The provision of book boxes to form tutors encourages reading for pleasure in pastoral time, with the requirement for pupils to complete a reading diary. Outside the English department, opportunities are provided in all other subjects to develop pupils' speaking and listening skills through teacher-led question and answer sessions and, with the exception of information and communication technology, through pupil pair and group discussion. The practice of drafting to improve the quality of expression is used in information and communication technology, languages, history and to a limited extent in science. A few subjects, history, for example, have developed their own language policy, but it appears that most are awaiting the ratification of the school's policy.

26. The teaching of numeracy is also a strength, not just in mathematics, where it is taught exceptionally well, but also in other subjects; science, geography and design and technology, for instance. A very good example of the teaching of numeracy was seen in a Year 8 personal and social education lesson, when all the pupils in a mixed ability tutor group were able, with the help of calculators, to work out the relative numbers of units of alcohol in various amounts of a range of alcoholic drinks. The higher attainers were encouraged to work the calculations in their heads and did so successfully.

27. The school is meeting the needs of all of its pupils well. Grouping into ability sets enables the work to be pitched at the right level in most classes, and most teachers have extension work available to challenge further those pupils who complete a task early. Teaching strategies observed were working equally well with both boys and girls, and teachers are very aware of the need to involve both sexes in lessons. Very able and talented pupils are well stretched, on the whole, in the highest sets, although one or two things militate against this. The upper sets tend to be in very large group sizes (*sometimes as high as 35 in modern languages and geography*), often taught in small rooms, and there is sometimes too leisurely a pace in the long double lessons of 90 minutes, whereas the most able pupils could cope with more work at a faster rate.

28. The quality of teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good overall. In two

lessons teaching was very good, and no lesson observed was less than satisfactory. Teaching is particularly effective in lessons provided for pupils to focus on improving literacy and numeracy skills. Pupils' work is very well planned and organised. They arrive from all parts of the school for the lesson, collect their work in trays and start immediately on their tasks. This may be to learn spelling, work with number, or reading to show understanding through written answers. Pupils successfully rise to the teacher's challenge to take responsibility for their own learning. They set their targets, and check their progress. 'I reached my target – I did four tasks this lesson!' a pupil was heard to exclaim. The teacher assesses the progress of each pupil, and checks that they move to appropriately challenging tasks. Special support assistants and volunteers are used effectively by the teacher, for example to listen to pupils' reading or test their spelling. Resources are carefully selected to stimulate pupils' interest and improve their learning in progressive steps. Effective use is made of the school rewards system to recognise good effort and quality work. Pupils make good progress in their learning targets in such lessons, and their behaviour is very good. Occasionally teaching is less effective because planning is insufficient to take account both of the special needs of all pupils, including those with behavioural difficulties, and of the appropriate deployment of special support assistance. Even in those lessons, however, the teaching is satisfactory because the overall planning and other provision enables almost all pupils to make satisfactory progress.

29. Pupils at St Michael's learn well and make good progress at Key Stage 3 in every subject except information and communication technology and physical education, where their learning and progress are just satisfactory, and in mathematics, where their learning and progress are very good. At Key Stage 4, pupils learn well and make good progress in every subject except information and communication technology, where learning and progress are satisfactory, and geography and mathematics, where learning and progress are very good.

30. This learning and progress mirror the good and often very good teaching found in eight lessons out of every ten, but is also the result of the exceptionally positive attitudes of pupils in the school, their very good attendance, and the good quality monitoring of teaching and learning across the school.

31. There are no serious weaknesses in learning in any subject at any key stage, just relative strengths. Particular strengths in learning include pupils' levels of interest and concentration, their pace and productivity. Pupils in German lessons make very fast progress from the beginning of Year 7 and, by the end of the first term, have covered as much material as would be considered a year's work in many schools. Pupils' knowledge of the level of their own achievement is also a significant strength. This was vividly illustrated by the Year 11 pupil who told the inspectors that, at the end of Year 9, he had been on track to achieve a grade C in his GCSE art examination, but now, immediately following the mock examinations, he was on track for a grade A. This, he felt, was due to the very hard work and determination of an art teacher to make sure that he succeeded. Pupils in a Year 11 English class vied with each other to read the text of 'An Inspector Calls', showing that their eagerness does not die away as they reach their final year in the school. Pupils are very well behaved in lessons and listen attentively so that they are able to carry out tasks confidently. They ask questions about things they are unsure of; are secure enough to discuss why they think a particular thing, and derive satisfaction from learning and achieving good standards. Good examples of this were seen in many mathematics lessons, where pupils were happy to discuss their methods and were able to explain fluently what they were doing

and why. Pupils are careful and patient in practical lessons and put very good effort into presenting their work well. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good and there is mutual respect. Pupils demonstrate not only high levels of interest in lessons, but their homework also reflects the care they take over completing it to a good standard.

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

### **The quality and range of opportunities for learning provided by the school.**

32. The school has improved some aspects of its curricular provision since the last inspection. For instance, more time has been given to English and mathematics, and personal, social and health education courses have been revamped and improved. A successful GNVQ course in health and social care has been introduced. At both Key Stages 3 and 4, the curriculum is relevant to the needs of the pupils and meets statutory requirements. Its *breadth* is satisfactory, but there are some weaknesses in its overall *balance and continuity*. The lengths of lessons, the spread of lessons across some years, the shortage of time for some subjects at Key Stage 3, the lack of use of information and communication technology in other subjects and the size of some higher attaining groups, are the main causes of concern.

33. At Key Stage 3, all pupils study drama and information and communication technology in addition to the statutory National Curriculum. The time allocation for physical education at Key Stage 3 and for French and German in Year 9 is below that seen in most schools nationally. The school working week (*24 hours and 30 minutes at both Key stages*) is above the average time elsewhere for Key Stage 3, but below that for Key Stage 4 in most other schools. The length of lessons is unsuitable for some subjects. For example, practical subjects, such as physical education and art, have insufficient time in a single lessons of 45 minutes, and where other subjects are allocated a double lesson of 90 minutes, pupils' concentration and motivational levels are sometimes adversely affected. In Year 7 food technology and information and communication technology, and in Year 8 art and drama, lessons are paired to give pupils a double lesson for half of the year. This means that some pupils do not start one of these courses for sixteen weeks, leading to a lack of continuity, particularly in art between Year 8 and Year 9. The lack of planned opportunities for using information and communication technology across almost all subject areas is a weakness. History is one of the very few subject areas where information and communication technology is sometimes used to teach a particular subject. The majority of other departments recognises its importance but plead that they are handicapped by the present poor quality and provision of suitable computers.

34. At Key Stage 4, in addition to the compulsory subjects, pupils select from a variety of options which include history, geography, art, music, drama, health and social care. From these courses they gain a range of qualifications, including GCSE, full and short certificates. All pupils work in information and communication technology towards either Computer

Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) course, the Unit Award Scheme or a Certificate of Achievement. Pupils are provided with a relatively broad experience of design and technology, but there is not enough use of metal in the resistant materials area and the department does not provide opportunities for pupils to study textiles technology.

35. Pupils with special educational needs have full access to the curriculum and the extra-curricular opportunities. Ability setting provides suitably smaller classes for those with learning needs, and the opportunity to move to classes where levels are higher as their attainment improves. *Enrichment* lessons give pupils very good opportunities to improve their basic skills at times that do not take them from other lessons. The Learning Support area effectively provides further help with learning needs and homework at lunchtimes and after school.

36. A good range of extra-curricular activities enriches to the curriculum for all pupils. Music and drama make a significant contribution to this enrichment, with many pupils involved in drama productions, choirs and bands. The school band fosters good relationships through visits to local primary feeder schools. There are many opportunities for pupils to take part in sporting activities at different levels, with clubs for the majority of pupils and school teams for higher attaining pupils. The homework club, and the mathematics computer club are further examples of the good provision of extra-curricular activities.

37. The school has a long tradition of good links with the community that make a significant contribution to the curriculum, and this is set to continue. In 1997, the school won a National Curriculum Award for the quality of these links and most departments involve experts, guests and visits to support their studies. A physics day at Manchester University, speakers from BNFL, environmental work in Chorley, the Royal Society of Chemistry competition, astronomy work at Jodrell Bank, geography field trips to Clitheroe, Lake District and Chorley, and history trips to Astley Hall and Holmshore Textile Museum are a small selection of the range of visits organised for pupils.

38. The school has a good relationship with industry and commerce. It is part of the British Aerospace network of schools and some pupils attend the Young Engineer courses at weekends. The Industry Days for Year 11 pupils are well-organised and involve many people from the world of business who share their expertise and experience with pupils in a realistic and practical way. The careers and work experience modules within the personal and social education programme are particularly well managed, and have a direct impact on pupils' personal development and attitude to work. Both modules are inter-linked and ensure pupils are well prepared to get the most out of their relationships with employers. There is a database of contacts and people who are willing to be involved and can be invited into lessons in school.

39. Provision is good in all year groups for personal, social and health education, including sex education and information about the dangers of the misuse of drugs. Members of the police, health and safety professions are well integrated into the programme so pupils get the best possible advice and help they can. The programme is jointly co-ordinated by a senior member of staff and the year heads. The schemes of work are detailed and thorough, and modules are evaluated by staff and pupils. Specialist staff are responsible for some topics such as careers and work-experience. Both of these are particularly well managed and

organised, and contribute greatly to pupils being well prepared for life outside school. Other lessons are taught by tutors, and although well supported by materials and resources, some staff do not feel confident with the subject. During the inspection, some of the lessons observed were startlingly good whilst others (on the same topic) were ordinary. However, overall, the personal and social education programme plays a very positive part in the support and personal development of pupils.

40. There are a large number of feeder primary schools and the school makes every effort to forge strong links with them. Primary children are invited to St Michael's for a variety of activities, taster lessons and induction events. Year 7 pupils report that they settled into secondary school life easily and felt at home very quickly. The school band tours around the primary schools, and many primary children have the chance to watch productions at St. Michael's. Staff from the English and mathematics departments visit primary schools to monitor the teaching of literacy and numeracy.

41. Through the careers co-ordinator, the school has developed very good links with the Post-16 colleges in the area. Open days, conferences, sample sessions, and talks from college staff all help pupils select the correct college course to suit their needs. The quality of this partnership is a strong factor in ensuring the transition to the next stage of their education is a positive and enjoyable. The school also has a very strong and productive partnership with St Martin's College, Lancaster, jointly training student teachers.

42. The school's strategies for developing both literacy and numeracy are effective, with the result that standards in both are high across the school. For example, the literacy co-ordinator has conducted in-service training sessions for the whole staff, and Year 7 form tutors encourage reading for pleasure in pastoral time and require pupils to complete a reading diary. Mental activities, lasting five to ten minutes, regularly form part of mathematics lessons; these have added stimulus to learning basic skills and have helped pupils to develop logical thinking and confidence in using number. Numeracy work, including pupils' work from other departments, is displayed so that pupils understand that number skills are used in a whole host of different situations. Standardisation of approaches, for example writing large numbers in blocks of three, has taken place, thereby enhancing the understanding of place value.

### **How well does the school cultivate pupils' personal (spiritual, moral, social and cultural) development?**

43. The school develops very well pupils' personal (spiritual, moral, social and cultural) development. It provides a daily act of collective worship for all its pupils. These are of good quality, and on some days are conducted by form tutors with effective pupil involvement, within their own form rooms. The school's mission statement, its Prospectus and the headteacher's personal statement all bear witness to the school's Anglican Christian foundation. 'The pursuit of excellence in the context of Christian faith and values' pervades everything that takes place in the school. The school caters for the whole child in body, mind and spirit by providing for very good quality spiritual development through worship, religious education and the other subjects. There is an obvious carry over into the moral dimension and a religious rationale for a code of conduct, discipline, behaviour and appearance. Thus each individual in the school is held in theory and in practice to be unique and equal in the

eyes of God, with talents to be fostered. Subjects such as history have detailed policy documents dealing with the moral issues in the topics studied. Discipline is a 'route to personal spiritual growth dignity and respect'. Environmental studies take place 'in the light of stewardship and the beauty of the world as a spiritual issue.'

44. The school provides all the usual benefits of social knowledge, skills and concerns, plus the additional religious dimension of very good community links with many parishes and the diocese, as well as with businesses and the world of work. Pupils' confidence and self-esteem are raised by the commitment of the staff and the promotion of Christian values throughout the school on a daily basis. There are plenty of visits and opportunities to mix on trips and in teams. One of the declared aims of the curriculum is to develop social, political, economic and environmental awareness. There is a school Forum in which pupils exercise responsibility, in addition to their work experience and charitable giving. There are very good cultural contributions from music, drama and art, with productions of 'Fiddler on the Roof', 'Half a Sixpence' and 'My Fair Lady'. The religious education and history courses, trips to various European countries and the formal exchanges with schools in Germany, Hungary and Belgium provide an effective cultural dimension to the curriculum as a whole, albeit largely white and Western. In addition, the school makes some provision to prepare pupils for life in the ethnic and cultural diversity of British society by, for example, its choice of tutorial patrons (*which include Bishop Desmond Tutu and Martin Luther King*), and by good use of a Muslim trail project, which is a regular part of the RE provision in Year 9.

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

45. The school provides a very good level of care and support for all its pupils, a fact which is strongly acknowledged by parents and pupils in their discussions and communications with inspectors. This area was praised in the last inspection and the high standards have been maintained, and in some respects (*monitoring of academic progress*) improved. It is a clear strength of the school.

46. The school gives a high priority to the physical care and well being of its pupils. The effective child protection policy follows the local authority procedures. A senior member of staff is the designated officer and attends appropriate and regular training. Clear and helpful guidance is provided for all staff on how to deal with such matters. Good use is made of medical support and other outside agencies, and lines of communication are clear. There are policies and guidelines for the organisation and participation of off-site activities and visits, and there are effective arrangements for dealing with first aid and sickness. Regular fire drills and safety checks on equipment are carried out. The health and safety policy is clear, and appropriate risk assessments take place.

47. The school provides very good support and guidance for its pupils and has created a caring and secure environment. Tutors play a central role in making this provision so positive. Tutors and pupil's stay together for a number of years, giving plenty of opportunity to build stable relationships. Teachers and tutors know pupils well individually and have a notable concern for their progress, welfare and personal well being. Pupils find their teachers are approachable, accessible, responsive and encouraging. The quality of their relationships is the basis upon which much of the personal support is built, and this contributes to pupils' confidence and ability to cope with everyday school life. The school is generally a happy

place and pupils enjoy being there.

48. The personal and social education programme effectively raises pupils' awareness of issues relating to health, drugs, sex, safety and relationships. A retired train driver visibly shocked Year 7 pupils with a vivid first-hand description of his train killing a trespasser who tripped and fell in front of it.

49. The school has very good systems and procedures for encouraging and maintaining good discipline and behaviour, based on a climate of honesty and fairness, showing tolerance towards others and accepting responsibility. The code of conduct is well established and is considered reasonable by pupils. It is supported by a system of rewards and sanctions which pupils generally respond to in a positive and mature manner. The good relationships between pupils and teachers also contribute to an orderly and calm atmosphere, and one in which pupils readily and naturally talk to teachers. Pupils are confident that if they have a problem, such as bullying, it will be dealt with quickly and sensitively. All staff use the incident slips consistently and fairly. The system of formal warnings and the pupil guidance unit deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour and minimise disruption for other pupils.

50. The school has very good procedures for monitoring and promoting good attendance. The data available through the computerised registration system are used well to identify pupils with attendance problems. A senior teacher co-ordinates the monitoring of attendance and looks at whole school and year group patterns. Despite their high levels of attendance, the school is always seeking ways to improve further, and sets itself very high standards to work towards. Pupils and parents are often reminded of the link between good attendance and high attainment, and pupils monitor their own attendance by recording it in their planners. The attendance notice board with eye-catching graphs and charts ensures that attendance is never forgotten, and individual and group awards are given for good attendance.

51. Very good systems are in place to record, monitor and report pupils' academic progress and personal development. Assessment procedures work very successfully because they create a system in which the pupils and staff are clear about where each pupil is at each stage of their studies in each subject. Pupils also know what must be done to improve. Assessment is very good in all subject areas, with the exception of physical education where there is a lack of Key Stage 3 assessment data. For instance, art teachers interview individual pupils; concise records are kept; pupils know their own targets and understand what needs to be done to improve and change targets. Within subject areas, heads of departments monitor teachers' marking. Supportive comments are encouraged. National Curriculum levels are not used as much as in some schools because the system is based on a local authority project which uses assessment data to produce minimum GCSE grade predictions. The school is very active in following up pupils who are deemed to be under performing. Heads of year and tutors use the abundance of assessment data regularly to monitor and track the academic progress of pupils each half term. This identifies under-achieving pupils quickly and extra support and mentoring are given to those pupils. All pupils have an individual and private interview with their tutor in the autumn term in which they discuss their progress, and their strengths and weaknesses, and set targets to work to. All pupils use their planners in a structured and diligent manner. They are expected to record their homework accurately and ask their parents to sign weekly. Any homework not completed will be indicated as such by subject teachers. Planners are checked weekly by tutors and periodically by senior staff so that any concerns about homework are picked up

immediately. Each week, tutors and pupils have a guidance lesson together, which provides valuable time for discussion and monitoring of progress and development. Pupils also complete a self-evaluation of their performance and achievements over the year, which is attached to their annual reports. These show that most pupils have a clear understanding of how well they are doing at school and what they have to work on to improve.

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

52. Overall, the good partnership between the school and parents ensures a good two-way communication at all times, and a joint commitment to high standards.

53. The school has continued to maintain the good partnership with parents reported in the last inspection and is constantly looking for ways to develop the relationship further. Parents are very positive about the school. They feel that staff value their opinions and support and act quickly at any concern. They also feel that staff are approachable, and appreciate the level of care given to their children.

54. Parents receive good quality information about the school, its philosophy and approach. The prospectus and annual report from governors provide plenty of detail on how the school works and what parents can expect. The newsletter, 'Newslink', and half-termly letters from the headteacher keep parents up-to-date with events, topical issues and news. All around the school, there are displays of pupils' work and photographs of activities and events, giving a good flavour of school life.

55. The overall quality of reports to parents is good at both key stages, except in some respects at Key Stage 4. Formal reporting to parents of all year groups is through a short report in the autumn term which gives grades for achievement and effort but with no written comment. The full report towards the end of the year is detailed and helpful. In many subjects, teachers comment specifically on what pupils can do well and where they need to improve. In a minority of subjects at Key Stage 4, the comments are too general and do not give parents a clear enough indication of progress. Parents have the opportunity to give their response to the reports by completing the return slip. The parents' consultation evenings are well attended, and the school makes personal contact with parents who do not attend. These evenings are also used to seek parents' views and opinions on the school, through questionnaires.

56. The school is keen to encourage parents to take an active part in their child's education and is very successful in doing so. Parents are expected to sign and check the homework planners, and some parents use this as a means of communicating with tutors and individual subject teachers. The home-school contract is firmly established and clearly indicates what both the school and parents can expect from each other. The school is very strongly committed to involving parents in learning and has been running a popular 'Parents as Educators' course for a number of years. Through the course, parents get an understanding and appreciation of how the school operates, how subjects are taught and how parents can help. Both parents and staff say this has greatly increased the part parents can play in helping children with their learning at home. Many parents help within the school, sometimes within lessons, in a most productive and valuable way. Some parents have become formal support assistants in lessons, and others volunteer their expertise and knowledge to specific subject



areas. During the inspection, parents were observed helping many pupils in the learning support centre, and in a number of design and technology lessons, where their input was of a particularly high quality and had a direct impact on the learning of pupils. The school places great importance on homework and asks for and receives parental support in this area. Parents receive a copy of the homework timetable each year and are asked to check that homework is completed properly. An active parent/teacher/friends association supports the school in all its activities and also acts as a forum for sharing and obtaining parents' views. The impact of all this parental involvement on the life and work of the school is very good.

## **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

### **How effectively do the headteacher, key staff and governing body lead, manage and account for the performance of the school?**

57. The school's priority areas for development are all concerned with raising even further pupil achievement by, for example, improving pupils' learning, developing teacher expectation, taking homework even more seriously, and detecting and removing any pupil underachievement as early as possible.

58. The headteacher, in his eighth year as head at the school, spearheads this drive to eliminate underachievement, whilst at the same time leading the school in the very friendly and effective manner which makes everyone feel welcome and valued. His very clear vision of the direction in which the school should continue to move is shared by all who work in or send their children to the school. This vision is also backed up by very hard edged and effective systems for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. These are a major factor in the maintenance of the school's high standards of attainment. He is aware of, and has plans to improve, the two identified areas of relative weakness in subject co-ordination.

59. He is well supported by a small but effective senior leadership team who share his objectives, and by an effective administrative support team, which contains some former senior members of staff of the school, who deal with many of the important but routine day to day paperwork and data handling duties. The headteacher and his teaching colleagues are thus left free to concentrate more on essential teaching and learning matters.

60. The governing body, recently slimmed down to a more manageable number, is effective in the way it both supports the work of the school and remains in touch with its many strengths and possible areas for further development. The good mixture of talents and experience amongst the governors complements the expertise in the school. The chair and vice chair of governors meet the headteacher every week in a close sharing of commitment and trust; they are comfortable with the leadership of the headteacher and are, as a matter of routine, well informed about what is happening in the school.

61. The quality of the school's pastoral leadership is very good. Pupils feel safe and secure and know whom to turn to for help and advice.

62. School development planning looks forward over three years. It has a coherent feel about it, and there is a greater degree of match between whole school targets and those of the separate departments than was the case at the time of the previous inspection.

63. Subject leadership, with just two exceptions, is good, and in some cases it is very good. There is room for improvement in the co-ordination of physical education and in the co-ordination of the use of information and communication technology as a routine tool in the teaching of other subjects.

64. Learning support shows improvement since the last inspection. Its leadership and management are good. The heavy workload is appropriately delegated, and clerical work is done meticulously by a part-time assistant. Special support assistants have a good understanding of their classroom rôles and relate well to teachers. The governors give strong support to the staff, report to parents annually, and monitor the use of resources. Support for subjects is channelled through half-termly meetings of representative teachers and the special educational needs co-ordinator. Minutes from these meetings show lively debate and a commitment to improve provision and practice. Individual education plans (IEPs) for pupils at Stages 2-5 are detailed and give general targets. Teachers are responsible for selecting those targets that can be addressed effectively in their subjects, and providing suitable approaches and tasks for pupils in their planning. Individual educational plans are available in all classrooms and teachers are aware of their contents. The translation of that information into useful subject targets linked to the targets pupils produce is variable. Pupils with special educational needs, especially, benefit from short-term, achievable and measurable targets. There is evidence of this in the school, for example, in *Enrichment* lessons.

65. The governors fulfil their statutory obligations and there are no issues concerning the provision of equal opportunities or equal access to the curriculum.

### **How adequate are the school's staffing, learning resources and accommodation?**

66. The match of the numbers, qualifications and experience of teachers to the needs of the curriculum is good. Some, as yet unresolved anomalies, remain in the salary structure. Apart from in the senior management team, women dominate the numbers of teachers and the number of middle managers. Although many teachers are very experienced with more than

15 years in teaching, and just under one fifth have spent all of their long experience in this one school, there is still a judicious blend of youth and experience to facilitate the exchange of ideas and to inform change.

67. The school holds the coveted Investors in People Award, which has recently been renewed. There was a sensitive response to the latest recommendations, all but one of which have been implemented. The training needs of non-teaching staff are equally well matched to the requirements of the school, but the one-to-one development interview recommended by the Investors in People assessor has not yet been implemented.

68. Staff development is an important plank in the school's planning. Every teacher is a member of at least one working party which contributes to one aspect of the school's management and development. In this way, all members of the school community are encouraged to take a share in policy making. Whilst appraisal is not in the form of the local education authority (LEA) model, it is effective in supporting individual teachers to meet the needs of the school. All teachers are seen to teach at least twice each year by senior staff and curriculum managers; some are observed three times, and all are interviewed annually and formally by the headteacher. The training needs of individuals are considered and job descriptions are renegotiated frequently. Staff development is well managed in line with these interviews. The training budget is devolved and carefully monitored. In-service training is carefully planned and its effectiveness carefully evaluated.

69. Whilst the spending on non-teaching staff overall is within reasonable balance, there is insufficient technician support in the technology area and none at all in art. The quality of service and commitment given to the school by the non-teaching staff matches that of the teaching staff.

70. Resources for learning are good in most departments and are very good in science. Some keyboards are out of date in music and there is a shortage of some equipment for teaching about 'control' in technology, where there is also a shortage of computers in the workshops. At the time of writing, the supply of information and communications technology (ICT) equipment in the school is just satisfactory, but with many out of date machines, some of which are ineffectively deployed. However, the buildings are in the process of being wired for a network that will link all curriculum areas with a new information and communication technology suite within a matter of a few weeks (*and 84 new personal computers have been ordered and paid for to be delivered to the school in the week after the inspection*).

71. The school has co-operated with the local education authority to devise a Property Asset Management Plan, which shows that there is insufficient accommodation to match all the curricular needs of this popular and over-subscribed school, even though the total floor space is calculated to be sufficient. Consequently there is such heavy pressure on available space that many lessons take place out of specialist rooms. There is a requirement for eight teaching rooms every time Years 9, 10 and 11 are taught science, mathematics or English. As a result, many lessons have to be taught out of each department, and problems of communication and transport of stock arise.

72. At the time of writing, plans are well advanced to build two new classrooms and refurbish four science laboratories. There is some scope for some internal alterations during this work, to create additional space that could allow the humanities subjects to be brought together on one corridor and allow the languages a separate suite. There is no suitable accommodation for drama, and that for music is too small for the numbers of pupils who take part. Art rooms are also too small, and the accommodation for ceramics is poor with a number of technical problems. The workshops for technology provide insufficient teaching space and are in need of refurbishment.

### **Does the school make the best strategic use of its resources?**

73. The school makes very good strategic use of its resources, including specific grants and additional funding, by firmly linking decisions on spending to educational priorities.

74. The creation of two administrative posts occupied by former teachers with long experience in school organisation relieves teachers of the burden of routine paperwork. A site manager and bursar efficiently manage their parts of the school. The administration of the school, including its financial administration and the efforts of teachers, is thus sharply focused on, and more efficiently applied to, the school development plan, which is itself firmly focused on the improvement of teaching and learning.

75. Administrators have responded promptly to the requirements of the latest auditors' report, which praises the arrangements made for the conduct of the school's finances.

76. Funds allocated for the support of pupils with special educational needs are subsidised from the school's budget, without identifying additional sums spent by curriculum areas on special needs. The direct spending is thoroughly monitored, and efficiently and effectively used. Curriculum areas are all obliged to relate spending to the development plan and the needs of the curriculum, and to bid annually for financial allocations. The school subsidises the cost of peripatetic music teachers by £9,000: this allows for a wide range of instrumental tuition and for good numbers of pupils to take part.

77. The principles of comparison, challenge, consultation and competition are well applied to the management and use of all of the school's resources. The school uses financial information from OFSTED to measure its performance against that of other schools. Competitive tendering is used to find the most cost-effective means of, for example, managing school cleaning. The use of funds provided for parents from their covenant scheme to refit the school with a computer network and to lease new computers is a very good example of successful consultation and bargaining before purchase.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

The governors, headteacher and staff should now attend to the following matters for improvement, two of which (*information technology provision and use, and aspects of the accommodation*) are already identified as priorities by the school:

- **Improve standards and use of information and communication technology throughout the school by:**
  - \* improving the quality of the available hardware and software;  
(*Paragraph: 142*)
  - \* deploying the information and communication technology equipment more effectively;  
(*Paragraph: 143*)
  - \* ensuring that it is used to aid the delivery of the national curriculum for other subject areas;  
(*Paragraphs: 32, 33, 136*)
  
- **Improve standards of attainment in physical education at Key Stage 3 (Years 7-9) by:**
  - \* improving the leadership in the department;  
(*Paragraphs: 161, 162*)
  - \* developing specific targets for improvement;  
(*Paragraph: 162*)
  - \* challenging the most able pupils more;  
(*Paragraph: 157*)
  - \* bringing the boys' rate of learning and progress up that of the girls;  
(*Paragraph: 156*)
  
- **Improve the curriculum further by:**
  - \* agreeing a more effective length of lessons;  
(*Paragraph: 33*)
  - \* reducing the size of some teaching groups;  
(*Paragraph: 27*)
  - \* improving the balance of options given to pupils in design and technology;  
(*Paragraph: 119*)

- **Improve further the accommodation, as soon as funds, permit by:**

- \* increasing the number of classroom spaces;  
*(Paragraphs: 71, 72)*
- \* grouping more subject areas together wherever possible;  
*(Paragraph: 72)*
- \* improving science laboratory and design and technology workshop provision;  
*(Paragraphs: 72, 105, 106, 120)*
- \* improving facilities for the teaching of both music and drama;  
*(Paragraphs: 27, 153, 90)*

**Other weaknesses governors will wish to take account of in their development plans:**

- \* some Key Stage 4 reports to parents need to be more specific about what pupils can do well and what they need to do to improve.  
*(Paragraph 55).*

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	180
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	47

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

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1	28	50	20	1	0	0

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

### *Information about the school's pupils*

#### **Pupils on the school's roll**

	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll.	1047	N/A
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals.	73	N/A

#### **Special educational needs**

	Y7–Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs.	43	N/A
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register.	157	N/A

#### **English as an additional language**

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language.	none

#### **Pupil mobility in the last school year**

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	15
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	20

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	4.48
National comparative data	7.8

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.41
National comparative data	0.9

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year.	1999	112	101	213

National Curriculum Test/Task Results	English	Mathematics	Science	
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	64	83	80
	Girls	81	77	71
	Total	145	160	151
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	68	75	71
	National	63	62	55
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	31	51	32
	National	28	38	23

Teachers' Assessments	English	Mathematics	Science	
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	79	86	82
	Girls	88	84	76
	Total	167	170	158
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	78	80	75
	National	64	64	60
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	57	54	33
	National	31	37	28



**Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4**

	<b>Year</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Total</b>
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	1999	98	110	208

<b>GCSE results</b>		<b>5 or more grades A* - C</b>	<b>5 or more grades A*-G</b>	<b>1 or more grades A*-G</b>
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	47	90	96
	Girls	71	104	107
	Total	118	194	203
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	57	93	98
	National	46.3	90.7	95.7

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

<b>GCSE results</b>		<b>GCSE point score</b>
Average point score per pupil	School	41
	National	37.8

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

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

### *Ethnic background of pupils*

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	3
Indian	0
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	0
Any other minority ethnic group	2

### *Exclusions in the last school year*

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	20	2
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

### *Teachers and classes*

#### **Qualified teachers and classes:**

##### **Y7 – Y11**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE).	58.13
Number of pupils per qualified teacher.	18.01

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

#### **Education support staff:**

##### **Y7 – Y11**

Total number of education support staff.	15
Total aggregate hours worked per week.	283

#### **Deployment of teachers:**

##### **Y7 – Y11**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes.	76
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 2	N/A
Key Stage 3	23.6
Key Stage 4	23.1

### *Financial information*

Financial year.	1998/99
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	£
Total income.	2,101,119.00
Total expenditure.	2,122,156.00
Expenditure per pupil.	2023.00
Balance brought forward from previous year.	56,439.00
Balance carried forward to next year.	35,402.00

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

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	1047
Number of questionnaires returned	450

### **Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	47	46	6	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	53	43	3	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	42	50	4	1	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	34	51	13	2	1
The teaching is good.	41	54	2	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	41	47	10	1	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	59	37	3	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	74	25	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	39	49	7	1	3
The school is well led and managed.	55	39	1	0	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	51	44	2	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	49	41	5	2	3

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

### **ENGLISH**

78. Standards of attainment in this subject are above the national average at the end of Key Stage 3 and well above average at the end of Key Stage 4.

79. In 1999, by the end of Key Stage 3, the pupils' average points score in the national tests was above the national average. The percentages of pupils gaining Level 5 or greater, and Level 6 or greater, were just above and above the national average respectively. The performance of pupils in comparison with those in similar schools was also above average. The Level of pupil performance has fluctuated considerably over the past few years, sometimes significantly exceeding the national improvement from year to year and sometimes lower than that trend. Girls consistently outperform the boys, as they do nationally, and the difference is marginally greater than the national average, especially in 1999.

80. The proportion of pupils gaining GCSE grades A\* to C is consistently high and increasing. In 1999 it was well above the national average with a proportion of the highest grades A\* and a nearly twice the national average. In GCSE literature the proportion of grades A\* to C is also well above the national average, again with a significant proportion of the highest grades.

81. Scrutiny of pupils' written work and lesson observations mirror the standards indicated by the Key Stage 3 tests. Towards the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' achievements in English are good. Pupils of lower levels of prior attainment and with special educational needs achieve standards in line with national expectations. Pupils of average and higher levels of prior attainment achieve standards above national expectations. Pupils show above average speaking and listening skills in a variety of situations. Pupils in Year 7 contribute articulately to a class discussion about dialect, work in pairs to produce collections of terms of affection - synonyms for 'luv' - and share them with the class. Pupils recognise the changes in language since the time of Shakespeare, read aloud an extract from 'As you like it', and exchange Elizabethan-style insults. In Year 8, groups of pupils conduct discussions, structured by the use of a task sheet, to plan the contents of a magazine they will subsequently write. Reading skills are above average and are developing well. In Year 8, pupils with special educational needs read the letters in the 'problem' page of a teenage magazine and identify appropriate answers to them. Lower-attaining pupils in Year 9 scan documents for information to make an informed choice of an appropriate fund-raising event. Higher attaining pupils listen attentively to a recording of 'Romeo and Juliet', following the text, and paraphrase a speech into modern English. Good progress is made in writing, with pupils developing the capacity to adopt different styles for different purposes. Low-attaining pupils in Year 7 'solve a crime' by translating a note written in early English and writing a letter to the police about it. Pupils in Year 9 scan documents for relevant facts and issues, and prepare a piece of discursive writing about foxhunting. Generally meaning is conveyed clearly and correctly, though low-attaining pupils have some problems with spelling. The volume of written work produced is above average, with few pieces left uncompleted except by the lowest attainers. Writing is always legible, though some low-attaining pupils cannot use cursive script. The general standard of presentation is high, with pupils taking an obvious pride in the appearance of their

work and many of them word-processing and desktop publishing very professional-looking pieces.

82. Towards the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' achievements are also good, with the lowest-attainers achieving in line with national expectations and the average and higher-attainers achieving above national expectations. as in Key Stage 3, girls attain higher than boys but to a marginally greater extent than nationally. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are above average. In Year 10 they listen to a recording of 'Macbeth', following it in the text, and contribute to a class discussion, developing their understanding of plot and character. in year 11, working in pairs, they compare and contrast poems and prepare an evaluation which they then present to the class. Pupils are generally eager to read aloud and 'act out' a playtext with some feeling and sense of character. comprehension skills are developed to a high level, enabling pupils to make perceptive and sophisticated responses to a variety of modern and pre-twentieth century set texts and factual material. In Year 11, pupils inform their responses to 'an inspector calls' by the study of background material on the social history of the 1900's. Pupils articulate their responses very capably, both orally and in writing. notes are taken voluntarily without the need for dictation. The quality of written expression is mostly above average. the process of planning and drafting written pieces, which are then revised in the light of discussion with the teacher, is carried out to a high level. Pupils are familiar with the terminology of literary criticism and generally use it comfortably. Coursework files contain a good range of extended factual, discursive and imaginative writing. presentation of 'finished' pieces is good, with many pupils word-processing their answers, and even the notes and 'rough work' books of the majority are neat. The progress of pupils with special educational needs is good, aided by the provision of work sheets and writing frames to structure their responses. Although the proportion entered for GCSE literature is growing, it is still below the national average, but nearly every pupil leaves the school with a grade in GCSE language. Provision is made for extension activities for the highest attainers. In 1999, a small group was entered for A/S English as well as GCSE and all gained grades C or D. Since this is not now allowed by the examining board, alternative strategies are under consideration. The standards achieved by the end of Key Stage 4 are good in relation to pupils' levels of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3. Nearly every pupil is entered for GCSE language and gains a grade.

83. Pupils are well taught by staff who are well qualified and have a good range of experience. In all the lessons observed, teaching was sound, and in three-quarters at both key stages it was good and sometimes very good. Teachers' expectations, both of quality of work and of pupil behaviour, are high and are rewarded by good responses. Teachers know their subject well. Pupils in a Year 11 lesson, for example, were able to develop their understanding of the set play text as a result of close questioning, informed comments on and extensions to their answers. Teachers' planning and organisation are good, with work and materials carefully matched to pupils' levels of attainment. In a Year 9 lesson, lower-attainers were helped in their search for information to reach conclusions by the provision of a variety of realistic but carefully selected documents and a writing frame to enable them to structure their responses. Pupils with special educational needs in Year 8 responded in a lively manner when their knowledge and understanding of parts of speech and vocabulary were tested and reinforced by playing a dice game. A good variety of teaching methods is employed which maintains pupils' interest and keeps up the pace of lessons. Almost every lesson contains a carefully judged combination of reading, writing, listening and speaking, which stimulates active response. The good quality of written work is maintained and encouraged by very

conscientious marking. Assessment is thorough and constructive, enabling pupils to improve the quality of their responses; targets are set and progress carefully monitored. Pupils are given formal opportunities for self-assessment; are conversant with their strengths and weaknesses, and are encouraged to meet the high expectations of their teachers. Teaching is generally characterised by an interest in and an enthusiasm for the subject, which are communicated to the pupils and stimulates them to respond. For example, pupils in Year 7 were able to share their teacher's interest in the variety of dialect words and phrases, and those in Year 8 were able to share the enjoyment of some of the rich imagination of Shakespeare.

84. A significant factor which contributes to pupils' success in the subject is a very well planned scheme of work, with a prescribed programme of common activities, each culminating in a formal half-termly coursework task. Careful attention is paid to the systematic development of English skills to ensure coverage of the statutory requirements of the national curriculum and, at Key Stage 4, of the GCSE syllabus. Assessment is carried out carefully, using the department's system of attainment marks which relate to National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades. Good records are kept to enable the monitoring of pupil progress and the achievement of targets, with a particular concern to improve the performance of boys. The accommodation and the supply of resources enable the curriculum to be delivered satisfactorily. The book stock and resources prepared by the teachers themselves are good. Teachers generally teach in their own rooms and good use is made of wall displays, predominantly of pupils' work, to stimulate interest. The subject is manifestly a success in the school, thanks to the expertise of the subject staff and the management of the department. The management of a large team of teachers, with the monitoring of their teaching and of the progress of a large pupil population, is a heavy burden of responsibility, but it is undertaken very capably and with great success. After only a relatively short time in the school, the head of department has forged a strong team through regular department meetings, inducted some new members of staff and initiated developments.

85. Since the last inspection there have been significant improvements: the time allocation for English has increased and is now, overall, around the national median; detailed schemes of work are now in place for both key stages, ensuring a common experience for all pupils and compliance with the requirements of the National Curriculum and the GCSE; a more formal link with drama has been established in Year 9, and the overall quality of teaching has improved.

86. Standards of literacy across the school are high, largely because of the success of the school's strategies for developing it, in for example, geography, history, mathematics, music and French. Teachers develop pupils' speaking and listening skills through teacher-led question and answer sessions and through pupil pair and group discussion. Pupils respond well to opportunities to read aloud in geography, history and mathematics. Pupil listening is generally active and sustained, with specific tasks set in history, languages, mathematics and music. Pupils use well the good range of writing opportunities, from notes to extended pieces. They go beyond merely factual responses in history, and they write personal descriptions of their own bedrooms in Year 9, after only four terms studying French. There is a good input from staff to improve pupils' vocabulary, particularly the introduction and explanation of technical terms, though the practice of having keyword lists on classroom walls is not universal, and it appears that pupils have difficulty with some science vocabulary. The practice of drafting has improved the quality of expression in information and communication

technology, modern languages, history and to a limited extent in science.

## **DRAMA**

87. Drama is taught throughout the school, timetabled separately from English at Key Stage 3 and offered as a GCSE option at Key Stage 4. Standards of learning in the subject are good; pupils are enthusiastic, perform without inhibition and make good progress in the skills of speaking and movement.

88. Pupils in Year 7 prepare and perform individual and group mimes in response to the poem 'Jabberwocky'. Year 8 pupils work in groups, co-operatively and with obvious enjoyment, to prepare and present to the rest of the class a scripted piece based upon a class reader – 'The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tyler'. In Year 9, work in drama is linked with the preparation of the set Shakespeare text for the national tests in English. A Year 9 class improvised and presented an impression of a performance, which very effectively illustrated the stage conventions of the period and the participation of the audience. There is no formal national assessment at the end of Key Stage 3, but standards of achievement are in line with national expectations related to levels of prior attainment.

89. In Key Stage 4, pupils show good skills in preparing improvisations on a theme, and are able to do the reading research to complete the optional written tasks on aspects of theatre. In Year 11, pupils work well in groups, without teacher input as the examination syllabus specifies, preparing a variety of scripted pieces for the controlled test and demonstrating good understanding of freeze frame and other stage techniques. The standards achieved by the end of Key Stage 4 are good, with all pupils entered gaining a GCSE grade and the proportion of grades A\* to C increasing over time, to a point well above the national average in 1999. The subject has appealed significantly to girls in the past, although many more boys are now involved in Key Stage 4.

90. Teaching is good, the work of a number of non-specialists being monitored by the specialist head of department. It is informed by the provision of a comprehensive scheme of work providing detailed work units and procedures for assessment and monitoring, including pupil self-assessment. The subject is clearly a success in the school; the number of pupils opting to take it at Key Stage 4 has increased steadily. It makes a significant contribution to pupils' social and cultural development, through classroom activities and opportunities to take part in very ambitious school productions. The resources provided are satisfactory for the delivery of the subject curriculum but the accommodation is inadequate. There is no specialist teaching area for drama. The school hall offers adequate space but cannot satisfactorily accommodate two groups of GCSE pupils timetabled together, and the use of the adjacent dining room has obvious disadvantages. Teaching drama in classrooms imposes considerable limitations upon staff and pupils and the success of those lessons reflects great credit upon the quality both of pupil management by staff and of pupil behaviour.

91. Since the last report, some progress has been made in the closer linking of drama with English at Key Stage 3, but none has been made in the improvement of the accommodation.

## **MEDIA STUDIES**

92. Media Studies is offered as a GCSE option at Key Stage 4. The standards of learning in the subject are good and attainment by the end of the Key Stage is in line with national expectations. Pupils in Year 10 work with enjoyment in groups, preparing a storyboard to illustrate the opening of a TV crime drama, stimulated by teaching which communicates enthusiasm. Pupils in Year 11 deconstruct images and explain their significance, utilising the technical vocabulary of the subject. Their interest was engaged by the teacher's use of modern CD covers to which the pupils could relate. At the end of the Key Stage, standards of achievement are satisfactory in relation to pupils' levels of attainment on entry. In 1998, the first year of entry, all pupils gained a grade and the proportion of grades A\* to C was high at 67 per cent. In 1999, the number of entries reduced by half and the proportion of grades A\* to C also reduced, to 42 per cent, although again all pupils obtained a grade. Efforts have subsequently been made in counselling pupils prior to choosing this option to ensure that they recognise the particular academic demands the course makes.

## **MATHEMATICS**

93. This is a very strong curriculum area. Levels of attainment in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 3 are well above national averages. In 1999, the percentage of pupils reaching Level 5 or above and the percentage reaching Level 6 or above were both well above national averages. The school's results were well above the national results when judged on average points, both in 1999 and over the last four years. This is a significant achievement. Girls outperformed the boys in 1999 but not in the previous year. Between 1996 and 1999, overall results have been increasing at a slightly faster rate than the national average. When the results are compared with schools which have similar intakes, on all criteria this school's results are well above the national average. In most of the lessons, pupils practise numeracy work using mental strategies. Many of these are creatively designed to stimulate the pupils' interest. Higher attaining pupils in Year 9 study ratio and percentages, following a quick revision of percentages, which the teacher relates to changes in the bank rate; pupils deal efficiently with the concept of ratio. The pace of the lesson is very high and pupils concentrate very hard indeed. When calculating the volumes of prisms and cylinders, the use of formulas and the correct method of presenting work are well stressed. Pupils in Year 8 build shapes on computers and learn new procedures; they work well collaboratively. A two coin chance activity is enjoyed by pupils in Year 7 who are studying probability; pupils understand why the probabilities of outcomes are different. They enjoy the competition of the activity and show great enthusiasm. Nets of solids are carefully drawn and pupils explain clearly their thinking in their designs. Less able pupils use multi-cubes to construct solids which they then draw on isometric paper, recognising the way in which three-dimensional solids can be represented in two dimensions. An extension group in Year 9 is held during tutor time; the teacher cleverly proposes questions and allows pupils to devise methods and solutions.

94. Results in GCSE are consistently above national averages. In 1999, 59 per cent of pupils gained grades A\*-C compared with a national average of 46 per cent; 98 per cent gained grades A\*-G compared to 96 cent nationally. When average points scores are considered, these results are significantly above the national ones. Girls performed much better than boys at this level. The results in mathematics were very close to the average for all other subjects in the school. Higher attaining pupils in Key Stage 4 calculate areas of



complex shapes and the teacher encourages the pupils to propose ideas and hypotheses on how to approach problems. Some pupils try to take too many steps at once, but the teacher gives effective and sympathetic guidance. Factorising the difference of two squares is confidently handled; an extension exercise is taken from an 'A' Level textbook which makes pupils think about different types of quadratic expressions. Middle ability pupils consider approaches to calculating areas of trapezia, parallelograms and more complex shapes. Time targets are given to pupils to keep the pace of lessons very high, and the response of the pupils to the challenges is excellent. Simultaneous equations are constructed and pupils examine several methods of solving these. Some pupils prefer graphical methods to algebraic ones. Development of numeracy skills in a lower ability group is limited by inappropriate accommodation for the teaching of mathematics. Throughout the key stage, pupils respond very maturely and are very keen to make progress in their mathematical studies.

95. The quality of teaching is very good at both key stages. It is sound or better in every lesson, good or better in almost all lessons, and there is very good teaching in nearly half of the lessons, which is a very commendable proportion. This reflects well on a very talented, dedicated and committed staff. All teachers are very secure in their subject knowledge. Very good developments have taken place in introducing basic numeracy skills into lessons. Some of these ask the pupils to extend their thinking along complex routes. A very successful strategy asks pupils to stand at the beginning of a lesson, close their eyes and concentrate on mental calculations that sometimes involve both geometry and arithmetic. Other lessons use cards and mathematical bingo games to good effect. Creative approaches stimulate pupils' interest and are developing number skills very well. Teachers expect pupils to behave correctly and to perform at very high levels; in many classes, an excellent working rapport is built. Pupils and teachers are aware of target grades; teachers discuss these and give strong encouragement for improvement. Teaching methods are mainly traditional, and are successful. Pupils are encouraged to think and to devise their own methods. Lessons are generally broken into small parts with specific learning targets; teachers interrupt written work appropriately to confirm learning, to check understanding, and then to move onto further work. Occasionally, lessons are too closely tied to textbooks. Teachers use a variety of methods to control pupils and caring help is given to pupils. Mathematics ground rules are glued into exercise books and teachers apply these sensibly. Attitudes and behaviour in three-quarters of the lessons seen are very good or excellent, which is highly commendable. Lessons start promptly and proceed at a good pace. Some lessons would be improved by the use of more teaching aids to give greater impact. Pupils' exercise books are heavily marked, although some could contain more useful comments. Homework is set according to the school timetable, and includes both completion and extension work. Some good conclusions to lessons are seen which summarised the progress which pupils made in their learning. The consequences of all this very good teaching include very good learning and progress throughout both key stages, and very good gains in mathematical skills and understanding across all aspects of mathematics, at a very productive pace.

96. The head of department provides clear guidelines for the philosophy, objectives, expectations and expected standards in mathematics. It is a very well organised and structured department, with some good standardisation of practices by teachers. The head of department leads by example in her dealings with pupils. She is very ably supported by a committed team of teachers, all of whom are suitably qualified and work very co-operatively together. The department considers statistical data well to judge attainment patterns and improve performance. Assessment is very well undertaken; pupils and teachers are very

aware of target grades, and teachers sympathetically give clear guidance to pupils on how to improve. Monitoring and evaluation of pupils' work is at a high level. The head of department has observed other teachers of mathematics in classrooms; this should be extended within the department so that other colleagues may share good ideas. Learning resources are generous, and pupils are provided with good quality textbooks. Accommodation provided is unsatisfactory; there are six classrooms allocated to mathematics and in three-year groups there are eight classes being taught at the same time. One group is taught in a school-dining hall; this is an unacceptable area for the teaching of mathematics.

97. Numeracy is strength across the school due to concentrated and co-ordinated work over the last few years. Mental activities, lasting five to ten minutes, regularly form part of mathematics lessons; these have added stimulus to learning basic skills and have helped pupils to develop logical thinking and confidence in using number. Numeracy work, including pupils' work from other departments, is displayed so that pupils understand that number skills are used in a whole host of different situations. Standardisation of approaches, for example writing large numbers in blocks of three, has taken place, thereby enhancing the understanding of place value. In science, pupils make good use of graphs and percentages in practical work; problem solving takes place in calculations on electricity; pupils use graphs and 'lines of best fit' in data handling; older pupils use calculators sensibly, but more mental calculations could be performed by pupils. Numeracy skills are used in geography practical work, including tallying, pacing, measuring temperature, rainfall and wind speed. Grid references, latitude and longitude, flat maps showing a spherical earth, and maps compared to aerial photographs give pupils practice in shape and space. A lesson was observed which included drawing of bar and line graphs, and pupils in Key Stage 4 interpreted statistics, including ranges of temperature and annual rainfall. Numeracy in design and technology is effectively supported when teachers insist on accuracy in measuring and making materials, which in turn enables pupils to make products which fit together well and look good.

98. The three recommendations made in the last report have been put into effect. The use of assessment data, including forecasts, is now a strength. It is used very efficiently to pin point improvements in pupils' standards of achievement. The department has considered the teaching methods used; there are new schemes of work, a change to more appropriate textbooks, interesting activities have been introduced, and numeracy work is very well advanced. There is also an emphasis on pupils thinking out solutions to problems. The department is very well led and the teachers work together extremely well as a team. Strong relationships are built in lessons and pupils are very well served.

## SCIENCE

99. Standards of attainment in science are high. In 1999, at the end of Key Stage 3, the pupils' average points score was well above the national average. Equally, the percentages of pupils gaining Level 5 or greater, and Level 6 or greater, were well above national averages. The performance of pupils in comparison with those in similar schools was also well above average. The level of performance has remained consistently high over the past few years. On entry to the school, pupils have above average knowledge and varied experience, so that the advancing of relative attainment to be well above average represents good progress over the key stage.

100. At the end of Key Stage 4, in 1999, GCSE results, represented by the average points score, in double award combined science, were well above national average and well above average for similar schools. The percentage of grades A\* to C has varied over recent years but overall has been above average. The performance of pupils studying single award science indicates a points score in line with the national average and reflects good progress in their knowledge and understanding of the subject over the key stage.

101. Observed work and lessons in school mirror the standards indicated by the Key Stage 3 test and GCSE results. The majority of pupils in Year 9 have a secure understanding of basic concepts in each of the attainment targets and many extend their knowledge to the requirements for the highest levels. Pupils have developed good skills in investigative science and many consider the reliability of observations, carrying out quantitative graphical analysis quite readily. In Year 11, all pupils have a basic knowledge of scientific principles and practise experimental skills to a good level. Over half of the pupils have sufficient depth of knowledge and understanding of a topic such as photosynthesis to achieve good GCSE grades. The extended depth of understanding needed for the highest grades, is less common than might be expected. Pupils with special educational needs reach an attainment in line with other pupils of the same ability set. No significant variation is noted in the performance of boys and girls at either Key Stage 3 or 4.

102. Standards of behaviour are very good. Pupils show respect for each other and for property. They listen carefully when required and attitudes to work are very good. Pupils are diligent and careful. Homework is reliably attempted. Pupils collaborate well in-groups, when carrying out investigative work. They take responsibility for their learning, are curious about scientific phenomena, and seek to extend their knowledge and understanding through questions and open discussions.

103. Overall, the quality of teaching in science is good. At Key Stage 3, three quarters of lessons seen were at least good. The remainder were at least satisfactory. In Key Stage 4, half were at least good, a quarter were very good and the others satisfactory. One key strength is the adoption of supportive and encouraging strategies which enables the pupils to be enthusiastic to learn. A good variety of techniques includes interesting and demanding experimental work. Pupils are managed well, with teachers expecting, and gaining a good standard of behaviour. Support for pupils with special educational needs is effectively provided by specialist assistants in some classes. Assessment data is used rigorously to evaluate achievement, refine setting, establish targets, and to identify under achieving pupils. Homework is a significant feature and always extends or enhances the work from the lesson. Where teaching is only satisfactory, the work does not sufficiently extend or challenge the

more able pupils. The pace of learning is inclined to be leisurely and lacking urgency, due to an inefficient use of the long double period of 90 minutes. Marking of pupils' work does not always provide enough guidance on how to improve their work. In two thirds of lessons seen, the quality of learning was good and very good, and was higher at Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4. As a result of this mainly good teaching, pupils are making significant gains in the acquisition of scientific knowledge and in the development of the investigative skills of, for instance, predicting and giving reasons for their predictions. Because of the long length of the double lessons pupils are able to complete experiments with ease, but they are not always challenged sufficiently with further work in a way that would improve their productivity. Pupils with special educational needs make progress in line with others in the class since either additional support materials are provided, or support assistants are sometimes present, or additional effective support is provided by the class teacher.

104. The department is well led and managed and this contributes significantly to overall pupil achievement. Staff work well together to develop new ideas and assessment techniques. Pupils are closely monitored through efficient systems to identify underachievement. There is a clear leadership direction, with well-managed control of resources. Good support is provided for new teachers and students. Effective monitoring of teaching is carried out.

105. Schemes of work are sufficient for long term planning, but fail to provide enough guidance for staff to prepare with enough detail on a daily basis. This has an impact on the provision of work matched to pupils of different attainments, although groups are strictly set by ability, in all years. The curriculum provides appropriate breadth, balance and relevance, and satisfies the requirements of the National Curriculum programmes of study. Facilities for information and communication technology in the department are poor, with virtually no usable computers, although this shortcoming is due to be redressed with the imminent arrival of the school's new computers. Textbooks are modern, with a good library stock, but they are not issued to pupils for retention and independent revision. Accommodation is barely satisfactory, since laboratories are relatively small for the larger than average group sizes. Furniture and services are in need of rearrangement to facilitate practical work. There are only seven laboratories but each year group (9 - 11) is divided into eight sets taught simultaneously.

106. The department has continued to improve on many fronts since the last inspection. In the previous inspection, only two issues were raised. The first was the inappropriate match of ability and content in the lessons at the time. This has been tackled to some extent, but further work needs to be done to ensure extension and challenge for higher attainers in each of the groups at Key Stage 4. A second comment was made on pupils being taught out of the science laboratory due to insufficient number of specialist laboratories. This situation still prevails.

## ART

107. Standards by the end of Key Stage 3 are above national expectations. The range and quality of the work is a good feature. Sculpted heads of humans and animals clearly display the pupils' skills in drawing, research and manipulation of clay. Similarly, their compositions in paint and print demonstrate a clear grasp of the basic elements of drawing and design, and a knowledge of critical studies. The pupils' sketchbooks, as at Key Stage 4, demonstrate good methods of research, preparation and thought involved in the production of original work.

108. Standards in art by the end of Key Stage 4 are very good. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher grades in the 1999 GCSE examination is well above the national average and indicates continuing improvement over time. The pupils have good drawing skills and use these to create inventive, original compositions in painting, printmaking and sculpture. Their work displays the influence of a large number of artists, including Picasso, Braque, Warhol, Kandinsky and Klimt. Portraiture, using computer modified video imagery, also figures prominently in the work of these older pupils. The quality, scale, and range of materials used in sculpture are equally good, as are the inventive coatings and finishes employed.

109. At both key stages the girls are more successful than the boys, whilst both are achieving above national expectations. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in art as do those who are naturally gifted. Almost half of the girls who sat the GCSE examination in 1999 gained A\* or A, grades, whilst fewer than a fifth of the boys entered gained grade A passes. This is due largely to the greater efforts of the girls in coursework. The department is actively exploring ways of raising boys' performances, including carrying out individual interviews with each pupil in turn.

110. Teaching in the department is good overall. The better teaching occurs at Key Stage 4 where it is good and often very good. The easy way teachers move around their classes, giving individual tuition whilst assessing their pupils' progress and offering constructive criticism, is a strength of the department. Teachers have secure knowledge and understanding of their subject and use it effectively to teach its basic skills. At Key Stage 4, their methods, expectations and planning are very good. A particular strength is the teachers' practice of interviewing older pupils to identify gaps in their portfolios and then monitoring their progress towards new targets. Homework is also used to fill gaps, in addition to reinforcing classwork and on-going projects. Relationships within the department are good. The pupils recognise their teachers' ability and intense interest in their subject and respond positively to improve their skills, raise productivity and their pace of working. Their ability to work independently and sustain concentration is very good at Key Stage 4. Teaching at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory and often good. The way lessons are introduced and subjects linked to the work of famous artists or craftworkers is another feature of the department. Strategies are needed to break up some of the longer, double lessons, to maintain the attention and concentration of some of the younger children, as well as to raise the attainment and progress of certain of the less able and occasionally noisy pupils. Pupils' learning at Key Stage 3 is good. Pupils enter the school from a wide variety of schools with an equally varied understanding of art, but they soon develop their skills and knowledge by taking advantage of the opportunities presented to them. They make good use of the subject specific vocabulary provided for them in the form of a glossary in the back of their workbooks from Year 7

onwards. The self-assessment procedure pupils follow encourages them in their efforts, whilst the element of competition amongst the pupils also helps to generate a good pace of learning.

111. The curriculum in art is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. Indeed the range of processes available is particularly rich. The opportunity for pupils to complete work at lunchtimes or in extra classes after school is of great benefit to the pupils. The department makes a good contribution to the pupils' cultural development, despite there being few opportunities for pupils to visit galleries or museums, or to work with visiting artists. Even though the main influences on the pupils are European and North American, much profitable work is based on African masks and South American sculpture. The school's policy of interrupting the studies of Year 8 pupils for half of the year so that they might be taught drama is unsatisfactory. Their progress and attainment in art are halted and their reintroduction to the subject at the end of this period requires their teachers to revisit previously covered ground to regenerate a learning process. The leadership of the department is sensitive and realistic. The department's schemes of work are comprehensive and adventurous and are driven by ongoing assessment. This practice of assessing and monitoring pupils' work, particularly at Key Stage 4, is a great strength and keeps pupils fully informed of their levels of performance and progress.

112. The department has improved in some respects since the last inspection. For example, the greater success in the GCSE examinations, particularly in the highest grades. Other significant improvements have included linking ceramics to art, restructuring courses, and introducing innovative methods of assessment and monitoring. Longer term planning is less successful, since it does not sufficiently consider the implications of resources, time and cost. There are still problems with accommodation, there is no technician support and the use of information and communication technology in art is poor due to the outmoded equipment. The otherwise strict observation of health and safety procedures in art is not yet backed by an insistence that all pupils wear protective clothing when working with ceramic materials.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

113. Standards of attainment are above the national average by the ends of both Key Stages. In the 1999 teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3, pupils reached standards which were above the national expectation. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A\*-C was above the national average in the 1999 GCSE examinations, as it has been consistently over the last three years.

114. Standards of attainment are above average at the end of Key Stage 3. Pupils have a good understanding of the design process, which they follow to design and make well-finished products. They produce imaginative designs and demonstrate good construction skills when they design and make hand-held games and automata with simple mechanisms. Finishing skills, which were criticised in the previous report, are now strength, and pupils show great care and patience in finishing their products to a good standard which is well crafted and aesthetically pleasing. They have good graphic skills, present ideas clearly and interpret design briefs creatively, when, for example, they design stationery based on the theme of a clock face. In food technology lessons, pupils have very good practical skills for food preparation and they are developing a good understanding of the ingredients they use

through investigation work. In all aspects of the subject, pupils know how to evaluate their work rigorously and they make realistic suggestions for improvement. Pupils' written work is presented clearly and appropriately and shows a good understanding of the materials and processes used, except in resistant materials where standards are lower. Encouraged by teachers, higher attaining pupils take opportunities to develop their ideas creatively and have very good practical skills. Pupils with special educational needs reach at least satisfactory standards with practical skills because they are well supported in class by teachers and they are willing to spend time to obtain a good finish to their work.

115. Standards of attainment are above average at the end of Key Stage 4. Pupils continue to reach good standards of work because they follow the design process and evaluate their work and improve it as they develop their projects for examination courses. As at Key Stage 3, pupils now achieve good standards of finish in their practical work. This is particularly evident in resistant materials. However, the projects they undertake in this aspect of the subject are not sufficiently demanding for higher attaining pupils and this restricts the level of attainment it is possible for them to achieve. Pupils reach good standards in graphic products lessons and develop interesting and imaginative designs which they model; café facades, for example. Both formal drawing and sketching are of a good standard and pupils understand the principles of good product design. In electronic products lessons, pupils have a good understanding of systems and components which they use to develop, for example, alarmed products. In food technology, pupils reach good and often very good standards because they have learned to understand both the materials they use and the underlying scientific concepts of the subject, through well taught investigation lessons. Pupils have a good understanding of the dietary needs of different people, such as vegetarians, and they develop food products which are attractive to look at, in addition to being appropriately nutritious.

116. The quality of teaching at Key Stage 3 is mostly very good, and never less than good. At Key Stage 4, half of it is at least good with just the one unsatisfactory lesson. Teachers plan interesting and inspiring activities that challenge pupils and promote enjoyment of the subject. They encourage pupils to be creative and to think for themselves. Pupils respond very well because they enjoy learning and welcome opportunities to develop unique products and the chance to exercise their imagination. Homework provides an appropriate extension to classwork and in most instances is appropriately challenging. Teachers have good subject knowledge which they use effectively to provide depth and interest as well as communicating their own enthusiasm for the subject. They insist on high standards of finish to practical work, and as a result, pupils are rewarded with work they are proud of. Less successful lessons include tasks which are insufficiently challenging and restrict the quality of learning. The quality and use of on-going assessments in lessons effectively helps pupils to understand how well they are achieving and what they need to do to reach higher standards. Teachers have a very good awareness of the potential of individual pupils and are quick to notice and deal with underachievement. This, together with other strategies, has been significant in raising attainment recently. The parents who provide classroom support as part of the 'Parents as Educators' scheme are successful in helping individual pupils to make better progress in lessons.

117. The basic skills of literacy and numeracy are an integral part of lessons. Numeracy in particular is effectively supported when teachers insist on accuracy in measuring and making materials, which in turn enables pupils to make products which fit together well and look good. Subject related vocabulary is relevantly introduced and pupils are provided with

appropriate lists of words from which they can select, for example, when they are carrying out sensory tests on food products. The department is aware that more can be done to extend this area through classroom displays.

118. The quality of learning is good because pupils are highly motivated and the quality of teaching is good. Pupils enter the school with standards of attainment which are broadly in line with national expectations, and, particularly in the first term, make very good progress in learning to use a wider range of hand and machine tools and a wider range of materials. Pupils are very well behaved in lessons and listen attentively so that they are able to carry out tasks confidently. They ask questions about things they are unsure of and derive satisfaction from learning and achieving good standards. They are careful and patient in practical lessons and put very good effort into presenting their work well. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good and there is mutual respect. Pupils demonstrate high levels of interest in lessons and homework reflects the care they take over completing it to a good standard. Consequently, pupils look forward to lessons and make good progress both in individual lessons and over time. Also, they make good progress over time because schemes of work and lessons are well structured to build skills and knowledge.

119. Pupils are provided with a relatively broad experience of the subject overall, but there is not enough use of metal in the resistant materials area and the department does not provide opportunities for pupils to study textiles technology. The department is capably and sensitively led. There is a good spirit of co-operation between staff and a shared commitment to raise standards.

120. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. Standards at Key Stage 3 are now higher, matching those achieved in Key Stage 4. The quality of teaching has improved and there is a better match of activities to pupils' abilities, except in resistant materials at Key Stage 4. Facilities in food technology rooms have significantly improved and now provide an attractive and stimulating learning environment for pupils. The workshop environment has improved but not enough to bring it up to modern expectations for the subject.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

121. By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment estimated by teachers in 1999 is very good, being well above the national average. Girls attain better than boys by slightly more than the national difference. In 1999 just over one third of pupils attained above the expected Level 5 and a fifth (41 pupils) reached Levels 7 or 8.

122. By the end of Key Stage 4, amongst those who choose to study geography to GCSE level, results are high. In 1999, 77 per cent achieved grades A\* to C against a national average of 53 per cent. Girls attained better than boys, though fewer girls than boys chose to study the subject. The few lower attaining pupils who opt for the Certificate of Achievement at the end of the course gain very good results. No pupil has failed to gain a certificate in geography for three years and results have improved steadily over that time; in two of the last three years, results have been significantly above the national average. In 1999, pupils did slightly better in geography than in their other subjects.



123. From an above average year group in 1999, the number of A\* and A grades matched the national average but did not exceed it, whilst the number of B grades was almost twice the national average. This suggests that the department could stretch its highest attaining pupils even further: teachers have correctly targeted course work scores as a means of achieving this; these dipped in 1999 during the absence for maternity leave of the head of department.

124. Every lesson seen, at both key stages, was at least satisfactory. Four fifths was at least good and a third was very good. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen and the teaching profile is better than at the last inspection. All teachers are competent geographers who present a wide range of appropriate case studies to support their clear explanations, and this is reflected in the high standards of pupils' knowledge and understanding. Interesting lessons are driven at pace from the front using a good variety of short tasks which absorb the pupils, who are well managed and allowed little time for misbehaviour. The attitudes and behaviour of the pupils are very good; only one example of poor behaviour was observed. Expectations of the pupils are high: there is no lingering sense that some pupils cannot achieve; all pupils are expected to learn, and they generally do. Time is well used and entry and dismissal procedures are efficient. The mission statement of the school is lived out in the Christian values overtly portrayed. Lessons are well planned to allow a wide range of teaching methods in well-organised and well-equipped classrooms. Low attaining pupils learn well how to construct and interpret a climate graph of the tropical rain forest by following very well prepared instructions projected on to a screen. Year 9 are absorbed in a video about the micro climates of these same forests, and high attaining pupils in Year 10 are observed to test their own values against a global population crisis, exemplified by a video on the one-child policy of China. Good practical work helps low attaining pupils absorb information whilst they are actively involved in their learning.

125. Assessment in its variety of forms is excellent and very well used to support pupils, to isolate under-achievement and to inform planning and teaching. The inspection of lessons and the survey of exercise books confirm the accuracy of teachers' estimates at the end of Key Stage 3. Comments written on exercise books use praise well, but the comments are not as sharp as the oral ones given in class. Homework is well used to extend or synthesise learning. This is supported by the very good use of homework diaries, the insistent monitoring of which presses pupils into good learning routines.

126. The consequences of good teaching and effective learning are high attainment and good progress. Pupils add good value to their prior attainment at all levels. Lower attaining pupils and those listed on the special needs register make good progress, both because the department uses materials which differentiate well between levels of difficulty, and because the quality of in-class support, when available, is good. The department intends to continue to accelerate the progress of boys. It ensures discussion in mixed gender groups but not yet in pairs.

127. The leadership and management of the department are very good. Secure, user-friendly schemes of work, very good planning and the pressure of very good monitoring to ensure implementation are great strengths which contribute strongly to the upward drive of the department. Courses are well balanced, with equal weight placed on the development of knowledge, understanding and skills, including a very good variety of local and regional fieldwork. The only weakness is that, except in Year 7, there is no formal teaching through

the use of information technology; this situation is only little improved since the last inspection.

128. Display is excellent and provides both a stimulus to learning and a celebration of the high quality of work of pupils. Good primary school liaison is shown in the work done with some feeder schools during Geographical Association Activity Week. Displayed materials show the wide range of writing required, as well as the good standard of model making. The commitment of teachers to improving basic literacy and numeracy is well planned and implemented. Classrooms are resource rich and well organised, but the desire to have a wide range of case materials means that sometimes pupils have to share resources. Teachers are willing to move furniture to facilitate teaching and learning, but some high attaining sets are very big, and crowded rooms make it more difficult to support these pupils, especially when desks are pushed against the wall. One geography room is too small for large groups and the blackout in all three rooms is badly hung. Two of the three teachers carry heavy responsibilities outside the department, and whilst this in no way affects their teaching, the head of the subject, who is also curriculum leader of humanities, is without significant support to carry the burden of development. This is nevertheless, a strong department which is getting even better.

129. There was only one major issue at the time of the last inspection: the implementation of the use of information and communication technology within geography. This has not carried out, apart from some slight improvement in Year 7.

## **HISTORY**

130. Standards in History are good. By the end of Key Stage 3, higher than average proportions of pupils achieve the expected Levels 5 and 6 in the national tests. Apart from a lower figure in 1998, the proportion of pupils achieving the higher grades A\* - C in GCSE History is normally around the 62 per cent which they achieved in 1999. It is normal for them to achieve 100 per cent grades A\* - G. This attainment is comfortably above the national average. Some pupils who are not entered for the GCSE benefit from following a course leading to a Certificate of Achievement.

131. Standards of achievement in relation to the five key elements of the National Curriculum are good, and especially so in those elements relating to the different interpretations that can be put upon history and the evaluation of historical evidence. The pupils in Year 8 are well aware that one man's traitor was another man's victim in Tudor and Stuart times, and those in Year 9 are able to understand that protestors at Peterloo were either a docile crowd cruelly set upon by troopers or a hostile mob being legitimately restrained by the forces of law and order, depending upon which sources and which interpretation is being used. This knowledge and understanding is a valuable gain. Some of the topics studied foster skills linked with information technology. There is equally strong development of key historical skills at Key Stage 4. For example, pupils studying for the GCSE are learning to discriminate well between Catholic grievances and Protestant fears.

132. Such gains are the product of the largely good and sometimes very good teaching seen at both key stages, which in turn produces an effective learning environment for these very well behaved and co-operative pupils. Almost all the teaching seen was good or very good

*(more than one half was good and just over a third was very good)*. The teachers know their subject well and employ a variety of strategies to ensure that their well planned learning experiences advance the historical progress of all the pupils, including the most able and those with special educational needs. Some of the best teaching was seen at Key Stage 3 on the topic of the Gunpowder Plot, where a good blend of teacher exposition and pupil investigation was made all the more enjoyable by the graphic detail of seventeenth century methods of torture. There were good insights into life in the seventeenth century, in empathy with various important figures, and also in skills of source evaluation. Pupils were brought to a growing awareness of the dangers of accepting biased accounts of well-known events. At Key Stage 4, pupils are well taught such topics as the transport changes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and they are able to understand the causes and consequences of such significant changes. They are also taught some good examination techniques. At both Key Stages, pupils with special educational needs profit from such enjoyable lessons and make good progress in appropriate areas, helped by modified work sheets and, on occasion, by extra support assistance in class. At both Key Stages, where different teachers were seen teaching the same topic to different classes, there was consistency of approach, of assessment, and of monitoring of individual progress. Individual pupils are well known to the teachers.

133. This good teaching, and these good standards, are underpinned by good leadership and management which ensure that statutory requirements are being met; that curriculum planning is effective; that teaching is monitored and that good practice is shared and spread. The rooms and resources available to the department are adequate and have a positive effect on teaching and standards, particularly in respect of good display. Trips and visits are strength, not just in historical terms but also in terms of cross-curricular links, which are good. The department makes a well-planned and effective contribution to the spiritual, moral social and cultural development of the pupils, and to the development of their literacy skills.

134. There are a few areas where the good teaching can be improved. These include the actual delivery of the well-planned use of information and communication technology. The good teaching of source evaluation could be further improved by paying greater attention to the historical background and authorship of the source itself. The schemes of work and planning grids are linked to National Curriculum key elements, but could be a little more linked to assessment levels in the documentation, to match the good practice in the classroom.

135. At the previous inspection in 1996 it was recognised that good or very good teaching was a feature of the majority of lessons and that the best learning was characterised by sustained and well-motivated pupil behaviour. These strengths have been maintained, and the relatively minor criticisms made in 1996 have been dealt with.

## **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

136. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are not high enough, and it is not used enough across the school. Teacher assessments made at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999, together with inspection evidence, indicate that no more than average proportions of pupils reach the level expected for their age. At the end of Key Stage 4, no pupils take information and communication technology at GCSE level. Instead, in 1999, over half the pupils in the year achieved success in the Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) examination, all other pupils gained the Northern Examining Board's (NEAB) unit award certificates in the subject. No subject area, except history to a small extent, uses information and communication technology to deliver significant sections of its programme of study.

137. Pupils in Year 7 have a satisfactory understanding of word processing and use a variety of fonts appropriate to specific purposes. They understand computer systems and all are working at the level expected for their age. In Year 8, pupils use spread sheets with confidence; they understand the basic principles of spreadsheets and their use in business. They enter data accurately and use formulae to total columns and rows. In Year 9, there is a wide range of attainment. Although all pupils have basic word processing skills, pupils in lower ability sets are slow in developing their project of a ski brochure cover. The majority of these pupils are working below national expectations. In a higher attaining set, pupils work with speed and accuracy, they use fonts and graphics effectively to convey the information required for their brochures, and are working at the level expected for their age. In Year 10, some lower attaining pupils are working well below national levels in data base work. They are slow to enter information and are only able to perform simple searches of fields. Average and higher attaining pupils working on CLAIT courses in Years 10 and 11 have satisfactory skills, with accurate word processing and good knowledge of databases and spreadsheets. Pupils taking GNVQ health and social care in these years make good use of information and communication technology skills to present course work in their folders. Many pupils are able to use bar and pie charts effectively to highlight information from surveys carried out.

138. Teaching is good at Key Stage 3, and satisfactory, occasionally good, at Key Stage 4. Teachers have good subject knowledge and their explanations are clear. Good use is made of question and answer sessions and briefings at the start of lessons. These ensure that pupils are fully aware of what is expected of them, and of how they can secure good marks for their work. There is good planning in all lessons, with appropriate tasks selected to provide sufficient challenge matched to pupils' levels of attainment. In a Year 7 castle project lesson, pupils were moved on to a new task too quickly without completing their project. For higher attainers, extension work is provided. In Year 8, additional spreadsheets and extended tasks

are made available for higher attaining pupils. Teachers expect and have good standards of behaviour in their classes. A positive working atmosphere is created which allows pupils to learn effectively. Pupils work individually and they sustain their efforts, staying focused on the tasks set. This allows teachers to offer help and advice to individuals where needed, and to support lower attaining pupils effectively. There are good relationships between teachers and pupils with a shared ethos for work.

139. Pupils learn new skills and increase their knowledge and understanding in lessons as a result of well planned teaching and the use of good quality worksheets. Over Key Stage 3, they improve their basic skills of keyboarding and learn new concepts, ways of presenting information, and of data handling through spreadsheets and databases. In Year 8, pupils learn how to use different formulae for calculations in spreadsheets, and in Year 9 they learn how to search databases. Pupils make progress as they develop new skills and refine existing ones as they move through the school, and use these to complete assignments in CLAIT and NEAB units.

140. The curriculum opportunities for pupils are in line with National Curriculum requirements at Key Stage 3, although the opportunity to develop skills and knowledge of control is limited to Year 9 only. This is a weakness in the provision. At Key Stage 4, all pupils have one lesson of information and communication technology each week. In this lesson they are able to pursue an external qualification such as the short GCSE or CLAIT, or an NEAB unit. Good assessment systems are in place and pupils understand what they need to do to gain high marks for their work. Work is regularly and carefully marked, although little use is made of National Curriculum levels to inform pupils of their progress in the subject, judged against national standards.

141. Leadership of the information and communication technology department is good in terms of the delivery of taught information and communication technology in separate information and communication technology lessons. Schemes of work are well prepared and pupils' work and records are well managed. The two good information and communication technology rooms are well cared for, as are the ageing Apple Mac computers. There are attractive displays of pupils' work in these rooms.

142. The co-ordination of the use of information and communication technology to teach other areas of the curriculum is less effectively managed. History is one of the few areas where planning intends pupils to develop a topic (*castles*) further through the use of information and communication technology. In the school as a whole, this is a weakness. departments are unable to deliver their subject through information and communication technology because of poor quality hardware, lack of subject specific software, sometimes unavailability of computer rooms, and lack of clear whole school and departmental guidance to organise information and communication technology activity in a way that would enhance learning in other subjects.

143. Since the last inspection some limited progress has been made. Pupils' attainment is now up to average levels for half of the pupils by the end of Key Stages 3 and a short course GCSE has recently been introduced, but far too little use is made of information and

communication technology to support learning in other subjects. With the imminent arrival of new computers, it is important that the school puts into place systems which enable full use to be made of these for the benefit of its pupils.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

144. GCSE results in German have been above the national average for similar schools in recent years, and French results, with a more restricted entry, have been significantly above. Girls almost always out-perform boys in both languages and frequently by a bigger margin than the national average difference.

145. Standards in German at the end of both key stages are above the national expectation in higher and mixed-ability classes, and match national expectations in others. Pupils make very fast progress from the beginning of Year 7 and, by the end of the first term, have covered as much material as would be considered a year's work in many schools. Listening skills are very well developed, with pupils responding instantly to requests from the teacher. Speaking is confident and accurate, albeit in limited contexts at this stage, and pupils are able to correct their own errors. A girl in Year 7, for example, was able to change the form of the verb in her sentence, about what she was wearing, without any assistance from the teacher. Pupils are given the opportunity to speak at length and a few examples were observed during the inspection of pupils using the foreign language for their own purposes. There are very few hesitant speakers at this school. Reading skills are developing through the occasional use of short stories in lessons, which pupils then summarise in English in their exercise books. Copy writing achieves a high level of accuracy and no written work is produced containing gross spelling errors. From the beginning, pupils are introduced to grammatical concepts and, by Year 9, higher attainers in German are writing in three tenses and in different registers, producing, for example, both formal and informal letters. Written work is copious in both languages, and in Year 9, after four terms of learning French, pupils are able to write a one-page letter describing their bedroom, demonstrating an excellent grasp of the formation of regular and irregular verbs in the present tense.

146. At Key Stage 4, standards continue to be above average in the upper bands and pupils of all ability levels undertake extended writing. In Year 10, higher attainers in German produce a lengthy account of a family holiday, containing complex sentences with subordinate clauses; pupils of average ability can write a one-page account of the Cinderella story containing only the occasional error. By Year 11, higher attaining pupils write at length about their work experience; a four-page description of life in a German school demonstrates an impressive range of vocabulary and an unusually acute understanding of the structure of the German language. Pupils studying French at Key Stage 4 are able to write in a variety of tenses and styles by Year 11, for example producing a tourist booklet, 'Bienvenue à Chorley', where the level of accuracy is a clear indication of why the GCSE results are 30 per cent above the national average. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress due both to the setting system, where work is targeted to their needs, to small classes and, above all, to skilled and rigorous teaching.

147. Teaching is invariably good, often very good, and occasionally excellent at Key Stage 3. It is largely good at Key Stage 4. All the teachers have a good command of the languages they teach. Most use the foreign language extensively or exclusively, both as a medium of instruction and for routine classroom interaction, enabling pupils to make very fast progress in their understanding of the spoken language. Teaching is rigorous, with a strong emphasis placed from the beginning on the understanding of pattern and structure in language. Lessons are very well planned, containing carefully graded material, and are usually presented using a stimulating variety of resources, mainly an overhead projector, flashcards and real printed material from the foreign country. Expectations are commendably high for all ability levels, with the gifted being encouraged to write at length. Excellent motivation is maintained in many lower attaining sets where all are expected to, and eventually do, obtain a GCSE grade. Teachers take full advantage of the creative opportunities provided by the department, not relying on one coursebook in either language. Lessons are taken at a fast pace with frequent change of task, and the best lessons are delivered with a humour, creativity and panache which sweep the pupils along. In the few less effective lessons, teachers communicate too much in English and use few resources beyond the blackboard and worksheets. All teachers enjoy a good relationship with their pupils, to whom they offer frequent praise and encouragement. The rate of learning in lessons in both languages is rapid. Pupils nearly always have good recall of previously learnt language, and the acquisition of new material is well consolidated through a variety of activities. Rapid learning was especially noticeable in a Year 10 French class where pupils were starting work on the Perfect tense, and in a Year 11 German class where there was a noticeable increase in fluency after intensive practice of new vocabulary.

148. The school is unusual in teaching German as the main foreign language, with French available for higher attainers from Year 8. The time allocation for languages is adequate except in Year 9, where one and half-hours per week on each language for those taking both German and French is below the national recommendation. Some upper sets in both key stages are too large with up to 35 pupils. The number of double linguists at Key Stage 4 is twice the national average. A well-established and highly successful programme of exchanges and visits abroad provides a major contribution, not only to pupils' language learning but also to their understanding of other cultures. The department enjoys strong leadership, with the Head of Department giving a high priority to the monitoring and evaluation of teaching. Relationships are good and the modern languages teachers work well as a team. Documentation is copious, with good policy statements and excellent assessment procedures. Schemes of work need updating to include reference to the Programmes of Study. The department is fully staffed with trained graduate linguists. Learning resources are adequate and all the language classrooms are attractively presented and contain colourful displays of pupils' work.

149. The department has maintained the high standards that were praised in the previous inspection report, and it continues to be a highly successful department. There are, however, two issues that have not yet been addressed: accommodation and the use of information and communication technology. The accommodation is insufficient with only four specialist rooms, and nearly one fifth of lessons are currently taught outside the modern languages

base, with the attendant problems of providing suitably varied resources. Pupils are not yet gaining regular access to information and communication technology to enhance their language learning. This is an area needing urgent attention if the department is to meet the requirements of the national curriculum programmes of study.

## MUSIC

150. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards of work are good. Pupils of all abilities are able to address the attainment targets with confidence and some skill. They are confident in identifying notes of the staff and improvise effectively. They listen with understanding to a wide variety of music and can develop tonic and dominant chords. They show progressions in their composing skills in their notebooks and sing accurately and with enthusiasm.

151. By the end of Key Stage 4, scrutiny of work and lesson observation indicates that standards achieved are very good. Results at GCSE, over time, have been consistently above national averages. In 1999, out of an entry of 33 pupils, 97 per cent achieved grades A\* to C in comparison with the National Average of 66 per cent. In the past, the results of girls had far exceeded those of boys, but in 1999 they were much closer together (boys 91 per cent, girls 100 per cent A\* - C). Pupils compose with confidence and manage both choral and instrumental works well. Performance work seen was very good. Pupils have good control of techniques when playing their chosen instruments. They are confident with cross rhythms, repetition, rising cadenzas and other rhythmic variations.

152. The quality of teaching is mainly good and sometimes very good at Key Stage 3. It is largely very good at Key Stage 4. This quality has a beneficial impact on pupils' learning at both key stages, and encourages the enthusiastic and positive response of the pupils, which was on display in all the lessons observed. Lessons are lively, well paced and interlaced with humour that ensures concentration from the pupils. Sensitive questioning motivates pupils to be eager to answer and feel that their views will be respected. Teachers are always encouraging and supportive and set appropriate challenges. This positive approach sets a good example to classes and ensures that criticism of performances by the pupils is always constructive. Teachers were seen enabling less able pupils to identify notes by removing unwanted bars from percussion instruments, and two experienced pianists were set a more complex composition challenge than the rest of the class. These strategies resulted in pupils being able to perform successfully and to experience a sense of achievement commensurate with their abilities. Individual attention given to pupils builds their confidence and often results in more accurate performances. Teachers join in the music making, adding a tune or improvisation over the pupils' performances, so giving a greater sense of purpose to the exercise and increasing the quality of the pupils' learning. This 'leading by example' is much appreciated by the classes and they respond with enthusiasm.

153. The curriculum and schemes of work are well planned and designed to fulfil the requirements of the attainment targets of the National Curriculum. Extra-curricular activity is very good. In the light of response and outcomes, schemes are revised and refined, and new policies have been created aimed at raising the achievement of boys. Differentiated worksheets and approaches are in place to ensure equality of opportunity. At both key stages, assessment by all teachers is ongoing, usually at the end of a unit of work, and is monitored by the Head of Department. This assessment is used to inform progress and set



targets. The department is well led and managed; formal and informal meetings of staff take place and regular sampling of teaching is undertaken. Resources are favourable to the department but there is too little storage space. One of the music rooms is too small and very crowded when some of the larger groups in Years 7, 8 and 9 have their lessons in there. It is very difficult for the teacher to move around the room. The department contributes significantly to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

154. The department has conscientiously addressed the recommendations from the last inspection report. Classroom singing is undertaken regularly; composing is now automatically included in the Key Stage 3 units of work; comprehensive personal music folders have eradicated copying from the board, and the keyboards are being updated.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

155. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 conforms to national expectations. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 exceeds national expectations.

156. By the end of Key Stage 3, the attainment of the majority of pupils meets national expectations in all areas of the physical education curriculum. Most pupils apply the techniques, skills and competition rules to several aspects of the physical education curriculum, including hockey, gymnastics, basketball, football and dance. Basic skills are sound and provide a platform for future development. In hockey most Year 7 girls are able to pass the ball accurately, move appropriately into space and receive the ball. Higher attaining pupils are able to stop the ball and execute a pass with relative speed. Many Year 8 and Year 9 girls can plan and compose fairly complex sequences of movement in gymnastics, although the quality of some of the movement does not reflect the ability of many of those pupils. At Key Stage 4, pupils in a Year 10 and a Year 11 Outdoor Education lesson on rock climbing were very successful in mastering basic climbing techniques, and had a very good understanding of all important safety issues. In both squash and badminton at Key Stage 4, new skills and knowledge are being acquired very effectively, and in volleyball, mastery of basic skills is a firm foundation for future development. A developing ability to plan and evaluate is apparent in several activities in Key Stage 4 and in gymnastics and dance in Key Stage 3, but is not similarly promoted elsewhere in the curriculum. Many pupils at Key Stage 4 are becoming good independent learners, but at Key Stage 3, boys in particular are not being given the opportunity either to take responsibility or to display initiative in their lessons. The role of exercise in establishing and maintaining health is not consistently emphasised, and pupils at both key stages have not developed an appropriate understanding of the short and long-term effects of exercise on the body systems.

157. Pupils learn and make good progress in most lessons at Key Stage 3, and learning was less than satisfactory in only one lesson. In girls' lessons, learning and progress are always good and on two occasions were very good. Pupils are encouraged to develop not only skills, but also a good understanding of the techniques and rules. An example of good progress for

most pupils was observed in a Key Stage 3 dance lesson, where pupils consolidated basic skills and movements, using planning and evaluating skills to improve both individual and group performance. However, the most able pupils in most lessons are rarely sufficiently challenged. Progress in observing and evaluating their own performance and the performance of others in the group is good in both gymnastics and dance lessons and progress is equally good for students of all abilities.

158. At Key Stage 4, progress and learning are always good and were very good in an outdoor education lesson on rock climbing. Here, new techniques were learnt, pupils appreciated the importance of a co-operative approach, and they were beginning to develop the appropriate related skills. Learning and progress were also good in volleyball, squash and badminton lessons at Key Stage 4, where basic skills were being adapted and refined to apply to these new sports. Evaluation of individual performance by staff is used to improve standards during many lessons, although target setting for individual pupils is not yet influencing progress at either of the key stages. A satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities, and fixtures with other schools, provide opportunities for pupils to extend and develop their skills, and many pupils and teams reach county standard.

159. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive at both key stages. Most are enthusiastic, well behaved, and co-operative, demonstrating a real enjoyment of the subject. They are attentive and their capacity to sustain concentration is good. Relationships between pupils and between pupils and staff are very good. There are many opportunities for pupils to work independently and collaboratively at Key Stage 4, but opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and to undertake different roles, such as coach or official, are limited.

160. All but one lesson was at least satisfactory (and two were very good) at Key Stage 3. Every lesson was at least good (and one was very good) at Key Stage 4. All girls' lessons were good and better at both key stages. Very good lessons were seen in Outdoor Education, in dance and in a Year 9 girls' badminton lesson. A secure knowledge of the subject is regularly conveyed to pupils through perceptive observation of performance, appropriate intervention and good, teacher-directed question and answer sessions. Thorough planning, incorporating varied teaching strategies and an appropriate sequence of activities involving both individual and collaborative learning, is a feature of many lessons. However, planning for the development of the most able pupils is often not incorporated into lessons. Discipline

and class management are usually good. Day to day assessment of performance during lessons is regularly used to enhance teaching and learning, but the recording of assessment using specific criteria for each activity, and the involvement of pupils in this assessment to help set targets for improvement, have not been developed. The unsatisfactory lesson (in boys' physical education) was the result of too pedestrian a pace, and of activities not being well enough presented to the class.

161. The curriculum meets statutory requirements at both key stages, but the time allocated at Key Stage 3 is significantly below the national average and makes it very difficult to cover National Curriculum requirements. The use of single lessons at Key Stage 3 for outdoor work is totally inappropriate and has an adverse effect on progress in many of these lessons. A broad range of activities at Key Stage 4, provides a sound preparation for Post 16 leisure activities. Schemes of work for Key Stage 3 lack essential detail and are not good working documents. There are no schemes of work for Key Stage 4 activities.

162. Day to day organisation and leadership of the department are good in many respects, and communication within the department is effective. Staff are good role models; are very committed professionals, and give generously of their time. However, the management of the department still requires further development. There is a lack of appropriate focus and prioritising, and also very little monitoring and evaluation of its work. Development planning only relates to whole-school priorities and does not effectively identify or address priorities specific to the physical education department. The head of department does not monitor teaching, and departmental meetings are not yet an effective means of encouraging appropriate departmental development.

163. The last inspection report only identified the length of lessons as an issue and this has still not been resolved.