

INSPECTION REPORT

St JOHN FISHER RC SCHOOL

Chatham, Kent

LEA area: Medway

Unique reference number: 118908

Headteacher: Mr Keith Findlay

Reporting inspector: Mr R Peter J McGregor
3525

Dates of inspection: 17-21 January 2000

Inspection number: 186591

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	11 - 19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Rev C Baker
Date of previous inspection:	6 November 1995

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			How well are pupils taught?
Mrs Vivienne Phillips	Lay inspector		How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Mr Peter Lawley	Team inspector	English	
		EAL	
Mr Roland Portsmouth	Team inspector	Mathematics	
Mr Michael Davidson	Team inspector	Science	
		Special educational needs	
		Equal opportunities	
Ms Raye Allison Smith	Team inspector	Art	
Mr Vivian Harrison	Team inspector	Design and technology	
Mr Stuart Jordan	Team inspector	Geography	
		History	
Mr David Gutmann	Team inspector	Information technology	
		Business studies and economics	
Mrs Roslyn Fox	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
Mr Robin Coulthard	Team inspector	Music	How well is the school led and managed?
Mrs Maureen Bean	Team inspector	Physical education	How well does the school care for its pupils?
Mrs Sandra Morgan	Team inspector		
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St John Fisher is a mixed, Roman Catholic, Voluntary Aided, comprehensive school for pupils in the 11-18 age range, with 1212 pupils on roll. The school is bigger than many other secondary schools. In the last year, 36 pupils joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission and 57 left. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is broadly in line with the national average. Very few of the pupils at St John Fisher speak English as an additional language, and an extremely small number are at the early stages of learning English. Very few pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds. 311 pupils are on the school's register of special educational needs, over 200 of whom are at the lower stages 1 and 2. The proportion of pupils with special education needs is above the national average, but the number with Statements is as expected for a school of this size. About 30% of the population in the local education authority area attend selective schools, significantly reducing the number of higher attaining pupils attending St John Fisher. Pupils of a full range of prior learning join the school each year. The proportion of pupils attaining level 4 at the end of Key Stage 2 in their primary schools, the level expected at age 11, is as expected nationally, but because of the low proportion of pupils gaining level 5 and the slightly below average points score for the pupils, attainment on entry is judged to be a little below average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school is effective. At Key Stage 3 standards are as expected and at GCSE results are above average. In the sixth form GNVQ outcomes are above average. Although A-level results are well below average, the pupils concerned are achieving well. The quality of teaching is sound in Key Stages 3 and 4 and good in the sixth form, although teaching weaknesses restrict achievements in some areas. Pupils' behaviour is good in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, but unsatisfactory overall in Key Stage 3 because of the unacceptable behaviour of a minority. The school, spread over two sites, is well organised and led. Priorities for future development are appropriate. The school provides sound value for money.

What the school does well

- Examination success at GCSE in English, science, business studies and history
- Some very effective teaching, particularly in history, physical education, business and English, resulting in well motivated and successful pupils who achieve well
- Good leadership of the school and some successful departmental management
- Good assessment and recording, which helps teachers know what should next be taught
- Good pupil attitudes to learning
- Long standing monitoring procedures for evaluating teaching and learning; the school is working to overcome identified weaknesses
- Working hard to improve accommodation, achieving some notable success which helps the pupils learn

What could be improved

- Standards that are too low in modern languages, information technology, art and music
- The quality of some teaching, particularly behaviour management of a small number of difficult boys in Key Stage 3
- Weaknesses in management by some heads of department, particularly their ineffective monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning
- Statutory requirements not met in information technology, and design and technology for all in Key Stage 4
- Inefficient and ineffective electronic registration procedures
- Substandard accommodation in the school libraries, and for physical education and design and technology which detracts from pupils' achievements

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in November 1995. The school has made satisfactory improvement in the past five years, with good improvement in some areas, working within budget constraints resulting from important buildings developments. The school's leaders have responded appropriately to the previous inspection. The school has the capacity to improve further.

Health and safety issues identified at the time of the last report have been audited and resolved. In 1995 the school was considered to have too many pupils considering the size and complexity of buildings. Governors and managers have worked hard to acquire funding and new good quality teaching blocks have been constructed at great expense to the school as well as

central funding. The school buildings remain difficult to use and accommodation is cramped. Libraries remain inadequate, accommodation is poor for design and technology at the upper school, and physical education. Resources for most areas are sound. Improvements have been made in information and communication technology equipment but resources are still insufficient. The performance of pupils in mathematics has improved greatly since 1995. Attainment at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 in mathematics is now average with sound achievement; in the sixth form attainment is below average but achievement is good. Departments are reviewed. Their progress towards identified targets is known. Some departments are now progressing very well, others are not and are not held sufficiently to account. The curriculum has been reviewed and improvements made in modern foreign languages and, to a certain extent, information technology. Issues still remain in music, art, design and technology and information technology. Arrangements for recording attendance have been substantially changed but they remain, in part, ineffective and inefficient.

The sound quality of teaching has been sustained since the last inspection. The pupils' behaviour is generally good, but with a troublesome minority, as reported five years ago. The trend in the school's average points score at the end of Key Stage 3 is broadly in line with the national trend over the past four years. The trend in the school's average total GCSE points score per pupil, although rising over the past six years, has not done so as rapidly as nationally. A-level standards have been well below national averages in most subjects for the past four years. There is significant added value, however, compared with the pupils' GCSE grades, and achievement is good.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	B	C	B	B
A-levels/AS-levels	E	D	E	

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

In this report, the term 'standards' refers to pupils' attainment relative to some clear benchmark, such as National Curriculum levels, or descriptions, at the end of a Key Stage. 'Above average' standards, for example, means that a higher proportion of pupils of a particular age are succeeding at or beyond the level set than in the majority of schools. 'Achievement' on the other hand, reflects the accomplishments of pupils in relation to what you would expect of these particular pupils. The pupils' prior attainment, what they can already do, is the reference point for pupils' achievement.

Key Stage 3 results in 1999 were broadly in line with the average for schools nationally. English standards were well above average and science above average. Mathematics results were below average but current standards are average. GCSE results in 1999 were above average, with an above average proportion gaining five A*-C grades. The proportion gaining five A*-G grades was well above average. Over the past three years standards have been similarly high. The school's success is in gaining higher proportions of C and B grades and lower numbers of D and E grades for pupils who are on the grade boundaries. The proportion of A* and A grades, although significant, is lower than that in similar schools. The school works for, and achieves, challenging GCSE targets. Highest standards are in business studies, then English and science. Pupils' achievements are good or very good in physical education and history. The lowest standards are in modern languages, art, music and information technology and in these subjects there is underachievement. Pupils' standards in work seen generally reflected their GCSE results and achievements. Pupils with special educational needs make sound progress overall but some with behavioural difficulties underachieve.

In the sixth form, pupils' A-level points scores are well below the national average. Considering their GCSE attainment, however, pupils' achievements overall are good; in history they are very good. GNVQ standards in business are above average and achievement is good. Standards are highest, and above average, in A-level English, economics and business studies. Pupils' achievements in these subjects are very good. In no A-level subjects were achievements unsatisfactory although standards in several were below or well below average.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Most pupils have positive attitudes, a few do not.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is very good in the sixth form, good in Key Stage 4, but unsatisfactory in Key Stage 3, particularly on the lower school site. Exclusions are average.
Personal development and relationships	Most pupils get on very well together. They co-operate, share and respect one another. A minority of younger pupils display immature social skills.
Attendance	Broadly in line with the national average rate; low unauthorised absence.

High attainers and older pupils usually have positive attitudes to school and learning, enjoying school life and appreciating what is on offer. A small minority, mainly in Years 8 and 9, do not and they try to interrupt the learning of others. Involvement in extra-curricular sport and school visits is good. Attendance is sound, but lower last year than the year before.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching of English was good, leading to effective learning throughout the school. Mathematics teaching was less effective than for English in Key Stages 3 and 4 and sound overall. In the sixth form, mathematics teaching was good. The quality of science teaching was mixed and similar overall to that in mathematics in Key Stages 3 and 4. Teaching of A-level biology was good and, in physics and chemistry, sound. Teaching of basic skills was judged to be sound overall: literacy is effectively taught in several subjects following a whole school initiative; numeracy teaching is sound and improving; information and communication technology skills are promoted insufficiently in most subjects.

The overall quality of teaching was sound in Key Stages 3 and 4 and good in the sixth form. The quality ranged from excellent to poor in all three key stages. 94% of teaching was satisfactory or better, 17% was very good or better, and 6% unsatisfactory or worse. The best teaching was in history, physical education, business and economics, the weakest in art, music and modern languages. The quality of pupils' learning correlates closely to the quality of teaching. Most pupils show a willingness to learn and a desire to succeed. They concentrate well in lessons and make effective progress. A few lack interest in learning.

Particular strengths include good teachers' knowledge in most subjects, some good questioning and assessment techniques which ensure work is well planned to meet pupils' needs. A number of characteristics are specific to subjects, for example the strong examination focus in science. The most significant weakness was some teachers' inability to manage pupils who misbehaved; there is also some under-expectation and ineffective use of homeworks.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Broad and relevant with equal access for all. National Curriculum requirements not all met, so unbalanced, therefore unsatisfactory overall.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Statement requirements met. Strengths in some teachers' responses to pupils' needs and full integration of pupils. Weaknesses in planning subject specific targets. Support less effective for pupils with behavioural, rather than learning, difficulties.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The very few pupils provided with effective support by their class teachers. Provision not effectively co-ordinated and managed across the school.

Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school fosters pupils' personal development. Good promotion of spiritual and moral development, encouraged by the Catholic ethos. Social and cultural development soundly promoted. Limited opportunities for pupils to take responsibility.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good care. Effective systems for monitoring pupils, and good target setting in Key Stage 4. Teachers know their pupils well. The electronic registration process and end of day registration period inefficient.

Staff and parents work in close partnership for the benefit of the pupils. Relationships are good and expectations shared. A good range of pupil groupings in different subjects helps pupils learn. Available time is used very efficiently, even with the separate sites problem of staff having to travel. Careers education and work experience opportunities are good. Curriculum requirements are not met in that: not all pupils study a design and technology subject in Key Stage 4, because of a lack of facilities; few subjects have effective planning for the use of information and communication technology; very few pupils experience physical education in the sixth form; and the music curriculum does not plan to meet all requirements. School records on pupils have a good balance of positive as well as critical information. The language and message in the anti-bullying policy is unclear to pupils. The school's provision of a counsellor for one-to-one support for pupils is very good practice.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good leadership and management. Strengths in the management of some departments, resulting in good achievement by the pupils, but weaknesses in other departments.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very effectively in terms of strategic development, but less so as 'critical friends'. A well informed and knowledgeable governing body.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Long standing and effective monitoring of teaching and learning, leading to improvements. Insufficiently effective procedures in some departments. Very good data analysis to identify where the school has added value and where improvements are needed.
The strategic use of resources	Good long term plans which have resulted in significant improvements in school buildings. Efficient and effective use of most resources. Unresolved issues over sufficient funding for the separate sites.

A very well organised and efficient senior management team is committed to high achievement for the pupils. Senior management 'presence' is good around the upper school site but to a much lesser extent at the lower school. A very good school development plan is used to direct the work of the school. Team culture is strong. An effective reorganisation of the management of special educational needs has taken place in order to make improvements for these pupils. The school applies the principles of best value through efficient and effective management and financial procedures.

Teaching and non-teaching staff are sufficient and appropriate. Teacher induction and appraisal processes are good. Accommodation has strengths, such as the new classroom blocks but significant weaknesses remain which restrict learning. Resources are sound but information and communication technology facilities need to be further improved and better used.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils make good progress and do well • Teachers have high expectations and teaching is good • Staff are caring and work hard, promote good attitudes • They feel comfortable about approaching the school • Good behaviour by most children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The help given to pupils with special educational needs • Inconsistencies in setting homework • The range and number of extra-curricular activities • Some senior managers' communication with parents • A few pupils' behaviour which affects others

Inspectors generally agree with the positive points made by parents: pupils are making progress; most, but not all, teachers have high expectations, work hard for the pupils, are good role models and communicate well; most pupils behave well. Inspectors also agree, in part, with parents' criticisms: not all pupils with special educational needs receive effective support in their subject lessons; homework is not regularly set by all staff; and a minority of pupils with behaviour problems do affect the work of others. No evidence was found that some senior managers do not communicate well with parents, although

this is a strongly held view of a small minority of parents. Few 'clubs' are provided and fewer musical activities than in many schools but extra-curricular sports clubs are popular and successful.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. The school's results at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 were broadly in line with the average for schools nationally. Standards were highest in English, where they were well above the national average, and weakest in mathematics where they were below average. Science standards were above average. The relative success of the pupils in the three core subjects varies greatly from year to year; in 1998 the highest standards were in science and the lowest in English. End of Key Stage 2 test information from primary schools and the school's own nationally validated tests show that pupils' entry standards in English are always a little higher than in mathematics, but not enough to explain the difference in the Key Stage 3 data for 1999. The mathematics department has focused on this and targeted higher standards in Key Stage 3. Currently, Year 9 pupils' standards are higher and similar to national standards. Fluctuation in standards of entry is most noticeable in science but even this does not fully explain the great variety in standards attained in end of Key Stage 3 tests, year on year. Compared with similar comprehensive schools, overall results in 1999 were in line with national averages. English standards were again well above, science close to the average and mathematics well below. In all three subjects the proportions of pupils attaining levels 5 and 6, those expected at the end of Key Stage 3, were higher than average, albeit English much more so than mathematics. The shortfall was at the higher level 7, reflecting the small number of high attaining pupils entering the school because so many parents choose to send high attainers to local grammar schools. Compared with national benchmarks, boys outperform girls at St John Fisher at the end of Key Stage 3. The school's own data, however, shows that more high attaining boys enter the school than girls.

2. The trend in the school's average points score for all core subjects was broadly in line with the national trend, over the past four years. Overall, scores for English and science at Key Stage 3 have been above average, and those for mathematics close to the national average, although fluctuating. Taking the core subjects together, pupils' performance has been above the national average. This indicates that the school provides good added value in these subjects, from a base point of standards similar to or a little below average on entry to Year 7. Pupils' achievements are good in English and science and sound in mathematics.

3. In the non-core areas the picture is more mixed with some underachievement as well as good work. In physical education, history and geography, pupils' achievements are good and they attain at least the nationally expected standard at age 14. In design and technology achievement is sound. In modern languages, art and music, standards are below average and pupils are underachieving. In information technology, although attainment is below average, pupils are currently making progress because of the arrival of many new computers. Information technology is still used insufficiently in most subjects, however, which is restricting achievement overall. Progress over time has been unsatisfactory.

4. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE A*-C passes at 52% was above the national average in 1999. Boys' and girls' results were above average. Compared with national data over time, where girls significantly outperformed boys, girls at St John Fisher have done relatively less well than boys. Girls' results in 1999, however, were higher than those of the boys relative to national data. The proportion of pupils gaining five A*-G grades, at 96%, was well above the national average of 90%. Over the past three years these above and well above average proportions have been maintained. The trend in the school's average total GCSE points score per pupil, although rising over the past six years, has not done so as rapidly as nationally. Statistical data is not available to indicate entry standards for pupils in these years, to give some measure of added value, but the local grammar schools have grown in size, taking a greater proportion of the higher attaining pupils living in the area, which helps to explain the lower rate of improvement in GCSE results.

5. Compared with similar comprehensive schools, the proportion of pupils attaining five or more A*-C grades is above average. The proportions achieving five or more A*-G and one or more A*-G grades, are well above average. The achievement of A* and A grades is below that of similar schools. The school's success is in achieving higher proportions of B and C grades, and lower numbers of D and E grades. Pupils at the C/D grade boundary are targeted effectively for help and this has positive outcomes. The school also reviews each pupil's grades when results are published and if it considers a mistake may have been made an appeal is submitted. Such appeals have resulted in four grade improvements in the 1999 results.

6. In English language and science, pupils' GCSE results in 1999 were above average; in mathematics results were average. In-school comparisons between subjects indicate that pupils do better in English and science than many other subjects. These standards were reflected in the lessons and work seen, with good achievement in English and science and sound work in mathematics.
7. The highest GCSE standards in the school in 1999 were in business studies, as they have been for the past three years. In lessons and work seen standards were equally high and pupils' achievements were very good. In history, many pupils achieve very well for their prior learning and attain average or better results. In most subjects, GCSE standards are similar to national results, but with lower standards in some design and technology courses, English literature, art, music and information technology. Pupils' achievements in design and technology are sound overall – good in graphics – but as more lower attaining pupils take design and technology courses, standards are lower. Pupils underachieve in art and music resulting in the lower standards. Although the overall standard in modern languages is average, standards of low attainers are too low; they underachieve because of weaknesses in teaching. English literature standards are steadily, but slowly, improving and are now close to national expectations.
8. Standards in information technology are too low in a range of subjects as in Key Stage 3. The dearth of modern computers until quite recently has had a similar negative effect upon standards. Departments have the intention to make use of the new machines but they have not been in place long enough to have a significant impact on attainment and achievements.
9. Physical education standards in Key Stage 4 are a strength even though facilities are poor. Pupils' achievements in lessons are often very good because of very effective teaching. GCSE results have been below average but are improving and current standards are similar to national averages.
10. A-level standards are well below national averages in most subjects and they have been for the past four years. Very few A-level candidates attained top grades in GCSE and this shows in the lower overall standards at A-level. The proportion of A and B grades at A-level, 18%, is well below the national figure of 32%. The proportion of C, D and E grades, 73%, is well above the national figure of 42%. The school has carried out its own detailed analysis of results, and compared the A-level results of pupils who on entry to the school would have gained grammar school places, with national data on grammar school pupil attainment. The school's analysis shows significant value added. Evidence of lesson observation and scrutiny of pupils' work show good achievement by A-level candidates.
11. GNVQ standards are above average in business (Intermediate), and business and finance (Advanced). Intermediate GNVQ completion rates are 100%, well above average. Attainment on the advanced GNVQ course is in line with national expectations for merit level. Pupils' achievement in sixth form lessons, and over time, is very good.
12. Sixth form numbers are small, resulting in low group sizes in several A-level subjects. The school has a dilemma as it tries to run a combination of GNVQ and A-level courses to satisfy pupils' needs, but often has insufficient pupils to run two courses in parallel, for example GNVQ and A-level art courses.
13. In English, economics and business studies, attainment is above average and pupils' achievements are good or better. In history, achievement is also very good. Attainment is below average because a high number of the large group taking the subject had quite low prior attainment levels at GCSE. In design and technology, geography, music, French and German standards are below average but achievements are sound. In art, achievement is sound and a number of pupils have gone onto higher education in art following their A-level. Mathematics group sizes are small and attainment is well below average - the highest grade in 1999 was a C, but pupils are achieving well, making good progress. Science standards are mixed. Attainment in biology is average and achievement good, but in small physics and chemistry groups few higher grades are achieved and achievement is sound.
14. Pupils can opt to carry out physical activity in the sixth form, but few do. Standards are unnecessarily low because the subject is not timetabled.
15. Taking account of their respective starting points, pupils with special educational needs achieve standards which are at least satisfactory. Overall achievement by the end of Key Stage 3 is satisfactory in most subjects, and is good in geography and history due to the particularly good focus of teaching on the needs of these pupils. The reading skills of many improve well during the key stage, so that they can increasingly gain access to the whole curriculum. As pupils' confidence and behaviour mature and their interest increases, helped by the concerted effort of staff, achievement by the end of Key Stage 4 is good. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, for example, the 13 pupils placed on stages 3 to 5 of the special educational needs register achieved an average of almost six GCSE passes, of which 10 were among the top grades of A*-C. English, mathematics and science feature among the GCSE passes. The small number of pupils with behavioural difficulties

do not do as well as they could in some subjects. Strategies to manage their behaviour are not always effective and, in a few lessons, these pupils tried to disrupt the learning of others and underachieved themselves. The small number of pupils for whom English is an additional language are making appropriate progress.

16. Variations in standards in subjects in GCSE and in the sixth form are caused to a certain extent by differences in prior attainment of groups of pupils. More low attainers opt for some subjects than others, but inconsistencies in standards throughout the school are more to do with the quality of teaching the pupils experience.

17. The school's literacy guidelines are having a positive impact on pupils' acquisition of basic skills. Across the curriculum, their listening skills are well developed and the use of spoken English satisfactory or better in most subjects. Written work is generally sound and of a good range. Reading is promoted but opportunities to improve standards are not always taken in lessons. Basic numeracy skills are effectively promoted in several subjects but, as yet, the planned development of numeracy across the curriculum is insufficient.

18. The school has realistic, but challenging GCSE targets agreed with the local education authority, at 50% for five A*-C and 96% one A*-G grades GCSE. The school is aiming to exceed the agreed targets in 2000, as it has exceeded its own targets for the current year. Although GCSE results have fallen a little since the last inspection, pupils' achievements overall are sound in Key Stages 3 and 4, and good in the sixth form. In general, pupils of all abilities achieve similarly, but in a minority of lessons, pupils of low prior attainment did less well, relatively, than high attainers.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

19. Pupils enter both school sites in an orderly and sensible manner each morning. Some are lively but most are calm. They respect the school buildings, even with their shortcomings in facilities, and no graffiti are apparent. Pupils look after their own property and show respect for that of others. Many speak politely and well to visitors, offering help, for example to find a particular room. At lunchtime and during breaks pupils move sensibly around the complicated 'rabbit warren' upper school building. The presence of senior managers at key bottlenecks in this building, and there are several, ensures pupils maintain the 'keep to the left' rule. Virtually all pupils accept procedures that are of benefit to the school community. Most pupils wait reasonably quietly and sensibly outside classrooms for their teachers to arrive in both buildings. This is an important aspect of school life where travel time is needed between lessons because of movements across sites and within each building. The dining areas in the upper school building are small and the very short lunchtime results in some problems, but all issues such as shouting and pushing into the lunch queue were dealt with efficiently.

20. Around the lower school building, most pupils' conduct was similar to that in the upper school, but on occasions some pupils, mainly boys, were silly and loud. Although a rota of senior managers ensures that at least one member of the senior team of four is always on duty at the lower school site, generally it was noted that the presence of managers was insufficient. This was reflected in the slow movement from the playground at break times by some pupils and occasional misbehaviour around the school and during lunch breaks. Problems were not severe but more overt than in the upper school. The standard of behaviour reported in the last inspection is similar to today, with a generally good quality but a boisterous minority.

21. A small but significant minority of parents in their questionnaires reported that their children did not like school. The proportion of parents who sent back their forms was very small, however, at under 7%. Discussions with pupils indicated that there are instances of bullying but they are dealt with; their concerns focused more on a small minority of pupils who misbehaved in lessons. The most positive views were expressed by the youngest and oldest pupils in the school and the most negative came from Years 8 and 9.

22. Most pupils' conduct in lessons was positive, with a willingness to learn and a desire to succeed. In sets of higher attaining pupils, and in well-taught classes, pupils invariably concentrated hard, questioned what they failed to understand and learnt effectively. Their behaviour was sometimes excellent; they had positive attitudes to work and had high self-esteem. In a few sets of mainly lower attaining pupils, a small minority with behavioural difficulties tested their teachers' skills in behaviour management to the limit. In the few lessons observed where teachers did not manage such pupils well or where pupils' conduct was too lively, other pupils' work was interrupted. Attitudes and behaviour in observed lessons were very good in the sixth form, good in Key Stage 4, but unsatisfactory in Key Stage 3. In the sixth form, in all lessons seen, pupils' attitudes and behaviour were good or better and in over two-thirds, were very good or excellent. In Key Stage 4, two-thirds of lessons were good or better and a third very good. In Key Stage 3 about half were good or better, only a sixth were very good or excellent. In about one in eight lessons attitudes and/or behaviour were unacceptable. The lowest quality was in Years 8 and 9.

23. In a Year 11 English lesson for the highest attainers, after lunch, the pupils started the lesson somewhat passively but very soon demanded much of themselves. When given just two or three minutes for a task, every second was used fruitfully. Told to read and extract information from a magazine all, without exception, did so. Discussions between pairs were demanding and when a pupil did not understand, for example, what 'a play on words' meant, they quickly questioned the teacher. The pupils' behaviour was excellent throughout the lesson. In contrast, in a Year 8 lower band French lesson, on differences between French and English television, pupils were rude and disrespectful at the start of the lesson and continued in a similar vein. Chewing gum, chatter, shouting, and a lack of exercise books indicated the great lack of interest in learning shown by the disruptive small minority. Their behaviour was poor. Very few lessons of this poor quality were observed, but the majority of pupils who wanted to work in these lessons were seriously disadvantaged.

24. The number of permanent and fixed term exclusions from the school is broadly average. Each case is considered with care; exclusion is used as a final resort for unacceptable conduct. Procedures are clear and are followed. Each pupil's homework diary states the school discipline policy, which reflects the school mission and the code of conduct that pupils subscribe to on joining the St John Fisher community.

25. Pupils participate in a range of extra-curricular activities, which they thoroughly enjoy and appreciate. A number of pupils are very involved in charities, for example sixth formers arrange a penny trail and support Barnado's. Many sports clubs involve several hundred pupils over the year, both boys and girls, and lunchtime computer clubs are making good use of the school's new facilities. The pupils enjoy year group visits, for example to the zoo, and the good opportunities for theatre trips, geographical fieldwork and visits to France and Germany provided by departments. Pupils would like more! Most pupils show good levels of personal development. They relate well to school staff and other adults visiting the school, appreciating their time in school and developing a healthy respect for the views of others. A few do not. Sixth formers are very good role models for their younger peers. Their conduct was usually of an exemplary standard around the school and in their private study time. They have less responsibility than they could have and the lack of a school council, or similar, limits their voice and the voice of others in making suggestions that could be of benefit to the whole school. As stated in its own self-audit the school is aware that the pupils' views are not taken into account sufficiently.

26. Attendance was above the national average prior to 1998-99, when it dropped to a percentage broadly in line with the national average. Unauthorised absence is well below the national average. At the time of the last report attendance was lower, having fallen below 90%.

27. Points for development:

- Improve the behaviour of a small minority of pupils, particularly in the lower school building during breaks and around the school and of some lower attaining pupils in lessons
- Provide more opportunities for sixth formers to take responsibilities in the school and ensure that greater consideration is given to pupils' views about their life at St John Fisher.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

28. The quality of teaching was sound in Key Stages 3 and 4 and good in the sixth form. The quality ranged from excellent to poor in all three key stages. The proportion of observed lessons, where teaching was good or better, was three-quarters in the sixth form and about half in Key Stages 3 and 4. More than a third of the teaching in the sixth form was very good, but this proportion dropped to about one in eight in Key Stages 3 and 4. The proportion of weak teaching was similar in each key stage. The best teaching was to Year 12 where the quality was very good; no lessons were unsatisfactory and almost all were good or better. The lowest quality, although still sound, was in Year 9 where under a third was good or better. There was a very close correlation between the quality of teaching and the learning outcomes for the pupils. The best quality learning was in Year 12 and the weakest was in Year 9.

29. Teachers in most subjects, and throughout the school, plan effectively and have good subject knowledge. Setting and marking homework is not consistently carried out, which results in some nights with little homework set and too much on other evenings. Many features of teaching are sound overall in Key Stages 3 and 4, but these overall judgements mask great variation between the very good skills of a minority and one or two teachers with weaknesses. The most significant of these weaknesses was in management of pupil behaviour. In the sixth form, particular teaching strengths were: high expectations; effective pupil management; and good use of time. Teaching of basic skills is judged to be sound overall: literacy is taught effectively in several subjects following a whole school initiative; numeracy to a lesser extent, but numeracy teaching is sound and improving; information and communication technology skills, however, are promoted insufficiently in most subjects. Higher attaining pupils are well supported through challenging lessons in both mixed ability and setted groups.

30. A significant strength in pupils' learning was their own knowledge of how well they were doing. In Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, pupils' concentration, interest and willingness to learn were added strengths, as they aspired to succeed in their studies, motivated by consideration of career and further education prospects. The pace with which pupils worked and their acquisition of new skills and knowledge depended to a great extent on the quality of teaching, and as such it was sound in Key Stages 3 and 4 and good in the sixth form.

31. The quality of teaching of English was good, leading to effective learning throughout the school. Good teachers' knowledge led to interesting lessons with a brisk pace of work and thorough questioning. Effective assessment techniques ensured work was well planned to meet pupils' academic needs. Mathematics teaching was less effective than for English in Key Stages 3 and 4. Brief mental mathematics tests are used to good effect at the start of lessons to improve pupils' numerical skills and in the best work, pace and challenge led to highly motivated pupils. In the sixth form, good teacher expertise and effective relationships resulted in good achievement for these classes. The quality of science teaching was mixed and similar overall to that in mathematics. The significant strength which enables pupils to achieve success in science is the focus on examination requirements. As in English and mathematics, teachers have good subject knowledge, which facilitates learning. A weakness in science was some teachers' inability to manage the behaviour of a small minority of difficult pupils in Years 8 and 9.

32. Teaching strengths in history, where the quality was very good overall, result in great popularity for the subject. Teachers 'told a good story' making work stimulating and enjoyable. Homework was carefully used and teaching had a very good impact on pupils' literacy skills. Teaching of physical education was equally good. High quality lesson structure and good evaluation of progress, by pupils and staff, resulted in good skill reinforcement and development. Business and economics courses were also very well taught with an appropriate focus on the criteria for examination success.

33. Weaknesses in teaching art, music and modern languages are preventing some pupils from achieving the standards they should. In art, good teacher knowledge was not used effectively. Expectations were not high enough and as in several other subjects, teaching strategies to manage the behaviour of poorly motivated pupils were weak. Pupils' learning in art is not good enough because of these weaknesses. The quality of modern foreign languages teaching was unsatisfactory overall. Although good in the sixth form, pupil management was weak at times in Key Stages 3 and 4 and insufficient homework was set. Music teaching was sound in Key Stage 3, but unsatisfactory elsewhere, when the approach demotivated pupils.

34. Although the quality of teaching of design and technology, information technology and geography was generally sound, most lessons showed a combination of strengths and weaknesses. Good subject knowledge in design and technology was insufficient to achieve good learning for pupils when the pace of work was too slow. In geography, a good range of techniques was used but learning was less effective when teachers' contributions dominated lessons. The lack of computers restricted what teachers could do in information technology and homework was not set consistently, although good marking helped pupils know how to improve.

35. The few pupils with English as an additional language are supported effectively by individual teachers.

36. Teachers, helped by learning support assistants and local education authority tutors, work hard to include pupils with special educational needs in all that happens in lessons. As a result, pupils generally make satisfactory progress, the rate picking up as pupils move up the school. Despite this, progress both in basic skills and in behaviour is still not as good as it could be. Although pupils' individual education plans are readily available, they are not consistently and sufficiently well used across the curriculum for planning lessons and for keeping a check of pupils' progress in meeting targets. There are exceptions to this in a few subjects, such as history, and for pupils with Statements of special educational needs and those on stage 3 of the register with specific and moderate learning difficulties: these pupils have 'target books' with them in lessons which serve to remind them and staff what should be focused on. In addition to under-use of individual education plans, subject departments have not written subject-specific targets. Staff are unclear as to how their subject can support progress, for example in basic literacy skills. This should be remedied.

37. In the last inspection report the proportion of sound or better teaching was similar to that reported here. Strengths in history teaching have been maintained but the quality of art teaching has changed from a strength to a weakness. Quality planning has been maintained, as has good teacher subject knowledge. A significant weakness then, a lack of a suitable range of learning activities, is no longer a weakness. Overall, the quality of teaching has been sustained and, with thorough implementation of existing monitoring procedures and guidance notes on teaching, further progress is likely.

38. Points for development:

Improve the quality of some teaching through

- better management of pupils' behaviour, particularly in Years 8 and 9

- setting homework more systematically and ensuring that pupils of all abilities have an appropriate amount of work to do
- ensuring that information technology is used more frequently in subject lessons
- ensuring that subject specific targets are set and used in teaching pupils with special educational needs
- more effective use of expertise in modern foreign languages, music and art

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

39. The curriculum is broad and relevant. In Key Stage 3, all pupils have equal access to a full range of National Curriculum subjects, enhanced by the inclusion of dance and in Year 9 by the addition of a second language, German, for all pupils. In Key Stage 4, a choice of subjects, including two languages, ensures greater variety. In the sixth form, a range of A-level subjects is on offer together with a GNVQ in business studies. Supervised study periods are used well and good opportunities are provided for pupils to work within the local community, as when a sixth form student of A-level computer studies wrote a stock control programme for a local shop and tested it out for the owner. Issues identified in the last report, concerning the size of groups in sixth form English classes, have been addressed.

40. A range of groupings of pupils are used - setting; broad banding and mixed ability groups - which contribute successfully to improving pupils' learning. In history, for example, mixed ability groups, and teaching well matched to the needs of individual pupils, ensure that all pupils learn and progress well. In mathematics, setting enables a different curriculum to be taught to pupils of differing ability in a structured way.

41. The school provides equality of access and opportunity to its curriculum and to other opportunities for learning. Boys and girls can become fully involved in all that the school provides and can achieve equally well. The small number of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language benefit from being at the school. Pupils with special educational needs are fully integrated into the life of the school. Increasing attention is given to the needs of gifted and talented pupils so that their curricular needs also can be met. The school analyses and evaluates its examination results to see what improvements can be made. Increased attention has been given, for example, to helping boys to do better. Pupils' recent examination successes demonstrate the effectiveness of heightened staff attention to the learning needs of boys, but not at the expense of girls.

42. The curricular requirements expressed in Statements of special educational needs are met: pupils at stage 5 on the register have access to the full National Curriculum and religious education and the work is reasonably matched to their needs. For other pupils whose special educational needs require individual education plans, a strong emphasis on literacy and on behaviour in these plans frequently masks the need to match the subject curriculum specifically to pupils' needs. They often have the same tasks as other pupils, with the same resources: this is not always appropriate. However, the good working ethos in the great majority of lessons and the effective support of teaching and learning support staff go a long way to overcome this weakness in planning. The setting arrangements that the school employs have potential for increasing the rate of pupils' progress even further, but the school is hampered by a shortage of learning support assistants for pupils other than those with Statements.

43. Despite this good overall provision, the curriculum is judged to be unsatisfactory. There is no provision for every pupil to study design and technology at Key Stage 4. Additionally, in Year 9, the programme for information technology is delivered in blocks, which means that pupils have little opportunity to practise the skills they have acquired. The carousel arrangement in design and technology at Key Stage 3 and limited facilities for physical education, restrict access to some parts of the curriculum in those areas. Additionally, in the sixth form there is no guarantee that all pupils will receive their entitlement to physical education since the programme offered is voluntary, and little used. The A-level course offered for design technology in the sixth form does not meet the needs of all students in the group, some of whom obtained low grades at GCSE or have not studied the subject at GCSE at all. The provision of information technology across the curriculum is unsatisfactory. With few exceptions, such as the use of data logging equipment in Years 7 and 8 science, many subjects do not plan to use information technology in lessons. Significant progress is currently in hand as the new facilities available are brought into use. The improvement of provision in information technology and design and technology were issues in the last report. Progress is now being made in the provision of an appropriate information technology curriculum. The issue of curriculum provision in design and technology, however, depends upon improved facilities for Key Stage 4 courses.

44. The total curriculum time is in line with nationally recommended figures and time allocations for subjects are broadly in line with recommendations. Good provision of movement time between lessons results in very efficient use of available time, even with the separate buildings problems of staff having to travel. The single lessons for which art is taught

are short, particularly in Key Stage 4, and restrict pupils' ability to obtain the appropriate 'finish' and quality in their work. This was an issue identified in the previous inspection report. Some pupils are currently unsupervised when moving to outside facilities for physical education that restricts the time available for the activity when they arrive and has implications for their health and safety.

45. Planning is good in several subjects, for example science, English, history, GNVQ business and physical education, where the planning helps in the attainment of good achievement. Planning is inconsistent across departments, however, and shortcomings in art restrict attainment, where the links between planning and assessment are poor. Similarly, in music, some National Curriculum elements are not integrated into the schemes of work at Key Stage 3. In modern foreign languages, there are no schemes of work for Key Stage 3 and the sixth form in German.

46. The school meets statutory requirements for sex education through an appropriate programme for personal, social and health education. From Year 9, there is good impartial advice on careers and good links with the local careers service. The newly appointed co-ordinator has yet to prepare a development plan although his vision for the future development of the area is clear. The school offers a wide range of work related activities and provides good support for students when they receive the results of their GCSE examinations, resulting in a high proportion of pupils entering further education.

47. As the only Roman Catholic secondary school in the area, pupils are accepted from many primary schools. The school receives end of Key Stage 2 assessment data but curriculum links are quite tenuous with many of the schools.

48. Although the range of extra curricular opportunities is limited, overall provision, including good opportunities in sport, is satisfactory overall. Increasing numbers of pupils are taking part in extra-curricular sport and there are opportunities for extended study in subjects such as information technology and mathematics both during lunchtimes and after school. Visits to France and Germany enhance the provision in modern foreign languages, as does a combined French/art trip to France. Opportunities to take part in extra-curricular music are restricted by the short lunch-time, and provision is weak.

49. The Governors' curriculum committee meets regularly to discuss curriculum issues. The group's minutes indicate that they are kept well informed and make effective contributions to curriculum debate.

50. The school's curriculum and ethos fosters pupils' personal development effectively, as a result of the positive approach to it, which has been maintained satisfactorily since the last inspection. Spiritual and moral development are good and encouraged well by the Catholic ethos that underpins the school's work. Good attention is given to the principles that distinguish right from wrong. In a few subjects such as history, approaches to teaching stimulate a sense of curiosity by providing high quality opportunities to reflect on source material and ideas. Pupils are given time and encouragement to consider ethical, moral and human rights issues such as those raised by the slave trade and Nazism. This makes a very strong contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development. In other areas of the curriculum, apart from religious education, opportunities are missed to explore experiences, values and beliefs such as those reflected in pieces of art, music and writing. In science, the emphasis on preparation for examinations is often at the expense of any sense of wonder and intellectual excitement. In the best science lessons, fascination and enthusiasm are nurtured well, enabling pupils to be receptive to the wonders of the natural and physical world around them.

51. Physical education lessons contribute well to both social and moral development through a sense of fair play, justice and clear understanding of the rules of the game. Some useful opportunities are provided for pupils to take responsibility as form representatives. Most pupils, particularly in the upper school, understand the social behaviour expected of them in different situations. There are fewer opportunities than usual for pupils to take increased responsibility for organising activities, making suggestions and planning their own work as they move through the school. It is not easy for them to use their initiative, even within the programme of in-school community service in Year 12, which is a useful contribution to pupils' personal development, but organised for, rather than by them. Social development is cultivated effectively in the upper school where quite consistent attention is given to codes of conduct. The headteacher sets a good example, supported by strong staff presence around the building, which is reflected in the way pupils, particularly the older ones, relate to each other. The lack of a co-ordinated and consistent approach to personal and social development in the lower school, stemming from the presence around the building of fewer senior and middle managers, is reflected in pupils' weaker social skills and learning habits. Provision for social development overall, is satisfactory, with some strong features, such as paired and group work in many good lessons.

52. The school promotes cultural development satisfactorily. Pupils show respect for the feelings, values and beliefs of others. Some good opportunities are provided across the curriculum, particularly in history, geography and English for pupils to appreciate their own and other cultural heritages. The cultural aspects of language learning are supported well by trips and exchanges with France and Germany. Opportunities are missed which would extend pupils' knowledge and

experience of different cultural traditions in other subjects, such as music and science. Pupils are not taught to recognise the contribution of a wide range of cultures to mathematics, scientific and technological development. For example, there is little on display and within the teaching programme to highlight the work of scientists or origins of science.

53. Points for development:

- Ensure that all pupils follow a course in design and technology in Key Stage 4.
- Improve planning for information technology, ensuring that the full requirements of the National Curriculum are met in all relevant subjects.
- Provide all pupils in the sixth form with physical education opportunities
- Improve consistency in curriculum planning, including schemes of work for all years in German, linking planning and assessment in art, and ensuring that National Curriculum music requirements are clearly specified.
- Plan to provide some extended times for art in Key Stage 4
- Provide more extra-curricular activities, particularly in music
- Work to improve curriculum links with the many primary schools from which the pupils come into Year 7.
- Improve provision for social and moral development of pupils at the lower school building
- Increase opportunities for pupils to take responsibilities for aspects of school life, particularly in the sixth form

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

54. Arrangements for child protection are in place and comply with locally agreed procedures. All staff are kept well informed and appropriate training is given. A designated member of staff deals with incidents at each school building. A health and safety monitoring group meets regularly and appropriate safety checks are carried out, for example on electrical wiring and on physical education equipment. The monitoring of health and safety aspects is appropriate and shows that necessary improvements have been made since the last inspection when health and safety considerations were a key issue.

55. The school has in place very effective systems for assessing and monitoring pupils' academic performance. In Key Stage 4, in particular, the system of target-setting is used very well to monitor and improve pupil performance. Staff talk regularly with pupils and parents about their targets and keep a close check on whether these are being met. Teachers know their pupils well and there is a clear chain of communication, which ensures that staff and parents are kept informed about individual pupils as appropriate. Each pupil's record is kept up-to-date and is clearly documented. It is used well to ensure that positive as well as negative messages are passed on to parents about their children. This is a strength of the school.

56. In most subject areas assessment systems are appropriate, and what pupils achieve is reviewed to ensure that planning is also appropriate. Inconsistencies were noted between departments, however. For example, strengths in English contrasted with weaknesses in art.

57. As with pupils at the school generally, good oversight is maintained of the progress of those with special educational needs through regular assessments in subjects. In addition, systematic checking of improvements in reading, use of number and spelling provides further useful information. Prior to annual reviews, the necessary information is gathered from staff so that those attending the review meeting are fully informed of a pupil's progress and achievements. Requirements for annual reviews are met.

58. An electronic system for registering attendance has been introduced since the last inspection. It is generally used conscientiously at the start of the day and at the beginning of each lesson, but not always, and as a system for monitoring attendance it is inefficient. Teachers frequently find it difficult or slow to download the information they require and many are resorting to keeping a paper register of attendance. The registration of pupils at the end of the day is particularly ineffective and is not assisting the school in its attempts to either monitor or promote attendance. Low attendance at some of these 'end of the day' registration sessions left teachers having to follow up as many as half the class. On one occasion these pupils had gone home after a practical lesson without attending the registration period.

59. Problems with public transport, used by many of the pupils at St John Fisher, have resulted in a reduction in school attendance in the past year. The school is doing much to try to maximise attendance, however, through providing attendance targets for individual pupils, emphasising the importance of good attendance during the induction programme for Year 7, and reinforcing attendance messages in the school newsletters. Links with the education welfare officer are good and where concerns are raised about attendance there are effective follow-up procedures.

60. The arrangements for personal support and guidance are generally good, particularly at the upper school building. Issues related to healthy and safe living, such as drugs misuse, are tackled effectively through active tutorial work, although this aspect is less effective at the lower school. A counsellor is employed by the school to provide one-to-one support for

pupils who feel in need of this service. This is very effective in offering pupils an additional source of guidance. Form tutors know their pupils well, as do heads of section, and they have appropriate strategies to acknowledge both good and improving performance, for example the use of merit cards with bonus vouchers for consistent achievement. The advice given to pupils considering A-level courses is not always appropriate, resulting in some pupils attempting courses which do not match their needs.

61. The school has an anti-bullying policy which is part of the discipline policy and is also published in each pupil's homework diary. Although in practice the policy is reasonably effective it does not state clearly the procedures to be followed in the event of any incident and the language is not easily understood by pupils.

62. In most areas the school provides good care and support for its pupils, though the electronic attendance system is a weakness. Systems are generally more effective in the upper school building than in the lower school. The quality of provision, overall, is similar to that reported in the last inspection.

63. Points for development:

- Improve consistency in assessment, ensuring that the all departments use assessment records to review the success of their planning
- Review the electronic registration procedure and ensure that it is used more effectively and efficiently. The present end of the day registration session and procedure does not work well. Staff and pupils have to return unnecessarily to bases, resulting in incomplete records.
- Try to ensure a better match of sixth form courses for a small minority of (lower attaining) pupils

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

64. As at the last inspection, relationships with parents are good. The quality has been maintained. In general, parents have a positive view of the school, particularly the quality of teaching, the high expectations and the good progress made by children. Parents value education, want to see their children doing well and, as a result, the vast majority attend parent consultation evenings. All those with children whose special educational needs require annual reviews attend these. The school makes good efforts to keep parents well informed through useful newsletters and detailed progress reports. The quality of information provided about school life and pupils' achievements is good.

65. Most parents feel that the school deals quite well with their concerns. A few parents are not wholly satisfied with what they are told about their children's progress, do not feel that they are kept well informed, or that the school works closely enough with them. In one or two cases, they have not been able to make effective use of the arrangements for reaching key staff by telephone, or staff have failed to return calls and reply to letters. This is not the usual school response to parental concern.

66. Opportunities are provided for parents to comment on initiatives such as the home-school agreement and to discuss curriculum issues at educational evenings. In spite of the school's efforts, the response is often disappointing. However, when parents are concerned about issues such as progress, or changes such as new buildings, they do attend meetings to discuss matters. Overall, links with parents are effective in creating shared expectations about the importance of aiming for high standards. Parents support their children's learning and achievements well in response to information provided by the school, particularly by their interest in how well their children are getting on and whether they are working hard enough. Parental involvement with the school is constructive, providing good support.

67. Points for development:

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HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

68. The positive position summarised in the previous inspection report with respect to equality of opportunity has been maintained. A concern raised then, about girls participating less fully than boys do in a few lessons, did not emerge as a weakness in this inspection: teaching is generally responsive to the needs of girls, including when they are a minority in a class - girls progress as well as boys. In line with its Christian ethos, the school works hard to treat each pupil as an individual and is largely successful. However, pupils in the lower school do not share the same benefits as pupils in the upper school in having the continuous presence with them of one of the most senior members of staff to whom they can relate.

69. The leadership and management of the school, which were judged to be good at the time of the previous inspection, remain good overall, and in some respects they are more effective than previously. The work of the school and its priorities for development are firmly based on the school's Mission Statement: St. John Fisher School seeks to help and encourage pupils to develop, individually, collectively and freely, a way of life modelled on Christ, in accordance with the faith of the Roman Catholic church. Under the mature and firm guidance of the headteacher, ably assisted by his deputies and the large and well-organised team of staff who participate in the school's management, the school has continued successfully to implement its aims. The very strong commitment to high achievement is clearly evident in the pupils' levels of attainment in GCSE and GNVQ examinations and their achievements in A-level courses. The school remains popular with parents and has been fully subscribed for many years. The head and senior staff maintain a conspicuous presence around the school, particularly at the upper school building, which positively influences the ethos of the school and the demeanour of pupils.

70. The senior management team required to run this large, complex school on two sites is very well organised and works efficiently. There is a 'team' culture. The headship team, school management team, heads of department, departments and sections of the school have clear remits. They have carefully prescribed responsibilities, are clearly accountable and maintain efficient channels of communication. Improvement is a constant priority and various committees, for instance for staff development and assessment, meet regularly to develop the school's procedures. The professional development of staff is strongly promoted. Young and inexperienced teachers are regarded as a valuable resource, and teachers of all levels are active on committees. Line managers provide individual departments with good support but they have had too little influence on the efficiency of departments some of which are ineffectively managed. English, science, history and physical education are well managed. There are weaknesses in the management of geography, art and music, and also of special educational needs.

71. To strengthen the management of special educational needs provision, the headteacher has recently created a new management structure for this area. The objective is to reduce the number of pupils on the special educational needs register by enabling them to make progress more quickly. This brings together a number of senior staff and the co-ordinator so that procedures for pupils with learning difficulties (and separately for those with emotional or emotional and behavioural difficulties) and procedures for raising attainment in literacy and numeracy are more closely integrated. This teamwork, although onerous, has significant potential for directing the school's resources, more effectively and efficiently, at remedying pupils' special educational needs.

72. The governing body comprises both long-serving members and a significant number of recent appointees. Governors are kept well informed and are strongly supportive of the school. Sub-committees are appropriate and report regularly. Governors acknowledge and respect the professionalism of the head and staff. They analyse examination results and receive reports from departments. Each subject department and the department for special educational needs have a designated governor. Some governors attend lessons, but there is not a consistent or formalised approach to their monitoring role in the classroom, they do not report formally on their visits, and their function as 'critical friend' is under-developed.

73. The governing body plays a major role in the strategic development of the school. Governors receive the draft development plan from the headteacher and they collaborate closely with him in formulating future priorities. There is a well-established procedure for development planning as a three-year process. The current strategic development plan, which covers 1998 - 2001, is very good. It has relevant priorities and detail, it has been carefully costed, those responsible for its implementation and monitoring are identified, and there are realistic success criteria. Good procedures are included for monitoring its success. The principal targets are an annual review of pupils' achievement, and the development and extension of aspects of provision which enhance the value-added component of the education which pupils receive. These aspects are: curriculum monitoring; narrowing of the discrepancy between the achievement of boys and girls; strategies to develop pupils' learning skills (including 'thinking skills', information and communication technology, literacy, numeracy and marking); pastoral development; an annual curriculum review; and modification and extension of premises. Departmental development plans all reflect the priorities of the school's strategic development plan and many are good.

74. The governing body has a strong grasp of finance and showed both prudence and initiative when negotiating the current negative budget to finance the recent building programme with its clear benefits for the expansion of the school and quality of its provision.

75. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching is integral to staff development and there is a good range of carefully developed procedures. These include: observation of teaching by heads of department, with a termly focus, such as class management, assessment, and the use of questions; the sharing of good practice 'in house'; the use of formal appraisal, with reviews by external consultants; and research programmes linked with a local college. Where lessons are observed, this is carried out according to a fixed code of conduct. Feedback is given to teachers and what has been learned is shared at a half-

termly departmental meeting. These procedures have been successful in bringing about change and improvement for several staff, but there is some way still to go for a minority whose teaching skills are insufficiently effective.

76. Curriculum monitoring is well established, although the issue of short periods in art has yet to be resolved and a number of other curriculum changes such as Key Stage 4 design and technology for all have yet to be implemented. The monitoring is carried out in several ways: through regular monitoring by subject heads or their deputies; through annual departmental reviews; by the regular monitoring of the work of selected pupils; and by the shadowing of selected pupils or groups. Overall curriculum review is carried out by the senior management team.

77. The school is developing the use of information and communication technology in the curriculum, aware that it has fallen behind requirements because of the paucity of modern computers. Assessment data, pupils' profiles and records are stored, which facilitates tracking pupils and monitoring their progress. An electronic registration is in use but this does not always operate reliably. It is planned to improve communication between the two sites through the use of the laser link. Members of staff have and are undergoing training in computer literacy, although this is an area of relative weakness.

78. The school has adequate staffing and resources to support the curriculum. With few exceptions the school is fully staffed with experienced and qualified teachers and support staff to match the needs of the pupils and the curriculum offered. The school has successfully appointed experienced and effective staff to meet a temporary shortfall. To date the school is short of several experienced learning support assistants to meet the needs of pupils identified as having special educational needs. Technical support in science and design and technology is sound but the lack of any technical assistant in the art department places added pressures on teachers who travel between the separate sites.

79. Newly qualified teachers and other new staff benefit from a good and effective induction programme. The mentoring system, highly valued by newly qualified teachers, helps them settle into the school quickly. The school has a well-established appraisal system that has been running for several years. Great emphasis is placed on training and development of both new and experienced staff. Partnership schemes with local higher education centres support the school in providing courses and qualifications that enable staff to update their qualifications and skills in line with personal, professional and whole school targets. The school has supported several staff in their studies for higher degrees and advanced diplomas.

80. The school makes best possible use of the accommodation and resources it has. Weaknesses in accommodation, however, out-weigh the strengths; this is even after substantial effort and expenditure by the school in making improvements at both buildings since the last inspection. A recently completed major building programme has provided several good quality multi-purpose rooms, thereby releasing space for additional specialist rooms in the existing building. An improvement in the use of the accommodation since the last inspection is that many more lessons are now taught in specialist rooms. The newly opened information and communication technology suite is a strength, proving popular with pupils and adding significantly to the quality of education and the opportunities to work with new technologies. Sited next to the library, it provides a valuable research and graphics resource where whole classes can learn and be taught.

81. Elsewhere there are weaknesses, notably the problems of access to computers and the accommodation for Key Stage 3 information technology lessons and some business studies lessons. The rooms are cramped, too small for whole classes, and pupils have to share computers. Further weaknesses include music and geography rooms and the de-mountable accommodation, shabby and poorly lit, where a number of mathematics lessons take place at the lower school. These factors have a negative impact on the quality of learning and the achievements of pupils. Few improvements have been made to the library accommodation and resources since the last inspection. The libraries remain unsatisfactory and inadequate as centres to promote learning and literacy. They carry a restricted stock of books, particularly at the lower school site, and other research resources for the number and age range of pupils in the school. The accommodation for design and technology is also unsatisfactory in failing to provide the proper facilities to work with resistant materials. The facilities for physical education are poor. The lack of outdoor facilities limits take-up of extra curricular activities and has a negative impact on pupils' involvement and attitudes to the subject.

82. The quality and range of resources in most subjects across the curriculum are sound although, as at the time of the previous report, in all subjects there are weaknesses in the use and availability of information and communication technology equipment.

83. The school makes very good use of the finances made available to it. In a recent financial audit of the school's systems, the auditors stated that proper accounting records are kept and money was spent as it was intended to be. Minor issues raised in the audit have all been addressed. Short and long term financial planning is very carefully prepared, based on the school's development planning. Essential building improvements at both sites have placed great pressure on budgets for several years and this situation is likely to continue. The planned deficit budget for the current year – with local education authority approval, the deficit will be cleared within three years – has been essential in order to enable a key building

programme to be completed. Even with this expenditure, the planned design and technology improvements at the upper school were not possible, with the result that the lack of facilities is inhibiting the pupils' attainment in this subject.

84. The school has carefully calculated the actual cost of managing the school on two sites, including elements such as staff travel time, caretaking, cleaning and administrative staff, and resource costs such as the library and equipment which must be duplicated. This element of expenditure is calculated at several times that received, which places a further significant drain on the budget. Proportions of the budget spent on areas such as administration and learning resources are above average, which necessitates a below average budget proportion on teaching staff costs – this is unhelpful to pupils' learning. The pupil:teacher ratio is high and teachers at St John Fisher spend a higher proportion of their time teaching than in other schools. The school spends significantly higher amounts of money on supporting pupils with special educational needs than that designated for this purpose in the budget.

85. Sixth form costs are high for the relatively small number of pupils in several teaching groups. Overall provision in the sixth form is sound, however, and the wish of parents to have their children taught in a Roman Catholic sixth form facility means that this non-cost-efficient facility is effectively providing for pupils in the diocese.

86. The principles of best value are applied in existing school practices in the management of resources. Expenditure on all areas of school life has to be thoroughly justified with the current planned deficit budget. Competitive tendering is used to ensure best-value contracts are placed for all major expenditures and governors and senior managers debate at length before budgets are agreed.

87. The school is judged to provide sound value for money, considering the above average cost per pupil, but also the following factors: average Key Stage 3 results, above average GCSE results and sound achievement in both key stages; well below average A-level, above average GNVQ results, yet good achievement in the sixth form; generally good behaviour except for a small minority of pupils; sound attendance; a broad and relevant curriculum, lacking in some aspects of balance; sound or better teaching overall in all stages; and effective school management ensuring steady progress since the last inspection.

88. The 'team' spirit within departments and throughout the school stems from the value placed on the contribution each member of staff makes to the running of the establishment. Staff have shared values based on the school's aims and the school's priorities are known by all. Lines of accountability are clear. The school is well led and managed and the head and governors have high expectations of staff. Staff are strongly committed to the development of the school. Systems and procedures are in place to enable the school to improve still further.

89. Points for development:

- Consider ways of improving the presence of senior managers in the lower school building so ensuring instances of misbehaviour are minimised.
- Ensure line managers are more effective in bringing about change in ineffectively managed departments.
- Formalise governors' monitoring role – 'that of critical friend' – so ensuring great consistency of practice and increased impact.
- Further improve the effectiveness of the monitoring of teaching, so ensuring that all staff are sufficiently effective.
- Increase the number of modern computers available for the pupils to use.
- Increase the number of learning support assistants, as the budget allows, improving support for pupils with learning difficulties.
- Improve the quality of the library, particularly in the lower school building, increasing the number of available books and improving the research facilities available.
- Improve the poor quality accommodation for physical education and the shortage of specialist facilities for teaching resistant materials in the upper school building.
- Work to minimise the drain on the budget of the two separated buildings, through negotiating appropriate funding.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

90. The governors should include in their post-inspection action plan the way in which they are going to respond to the following issues, in order to raise standards in the school. The governors, headteacher and staff should:

- Improve standards in modern languages, information technology, art and music. This will be achieved through better teaching, curriculum planning and assessment. Improved staff expertise is needed in information technology.

(paragraphs 3; 45; 56; 124; 125; 157; 164; 171; 178; 180.)

- Improve the quality of some teaching, particularly in modern languages, music and art. More consistent implementation of behaviour management procedures is required with a small number of difficult boys in Key Stage 3. Work should be matched more effectively to the needs of lower attaining pupils in some lessons and high attainers in others. Improvements in questioning approaches and assessment procedures are needed, including marking of some work. Homework should be set more systematically and pupils of all abilities should have an appropriate amount of work to do. Subject specific targets should be set and used in teaching pupils with special educational needs. The role of senior managers in monitoring improvements will be important to achieve consistency of good practice.

(paragraphs 29; 31; 33; 34; 75; 92; 108; 117; 118; 126; 175; 184.)

- Improve management by the heads of the music, art and geography departments, particularly their ineffective monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning.

(paragraphs 70; 127; 145; 186.)

- Ensure that statutory requirements are met in that all pupils in Key Stage 4 follow a course in design and technology, that computer facilities are improved in the school and that all subjects use information technology effectively.

(paragraphs 3; 8; 34; 43; 82; 112; 119; 124; 131; 136; 153; 159; 164.)

- Improve the inefficient and ineffective electronic registration procedure which wastes time at the end of the day and does not result in accurate attendance records

(paragraphs 58; 77.)

- Improve the substandard accommodation for the school libraries and physical education facilities, and increase the number of design and technology workshops in the upper school.

(paragraphs 9; 43; 81; 136; 195.)

Please note that all these points for improvement are specified, or are referred to, in the school's substantial school development plan.

91. The following less important, but significant, issues are brought to the attention of the school.

Standards, teaching and curriculum

- Provide more opportunities for sixth formers to take responsibilities in the school and ensure that greater consideration is given to pupils' views about their life at St John Fisher (25)
- Provide all pupils in the sixth form with physical education opportunities (14; 190)
- Plan to provide some extended times for art in Key Stage 4 (44; 122)
- Provide more extra-curricular activities, particularly in music (48; 185)
- Work to improve curriculum links with the many primary schools from which the pupils come into Year 7 (47)
- Try to ensure a better match of sixth form courses for a small minority of (lower attaining) pupils (43; 60; 132)
- Co-ordinate support for the very small number of pupils for whom English is an additional language and who are at the early stages of acquisition of English (100)
- Ensure that the school's numeracy strategy is implemented in all departments throughout Key Stages 3 and 4 (17; 112)
- Continue efforts to raise attainment in design and technology; in GCSE English literature, especially for boys; and in geography emphasising the work for high attainers (7; 93; 129; 139)
- Formalise links with industry to assist in the vocational curriculum (203)

Management

- Consider ways of increasing the presence of senior managers in the lower school building so ensuring instances of misbehaviour are minimised (20; 68; 51)
- Ensure that line managers are more effective in bringing about change in ineffectively managed departments (70)

- Formalise governors' monitoring role – that of 'critical friend' – so ensuring greater consistency of practice and increased impact (72)
- Increase the number of learning support assistants, as the budget allows (78)
- Work to minimise the drain on the budget of the two separate buildings, through negotiating appropriate funding (84)
- Work to improve the quality of accommodation for mathematics in the lower school building and for teaching music and geography (81; 110; 147; 186)
- Install dust extraction in the resistant materials area in the upper school. (136)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	191
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	About 40

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
4	13	36	41	3	3	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	1034	178
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	110	12

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	29	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	311	1

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	11

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	36
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	57

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	9.4
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	1999	113	88	201

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	87	70	77
	Girls	77	46	48
	Total	164	116	125
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	82 (74)	58 (72)	62 (71)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	35(28)	31 (37)	24 (35)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	84	92	90
	Girls	75	75	77
	Total	159	167	167
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	79 (76)	83 (67)	85 (82)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	30 (40)	25 (27)	39 (43)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	1999	99	96	195

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	41	96	98
	Girls	60	92	96
	Total	101	188	194
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	52 (53)	96.4 (94.9)	99 (96)
	National	46.3 (44.6)	90.7 (89.8)	95.7 (95)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score	School	40.2 (39.3)
per pupil	National	37.8 (36.8)

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

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		1999	34	37

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	12.1	12.1	12.1 (13.6)	3	3	3
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (17.6)	2.7	2.8	2.8

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

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	
Indian	5

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		

Pakistani	3
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	
White	1194
Any other minority ethnic group	6

Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	31	4
Other minority ethnic groups	1	

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	68.6
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	2
Total aggregate hours worked per week	50

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	83%
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.1
Key Stage 4	21.9

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1212
Number of questionnaires returned	79

Percentage of responses in each category

My child likes school.

My child is making good progress in school.

Behaviour in the school is good.

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	35	48	11	5	0
My child is making good progress in school.	44	47	8	1	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	17	53	21	3	8

Financial information

Financial year	1998 – 1999
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	£
Total income	3094016
Total expenditure	3007322
Expenditure per pupil	2523
Balance brought forward from previous year	101657
Balance carried forward to next year	188351

My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	23	51	23	4	0
The teaching is good.	29	61	6	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	27	47	24	3	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	57	28	9	4	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	58	35	6	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	25	44	22	8	1
The school is well led and managed.	33	41	10	9	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	38	43	15	3	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	11	43	30	4	11

Other issues raised by parents

Parents appreciate a caring school with hardworking staff where pupils achieve. A small number find some senior managers less effective than others in communicating with parents. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is not as good as it should be.

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

ENGLISH

92. Attainment in English is above national expectations throughout the school. At the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' achievement in lessons observed, and in their work, was good. The 1999 Year 9 national test results showed a well above average proportion of pupils attaining level five, and an above average proportion at level six and higher. Based on the average points scores for these pupils, attainment was well above average. Over the last four years, girls' attainment has been above national average levels, and boys' attainment well above. In comparison with similar schools, results were well above average in 1997 and 1999, and in line in 1998. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs in Key Stage 3 is sound. In several lessons pupils with special educational needs learnt as well as their peers, but this was not the case in some lower sets, when a small minority with behavioural problems interrupted the learning of others.

93. In Key Stage 4, pupils' achievement in lessons and work was good. Attainment in English language at GCSE for pupils gaining grades A*-C and A*-G was above national averages for comprehensive schools in 1999. This maintained a three-year school trend that has seen boys scoring consistently higher than national averages and girls improving from average results to those well above. Attainment in English literature GCSE has shown a steady improvement since 1997, when results were some of the lowest in the school and the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C was well below the national average. Results in 1999 were close to national averages. Girls do better than boys here, reflecting national trends. Although girls' attainment was in line with national averages in 1999, that of boys remained below.

94. In the sixth form, attainment in English literature at A-level is above national averages. Although there were no grade As in 1999, all pupils obtained pass grades, the majority at C and above. Results have improved steadily over the past three years and the school's own data indicates significant value added for those pupils.

95. By the end of Year 9, nearly all pupils, including lower attainers, have attained a good level of reading considering their prior attainment. They read simple passages aloud with confidence, clarity and expression. They demonstrate well their enjoyment and knowledge of technical devices used in poetry, such as onomatopoeia and alliteration, by identifying examples and applying them to their own original work. On entry to the school, nearly all pupils are able to discuss issues together sensibly in pairs. They answer questions thoughtfully and clearly in front of others in class, although a weakness is that middle and lower achievers often do not develop their responses beyond a single phrase. Pupils across the attainment range rise to the challenge of writing independently for different purposes. These include scripts, letters, reviews of television programmes, and humorous pieces. For example, an article by an average attaining Year 9 pupil about 'musically ignorant parents' dealt with the generation gap in musical taste with affection, humour and light irony. A higher attaining pupil produced a well-structured analysis, well above the level expected from previous test results, dealing with the difference between W.H. Auden's 'Stop all the Clocks' and Liz Lockhead's 'I wouldn't thank you for a valentine'.

96. By the end of Year 11, higher attainers achieve above national expectations in class, and middle attainers produce work in line with national expectations. Low attainers' standard of work is as expected for their prior learning. For example, higher attainers showed a good level of independent thought about language and morality when they analysed the difference between emotive and factual words in a newspaper article on animal experimentation. In this emotive subject, both boys and girls demonstrated their skill in producing a balanced analysis. Pupils showed that they could recall, understand and explain well the relevance of particular incidents in a novel. Average attaining pupils, studying Mildred D. Taylor's 'Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry', showed both a sound level of understanding of what they had read, and effective speaking skills when debating their ideas in small groups before summarising their views on a chart to present to the rest of the class. Pupils' skills in accessing and using information technology to obtain and manipulate information is a weakness. The department is planning to develop its teaching to remedy this, making use of the school's new equipment

97. At the start of the A-level English literature course, pupils achieve good levels of knowledge and insight into the texts they are studying. For instance, a class studying Shakespeare's 'Othello' made observations about the combination of naivete and loyalty in the character of Desdemona. The pupils justified their views independently with accurate references to the text, without being censorious or allowing pre-existing modern perspectives on gender to cloud their judgement. By the end of the course they explain and justify their opinion with fluency and maturity both in class discussion and in written assignments. The attainment level in lessons and work seen is similar to that gained in last year's A-level examinations.

98. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour were very good in over a third of the lessons observed and nearly always satisfactory or better. Across the age range, pupils' behaviour is usually characterised by co-operation and willingness to learn both from the teacher and from each other. This creates a favourable and productive working atmosphere. A group of Year 10 average attaining pupils tackled a new exercise together, to learn about characterisation, against a ten minute time limit. With little teacher prompting, they produced vivid word pictures including the female who 'spoke in a masculine voice' or the character who found that 'My eyes are the colour of my moods'. Pupils and teacher shared a sense of enjoyment in discovering new levels of vitality and expressiveness to create and describe a fictitious character. In a minority of Key Stage 3 lessons a few pupils' attitudes were unacceptable. They were noisy and attention-seeking, causing other pupils to show frustration at their conduct and disruption. Pupils' attitudes to work are excellent in the sixth form and impact favourably upon the levels of attainment in lessons.

99. The quality of teaching was good in more than two-thirds of the lessons observed, leading to good, effective learning for the pupils, both boys and girls. Teaching observed was never less than satisfactory. It is characterised by good subject knowledge, good planning, and a firm pace in lessons so that the attention of pupils is engaged. Teachers' good questioning skills promote progress effectively, as pupils' answers are assessed well, and they are interrogated further, to consolidate and extend their understanding. This applies particularly to those with special educational needs who are helped to achieve well for their prior learning. Assessment, identified as a priority by the department, particularly in Key Stage 4, is an emerging strength. Especially effective is the indicative grading of written work, making use of National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades. Helpful comments are added which enable pupils to know what must be done in order to improve, and are supplemented by a grade indicating the effort they have made. To this is added a personal pupil target and the opportunity to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses. Such a careful focus on assessment makes pupils more aware of how their knowledge and understanding are progressing and how they may take control of their own learning. By contrast, a weakness in assessment is that much of the pupils' written work is not sufficiently marked at the early drafting stages. The quality of teaching has had and is continuing to have a favourable impact upon the rising standards of attainment in all end of key stage assessments. The relative weakness in the performance of boys at GCSE English literature will be further addressed by the approaches now being applied.

100. The school has a small number of pupils with English as an additional language, and very few indeed of these are at an early stage of language acquisition. There is no formalised support for those who join the school with little English, but individual teachers are supportive and helpful and these few pupils do make effective progress. The department is aware that more work remains to be done to manage and co-ordinate English as an additional language across the school.

101. The department of well-qualified teachers is very well managed. Improvements made since the last inspection concern problems of communication between the two separate sites, which have been largely overcome. A recently-appointed head of department has reviewed the work of the department, set priorities such as the implementation of an effective approach to assessment and produced a comprehensive range of other draft policy documents. These are now being worked upon and introduced, according to the priorities determined by the department and school development plans. The work of the department is monitored well through classroom visits, and discussions about teaching at departmental meetings provide an effective support to this process, which is having a good impact on the quality of teaching.

102. Across the curriculum, pupils have well-developed listening skills, and their use of spoken English is satisfactory or better in most subjects. In history, effective lesson planning strategies, such as the promotion of role play, have a powerful impact on pupils' understanding of language and give opportunities for the expression of different viewpoints. Written work is generally sound and of a good range, from the well-constructed e-mail messages being produced in GNVQ information technology sessions, to the extended reports produced by all in science. A group of staff is producing literacy teaching guidelines, and these are already having a positive effect upon classroom practice. Early developments include the use of personal pupil vocabulary books and the display of key technical words in each area. Notable success in literacy promotion was observed in design and technology, geography, English, and music.

103. Points for development:

- Continue efforts to raise attainment in GCSE English literature, especially for boys
- Improve behaviour management in the small number of Key Stage 3 lessons where a disaffected minority of lower attainers interrupt the learning of others
- Co-ordinate support for the very small number of pupils for whom English is an additional language and who are at the early stages of acquisition of English
- Use information technology more in English lessons.

MATHEMATICS

104. The pupils' results in the 1999 national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 were below national averages and well below those achieved by pupils in similar schools. The proportions of pupils at level 5 and at level 6 were slightly above the national figures, but the proportion at the very highest levels was well below the national percentage. The attainment of boys was higher than for girls showing a similar picture to national differences. The attainment in lessons and work of higher attaining pupils in Year 9 was above national expectations and that of average attaining pupils in Year 9 was close to the national expectation, indicating that pupils' standards are currently higher than they have been previously. Some higher attaining pupils in Year 9 solved problems by using numbers in standard form and manipulated algebraic expressions involving powers and indices, attaining a very high standard. Teachers assessed pupils at a much higher level than they actually achieved in the end of key stage tests in 1999. Over the four years up to 1999, mathematics results have fluctuated but on average are close to national standards.

105. The pupils' results in the 1999 GCSE examinations at the end of Key Stage 4, when compared with all comprehensive schools, were close to the national average. The proportion achieving A*-C grades were a little below average, but the proportion gaining A*-G grades was above average. The attainment of boys was higher than that of girls when compared to the national figures. GCSE results over the past four years have improved at a rate that exceeds the national increase over the same period, but the school results are from a base point of low standards. Some higher attaining pupils in Year 11 have already gained grades B and C at GCSE and are confidently working towards the highest grades. Pupils are now attaining standards, as seen in lessons and exercise books, not dissimilar to national expectations. The school's GCSE results in 1999 and 1998 were not significantly different from those of other subjects in the school; in 1997 results in mathematics were below those of most other subjects.

106. Pupils' results at A-level were well below the national average point score and have been for a number of years. In 1999 the highest grade was a C and not all pupils passed. Sixth formers' achievement, however, is good. Considering the

pupils' prior learning – their GCSE grades – achievements are above those which could be expected. They are doing well because they are highly motivated by effective teaching in relatively small groups.

107. Pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 are achieving soundly; they make satisfactory, and in some instances good, progress. Pupils with learning difficulties make similar progress to their peers, but a few with erratic behaviour sometimes fail to use their time in lessons well. Higher attaining pupils in Year 7 use co-ordinates with confidence to plot points; in Year 8 this develops to drawing straight-line graphs and the solving of linear equations and in Year 9 pupils can draw curved graphs and manipulate quadratic expressions. Average attaining pupils can draw plane shapes accurately in Year 7; this is extended to investigating angles in polygons in Year 8 and work on the circle in Year 9. Lower attaining pupils have their arithmetic reinforced throughout Year 7 and extend this to simple algebra in Year 8 and linear equation solving in Year 9. Higher attaining pupils in Year 10 develop their trigonometric skills in right-angled triangles to solution of non-right angled triangles by the use of the sine and cosine formulae in Year 11. Average attaining pupils in Year 10 develop their graphical skills so that by the end of Year 11 they can evaluate the formulae for a straight-line graph by considering the properties of the intercept and the gradient. Lower attaining pupils develop their knowledge of shape and space from polygons and their transformations in Year 10 to work on the circumference and area of a circle in Year 11.

108. Pupils' attitudes to learning were sound overall with good concentration and enjoyment in a number of observed lessons. Pupils usually arrived at their lessons prepared to work and settled quickly. They were attentive to their teachers and asked relevant questions to confirm their understanding. In a Year 8 lesson, for example, pupils enthusiastically sought answers to the initial problem of possible digits in a number question, then willingly offered solutions and reasons for their answers. Effective teaching skills and high expectations from the teacher stimulated pupils' interest. Low attaining pupils were seen to be enthusiastic in their lessons when presented with challenging but achievable work. Most pupils working individually were keen to progress through the route set for them, being encouraged by success and achievable targets. Time was lost occasionally in searching for cards to work from, which demotivated some individuals. In a few lessons, a minority of pupils whose behaviour is unpredictable tried to disrupt the learning. In no lesson was much time wasted, but their negative attitudes and silliness made the teaching task harder and reduced the quality of other pupils' learning. These instances occurred in the sets for lower attaining pupils. All the A-level pupils made positive contributions to their lessons and participated well in class discussions; the desire to achieve and succeed was very evident in their attitude.

109. The quality of teaching was similarly sound in Key Stages 3 and 4; in the sixth form, teaching observed was good. The most effective lessons in Key Stages 3 and 4 often started with a brief mental arithmetic test that revised the work in hand, had a clear focus and proceeded at a brisk pace; pupils were involved in the learning process and as a consequence achievement was high. Although just sound overall, a few lessons had unsatisfactory starts. In Key Stage 3, individualised work did not always progress as quickly as it could and learning was just satisfactory. Teacher assessment of the individualised scheme is detailed in Years 7, 8 and 9, but the task of ensuring each pupil is completing sufficient work of an appropriate standard is challenging and difficult to achieve. In other work, marking provides insufficient guidance as to how work can be further improved. An example of a good lesson that resulted in good progress and positive attitudes to learning mathematics involved a Year 10 class studying data handling. The lesson started with a brief review of previous work on calculating the mean of a small set of data, progressed to handling much larger amounts of data by grouping in relevant intervals, and then this technique was used to calculate an estimate of the mean. The pupils made their own decisions as to class intervals and to the appropriate degree of accuracy required. In the sixth form, teachers' good subject knowledge, thorough questioning and very effective support helped pupils to enjoy their lessons and make good progress. In double periods work was well paced and effective use of humour motivated the pupils.

110. The department members are a supportive team, led by an effective head of department committed to improving standards in mathematics. The department is resourced for an individualised scheme and these materials are now used to support a range of teaching and learning styles. All teachers are monitored regularly and supported in a positive manner, encouraging pupils' high achievement, although the teaching quality judgement of 'sound' in this report indicates that further improvement in teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 is needed if high standards are to be achieved. The three temporary buildings used to teach mathematics in the lower school, with one good quality modern classroom, are in a poor decorative state and this has a negative effect on the attitude of the pupils and the quality of their work.

111. There have been great improvements since the last inspection, when mathematics standards were too low. A*-C grades at GCSE of 26% in 1995 increased to 41% in 1999. Mathematics is now 'used and applied' much more than five years ago and the pupils experience a balanced curriculum. The use of information technology in mathematics is under-developed, but the recent arrival of new computers and the planning for their use, this and next year, should improve this situation. The department handbook is good, providing a comprehensive reference point for staff. As the quality of teaching continues to improve through the on-going monitoring of the quality of teaching against agreed 'good teaching criteria' and

staff adapt their practice in Key Stage 3 to include more direct teaching and less of the individualised work, pupils' achievements are likely to improve.

112. The mathematics department has a policy on numeracy and mathematics skills across the curriculum and this is now being developed to build on the numeracy strategy that is in place in primary schools. Mathematics lessons frequently start with a short mental exercise to encourage the use of mental skills and numerical work. Calculator use, where seen, was effective and efficient. Examples of development of basic numerical skills were seen in several subjects, particularly in physical education, but there was little planned development of skills through the school. Tabulation and graphical work was evident in science, especially at Key Stage 4, but such work was not fully exploited in geography. Data extraction and interpretation were evident in the analysis of historical information. Pupils weighed, measured and costed accurately in design and technology, and used a range of geometric shapes in graphics to develop the nets of three-dimensional objects. Good use is made of numerical skills in GNVQ subjects, business studies and in information technology. The lack of use of spreadsheets, because information technology across the curriculum is underdeveloped, is inhibiting the improvement in numerical skills to a certain extent. Some confident use of data analysis was seen in economics.

113. Points for development:

- Build on the sound quality of teaching, ensuring that the whole school approach to teaching and learning is thoroughly implemented in all lessons, so causing standards to improve further
- Ensure that all staff have appropriate strategies to deal with the small minority of pupils who show unpredictable behaviour
- Increase the use of information technology in lessons
- Work to improve the quality of mathematics accommodation in the lower school building
- Review assessment procedures at Key Stage 3 and ensure that teacher assessments more accurately reflect pupils' standards of achievement
- Ensure that the school's numeracy strategy is implemented in all departments throughout Key Stages 3 and 4.

SCIENCE

114. In the 1999 end of Key Stage 3 tests, pupils reached standards which were above the national average for all schools and in line with the national average for similar schools. Taking the past four years together, performance has been above the national average. During this time, the performance of boys has been better than that of girls, equivalent to about a term's worth of further progress over the key stage. In 1999, the school entered a very high proportion of pupils for GCSE – the majority for double award. Their attainment at grades A*-C was well above the national average for all schools and also for similar schools. For grades A*-G, attainment was in line with the average for all schools and above that for similar schools. Attainment in single award science was not as high, with pupils reaching standards just above the national average for grades A*-G, but below for the three highest grades. Boys and girls reached similar standards in double award science.

115. Compared with their other subjects at the school, boys did better in science in 1999, while girls attained just below their other subjects. Overall, results over the past three years have been similar to the 1999 picture. Too few pupils took advanced level chemistry and physics in 1999, and in the previous few years, for valid comparisons to be made with national averages. Not all those who took the examinations passed and those that did achieved low grades. The pass rate in biology was above the national average in 1999, although highest grade passes were well below. More pupils gained higher grades in the previous two years.

116. In their lessons, pupils in the present Year 9 are attaining overall standards above the national expectation. This was illustrated in well-taught work on forces, where pupils organised their notebooks carefully to show good knowledge of balancing forces. Subject specialist teaching is enabling Year 11 pupils similarly to reach above average standards, with a significant number on course to achieve high GCSE grades. Their achievement is good. A particularly strong feature of much of the work is the use pupils make of well-constructed graphs to present data gathered during investigations, and accurate interpretation of the resulting information. At A-level, pupils studying biology are achieving well, and those studying chemistry and physics are making sound progress to achieve satisfactory standards. Throughout the school, pupils are developing a sound knowledge base for science, with higher attaining pupils confidently able to apply new knowledge in unfamiliar situations. For example, the most able Year 11 pupils could work out the formulae for various compounds using their knowledge of atomic structure. Pupils are acquiring the skills necessary to enable them to achieve well in coursework investigations. Pupils with special educational needs achieve standards which are at least satisfactory, and which get better as they move up through the school: smaller classes and the increasing pace of teaching and learning are effective. Considering pupils' prior learning, pupils' achievements are sound.

117. The great majority of pupils are interested in science, responding positively to the teaching they receive. Where teaching shows a weakness, namely some ineffective class management strategies, many pupils do not try their best and lose interest. This is the exception, however, and in most lessons there is a good or very good working atmosphere. Behaviour is mainly very good indeed, and pupils take great care with resources. While many pupils readily try to answer questions, others are rather passive. Few pupils ask questions to show that they are thinking or are being stimulated to think.

118. In relation to the effect it has on the rate at which pupils are learning, the teaching observed during the inspection was sound overall, though it varied from unsatisfactory to very good. The quality in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form was sound, and good in Key Stage 4. The significant strength in Key Stage 4, which distinguished the quality from that elsewhere, was the focus on examination requirements. The greatest variation seen was at Key Stage 3 where difficulties in class management led to some unsatisfactory learning. Apart from this, teaching has a number of clear strengths which help pupils to learn: good understanding of science and of the requirements of the National Curriculum and examination courses, resulting in clear explanations; lessons firmly based on the good schemes of work; some excellent questioning which challenges pupils to think and keeps them on their toes, but this quality was not seen often enough; excellent class management when not a minute was lost from teaching and learning; prompt starts to lessons and the readiness of resources, the latter due to the effective contribution made by the well organised team of laboratory assistants; a good balance of teaching and pupils working so that their concentration and enthusiasm were maintained. Other than the weakness in class management, other less serious weaknesses which slow down the rate at which pupils learn are: the purpose of the lesson, in terms of gains in knowledge, skills and understanding, is not consistently explained to pupils so that they do not always know what to do next when a piece of work is finished; questioning often does not stimulate and challenge pupils sufficiently; routine marking frequently lacks clear guidance to pupils on what they can do to improve; absence of science targets for the individual education plans of pupils on the special educational needs register so that teaching in science is not consistently focused on meeting their specific learning or behavioural needs.

119. The recently appointed head of department, building upon earlier successes in the department, is effective. Test and examination results are carefully evaluated and there is a clear understanding of what needs to be done to maintain present standards and to bring about further improvements. Among these is the use of information technology: while good progress is being made in providing for this in Years 7 and 8, it is almost absent from the rest of the science curriculum. To this extent, the subject is failing to meet statutory requirements, as it was at the time of the previous inspection. Otherwise, improvements have been made since then, particularly the challenge of the work at Key Stage 3, as shown by the test results. However, there is still variation in the quality of teaching which needs to be addressed more effectively.

120. Science is making a generally satisfactory contribution to pupils' personal development. Moral and social development are promoted well, for example through mainly excellent sharing of resources and tasks, effective working pairs, pupils' readiness to help to maintain tidy and safe laboratories, and respectful listening to each other. Less successful is the attention given to pupils' spiritual development: opportunities are missed to explore the wonders of scientific discovery and to stand back in awe at the beauty of the natural world as revealed by science. Cultural development is also not well catered for, as there is little to show that some time is given to considering who made these discoveries.

121. Points for development:

- Remedy weaknesses in class management where a small minority of pupils are reducing the effectiveness of teaching.
- Improve the quality of marking to make it more helpful for pupils;
- Develop questioning skills to deepen pupils' insights into the subject;
- Increase the use of information technology in science lessons
- Plan for pupils' spiritual and cultural development through science.

ART

122. The results of pupils entered for GCSE examinations are below national averages and below the results of pupils in similar comprehensive schools. Pupils do less well in art than in other subjects in the school. Over the past 3 years the percentage of A* - C grades in examinations has fallen from above to below the average. Attainment of current pupils in Year 11 is below average but the quality and standard of the work is better than the results of the previous two years. Nevertheless a significant number of pupils, mostly boys, are not achieving their potential. Portfolios of work contain some hastily finished work and lack the kind of personal commitment and independent research and investigation expected of pupils at this stage of their learning. By contrast examples of good quality preparatory work, where pupils had used first hand experiences and resources to make imaginative and ambitious interpretations of a given theme, have led to good quality prints and sculpture. Standards of printmaking are high, for example showing some intricate and complex over-printing

techniques. The timetable arrangement of only single, fifty minute, lessons is an inefficient use of time and resources for art and hinders the achievement of higher standards.

123. The number of pupils taking A-level examinations is small and varies considerably from year to year. Trends over time and comparisons with national averages and similar schools could, therefore, be misleading. However, in recent years all of those entered for the examination have passed and some have gained the higher grades. There is a good record of progression onto higher education art courses. Achievements and progress made in lessons, taking account of the varied experiences and limited attainment of some pupils prior to joining the sixth form, are sound overall and some students make good progress. The quality of drawing is higher than the painting, much of which is weak. The work made by students attending a life-drawing class at a local college and the outreach programme from the Royal Academy show a high degree of intellectual rigour. This work makes a significant contribution to the standards achieved. The lack of available studio space for use outside lessons limits progress and standards of achievement.

124. By the age of 14, although the majority of pupils attain standards in line with expectations, a significant minority underachieve, making standards overall below average. Pupils' critical skills and their understanding and use of technical words and phrases are limited, for example in Year 7, when explaining primary and secondary colours. Pupils confidently use books and computer programs to collect information and assist their research but are less confident and practised at offering their own views and opinions of their findings. The quality and standard of drawing and painting in Years 7 and 8 are progressing well and enabling pupils to gain the confidence and skills to improve and refine their work over several lessons. In all key stages pupils have insufficient access to computers for research and to develop computer generated images.

125. Pupils' overall learning and the progress they make is unsatisfactory, with many producing insufficient good quality pieces of work. In particular, the progress of higher attaining pupils is held back and others do not achieve their potential. There are various reasons for this. Sometimes teachers talk for too long, causing a minority of pupils to lose interest and concentration, and allowing insufficient time for all pupils to practise and refine particular skills. Sometimes pupils are given too little information about the purpose of the lesson and the criteria used to judge their achievements. Without this information pupils are poorly equipped to appraise their own progress or to take steps to work independently. Progress and learning was more effective where teachers gave explanations during demonstrations and probed pupils' understanding, for example, about the scope of a particular printing process. This approach prepared pupils well for the work that followed. Learning was less effective where pupils had to rely on the teacher's explanation and description, for example, of what happens when black or white paint is added to a primary or secondary colour.

126. Teaching is unsatisfactory overall although in over half the lessons seen teaching was satisfactory or better. A strength is teachers' subject knowledge; they offer a very wide range of experiences and expertise. Where teaching is particularly effective, pupils are set imaginative and challenging work. The introduction and ending of the lessons are brisk and purposeful. Effective strategies ensure that pupils listen closely and carefully, leading to thoughtful responses to questions and some high quality drawing. Learning is less effective when teachers shout above pupils' chatter and, failing to capture their attention, cause the level of noise to increase further. On several occasions teachers attempted to teach against a background of talking. Expectations were not high enough. Teachers have too few strategies for managing the behaviour of a minority of pupils whose poor attitudes and low levels of concentration and motivation inhibit the learning of other pupils in the class. In Key Stage 4 and sixth form classes, teachers carry out informal, on-going assessments and negotiate with individual pupils how they can best make progress. This approach is reasonably effective because, over two years, pupils have been taught by the same teacher. Such lack of formality at Key Stage 3 creates problems for pupils and teachers and limits progression and continuity of learning. Learning objectives are not identified clearly and shared with pupils nor are assessments used effectively to plan the next stage of learning.

127. Weaknesses in management include the slow progress made towards the introduction of both appropriate assessment strategies and the monitoring of standards. Since the last inspection little progress has been made in developing the use of information technology in art. There are now more opportunities for pupils to work in three dimensions although the pottery kiln is inadequate. Improvements have been made to the storage facilities. The lack of technical support places unreasonable demands on the staff of a practical subject and who teach at both sites. The fall in standards in art since the last inspection means that progress since then has been unsatisfactory.

128. Points for development:

- Raise standards in art
- Improve department management, in particular the effective monitoring of the quality of teaching. The involvement of senior managers in this process will be important
- Improve the quality of teaching. Specific aspects are: higher expectations of pupils' attention and work rate; more use of information technology; more rigorous questioning of pupils' understanding; and better behaviour management of a small minority of pupils

- Review timetabling of the subject to enable lessons to be of sufficient length to be used efficiently
- Improve the quality of assessment so that recorded information is used to inform teachers' planning

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

129. 1999 GCSE examination results show that the proportion of candidates gaining grades A*-C was below average in resistant materials and in graphic products, and very low in food technology. Grades are below the national averages when compared to all maintained secondary schools and comprehensive schools. Results at A*-G grades, however, are in line with national averages. Results were also below national averages in 1997 but above in 1998. Combined design technology results in 1999 are below other subjects in the school. Low entries at A-level make comparisons difficult. Pass rates are high although those entered are usually successful at the lower grades.

130. Current attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 generally meets the national expectation and matches recent teacher assessments. An improving trend is seen with a small minority of pupils attaining above national expectation. In work observed, design folders show a range of graphical skills, research and analysis, from above to well below national expectations, indicating that pupils are achieving satisfactory levels for their abilities. The better folders show good use of colour, shading techniques and use of commercial material in presentation of the work. The weaker folders often lack a range of initial ideas, and research is shallow, with little evaluation. Information and communication technology is underused at this key stage. Good investigational skills were seen in food technology when researching vegetarianism. Models and prototypes were used effectively in structures and mechanisms when pupils used construction kits to investigate various forms of motion including pulleys.

131. Current attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is in line with national expectations for graphic products, but below in resistant materials and food technology. Predicted grades are indicative of these findings. Achievement, however, is sound, and occasionally good. In the best work pupils express ideas using a variety of presentational skills including photographs, freehand sketching, colour and commercial material. They use information technology to improve presentation and illustrate research evidence in graphical form. A small number of design folders lack quality and depth of investigation and indicate underachievement by the pupils. Practical skills are usually good and pupils use tools and equipment safely and confidently. Under the present option system the food technology and resistant materials groups attract mainly the middle and lower attaining pupils who achieve positively in these areas for their prior attainment levels. Not all pupils take a design and technology subject in Key Stage 4.

132. Current attainment of the small number of pupils taking A-level design and technology in the sixth form is below national expectations but levels of achievement are sound considering pupils' prior attainment. Some who take A-level do not have an A*-C pass in the appropriate GCSE courses. Graphical skills are satisfactory and sometimes good. Interesting projects are investigated, such as the luggage storage systems on Euro-Star and children's educational toys.

133. The quality of teaching was satisfactory overall. The best teaching, resulting in good achievements for the class, was seen in lessons which had good pace, appropriate teacher intervention, careful questioning, and where exemplar material was used to aid understanding. This was evident in a mechanisms lesson when designing a balancing toy and in a food technology lesson when investigating the nutritional values of a sandwich which the pupils were to design and make. The best learning was seen in a Year 11 graphic products lesson where pupils showed very good independent learning skills and pupils discussed strengths and weaknesses in designs in a confident manner. The teaching in this lesson was very effective. Good subject knowledge, good relationships and high expectations of quality and quantity enabled the pupils to learn quickly and confidently. Sometimes, even when teaching was satisfactory, learning, although sound, was restricted by a lack of urgency in the lesson. Some pupil inattention and distraction, rather lengthy theory work undertaken and missed opportunities to develop ideas and thoughts were the causes of this weakness. Pupils with special educational needs are as effective in learning as others in their classes. They make appropriate progress in mixed ability groups and achieve soundly.

134. Pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour were good in design and technology lessons. They work well in pairs or groups and share workplaces and equipment cooperatively. Relationships are usually good and pupils are generally interested in their work. Most can discuss their work confidently.

135. Assessment procedures are used constructively to support progress and learning. In Key Stage 3 assessment is linked effectively to National Curriculum requirements and in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form assessment is linked to examination board criteria. These assessment records are supported by teacher comments as to how the work can be improved. Marking is consistent across the department and homework is regularly set and marked. The department is fully implementing the literacy policy with word banks, vocabulary books and technical terminology on display in all rooms.

136. The department has managed curriculum change reasonably well with good policies and practices, including termly reviews of teaching, and guidelines for in-service training and its impact in the classroom. The sound quality of teaching, however, with strengths and some weaknesses, indicates that monitoring and evaluation of teaching is not yet sufficiently effective. Departmental management is sound overall. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is unsatisfactory as it does not meet statutory requirements: not all pupils take a technology subject. Staffing arrangements - three part-time teachers - present difficulties in managing a team and planning for continuity and progression. Accommodation is good overall. An exception is the resistant materials area in the upper school, which is not conducive to quality work. There is no dust extraction in this area, which is a health and safety hazard.

137. In the last report teaching was considered to be good although standards were similar to those currently attained. The poor quality accommodation was considered to be a major factor in the standards achieved, including a number of health and safety hazards. The department had insufficient tools and a lack of time in Year 11. Great progress has been made in improving the accommodation and resources and curriculum time is now appropriate. As National Curriculum requirements are not met and the current quality of teaching is sound, however, improvements are judged to be insufficient since the last inspection.

138. Points for development:

- Ensure that all pupils follow a course in design and technology in Key Stage 4 as required by the National Curriculum
- Raise performance at the end of each Key Stage across the department
- Improve the quality of teaching through more effective monitoring of existing practice and replicating the best work
- Install dust extraction in the resistant materials area in the upper school.

GEOGRAPHY

139. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 has improved over the last three years. The results of the 1999 teacher assessments were in line with national expectations, although the proportion attaining levels six and above was lower. Pupils' attainment in lessons matched national expectations. The majority of pupils achieve well at this stage. Those with special educational needs make particularly good progress in their learning as a result of the very good support provided by classroom teachers. The achievement of higher attaining pupils is not always as high as it could be, as the work does not always extend them sufficiently. Pupils produce work which is accurate, well presented and indicates sound knowledge and understanding. They show proficiency in the required skills, for example the use of an atlas and accurate mapwork.

140. GCSE results have improved since the time of the last inspection and in 1999 were in line with national averages. Attainment by girls was well above the expected level and that of the boys in the school. Pupils' attainment in observed lessons and their written work was similar to national expectations and the majority achieve well in relation to their prior learning.

141. Sixth form groups are small which makes comparisons with national data and year-on-year change difficult. Results at A-level in 1999 were below those gained nationally and those of most other subjects in the school, but all passed. Current attainment is at the expected level in most lessons, though students' knowledge and understanding of physical processes was weak. Pupils are making appropriate progress in relation to their prior learning and their achievement is sound overall.

142. All teaching was satisfactory or better in Key Stages 3 and 4. Pupils' learning was most effective when lessons included a range of activities matched to the needs of the pupils and a variety of teaching techniques were used that challenged them. The learning of a group of Year 8 pupils advanced significantly as a result of the expert and stimulating teaching of the regional contrasts between London and Wales. Learning was less effective where the teacher's contribution was too dominant and pupils had little opportunity to take responsibility for their own work. For example, in a Year 10 lesson, a very good introduction included expert use of video recordings, but this was followed by the teacher giving the pupils the answers to posed questions by writing them on the board. An opportunity to extend pupils' thinking and understanding was lost. Lesson planning, although adequate on some occasions, lacked detail. The department uses workbooks for all classes in Years 7 to 11. While these provide good support for the lower attainers and match the needs of the majority of pupils, they fail to provide the type of extension exercises necessary to progress learning to the higher levels.

143. There was too wide a range in the quality of teaching at A-level. Unsatisfactory learning resulted where the teacher's knowledge was not secure. When the teacher was comfortable with the topic, however, some very good teaching resulted. In a lesson on the topic of population, pupils consolidated their knowledge and understanding of interpretation of statistics as they reviewed their answers to examination questions.

144. Pupils' learning is supported by prompt and careful marking of their work. The good assessment information held by teachers is used well to predict and monitor pupils' progress. Teachers do refer to individual education plans of pupils with special educational needs in the planning of their lessons, but targets are not used well enough in all teaching. Behaviour of pupils in their mixed-ability teaching groups was very good. Teachers have very effective pupil management skills which results in classrooms being calm, orderly places where the atmosphere is conducive to learning. Pupils showed interest in the subject in most lessons and, where the teaching was particularly good, they were enthusiastic learners.

145. The team of subject specialists work well together under the leadership of the head of department. Management of the curriculum and planning is not sufficiently focused on the improvement of the standards attained by pupils and the quality of teaching and learning. There is no systematic evaluation of the learning. Schemes of work are adequate and cover the programmes of study without fully exploiting the opportunities available, for example to emphasise geographical enquiry and practical work. A strength of the curriculum is the provision for fieldwork; the department organises frequent residential visits in addition to those available to all pupils through the timetabled week.

146. Insufficient attention is paid to the development of pupils' literacy skills. For example, few opportunities arise for structured writing because of the over-use of the workbooks. Pupils have a good understanding of scale, direction and co-ordinates, but a much greater contribution would be made to the development of pupils' numeracy skills if more demands were made of them in the selection, interpretation and representation of statistics. Presently too much is done for pupils and few opportunities are provided for them to learn through the use of information technology

147. Since the time of the last report, strengths have been maintained and pupils' attainment has improved in Key Stages 3 and 4. Standards in the sixth form have been maintained. The variety of teaching techniques and strategies has improved and work is better matched to lower attaining pupils, although high attainers are still insufficiently challenged. The display of pupils' work is now very good. Despite improvement in departmental accommodation, too many lessons are still taught in non-specialist rooms. Overall sound progress has been made since the last inspection.

148. Points for development:

- Improve standards for pupils with high prior attainment using, for example, more independent learning techniques and specific individual targets.
- Ensure that staff, between them, have appropriate expertise to teach the full range required for the A-level course
- Review schemes of work and improve planning for: higher attaining pupils; literacy and numeracy skills; and geographical enquiry
- Increase the use of information technology
- Work to improve the accommodation for teaching geography.

HISTORY

149. The results of the 1999 teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 were significantly above the national average. All pupils achieve well over this stage in relation to their prior learning. The attainment of pupils currently in Year 9 matches national expectations. Appropriate emphasis is placed on each of the key elements of the National Curriculum and pupils produce work which is accurate, well presented, indicates good knowledge and understanding, and shows proficiency in the required skills. In a lesson on the 'The Slave Trade' with Year 9 many of these characteristics were apparent. Pupils appreciated that events could be interpreted in different ways and suggested reasons for this.

150. In 1999, pupils' GCSE history results were higher than most of their other subjects and in line with national expectations. Attainment of girls was above the expected level and that of boys in the school. The attainment of pupils in lessons matched national expectations. The achievement of pupils was very good. Pupils with special needs made very good progress at both Key Stage 3 and 4 and high attainers achieved their potential.

151. Results at A-level in 1999 were below those for other subjects, and the national average, but the subject is the most popular in the school with over thirty pupils taking A-level each year for the past two years. Several of the pupils taking the A-level course, with C and even D grades at GCSE struggle to understand a number of the concepts taught. The proportion achieving a pass at A-level was sound and pupils achieve very well in relation to their prior learning. Attainment in lessons is at the expected level; levels of knowledge and understanding are satisfactory and they are able to apply this in developing reasoned answers to questions and to support their responses with appropriate evidence. For example, in a Year 12 lesson, reviewing the character of Henry VIII, all became intensely involved in the discussion and applied the knowledge they had gained through their reading.

152. Teaching of history is very good overall. In Key Stage 3 the quality is good; it is very good in Key Stage 4, and excellent in the sixth form. Over half the lessons observed were very good or excellent. The teachers are able to tell a good story. For example, in a lesson with Year 11 the description of life in the war years was 'spiced' with details of local bombing. Pupils' learning progressed as a result of lessons which were planned conscientiously, where learning objectives were made clear, and the resources and activities challenged yet matched the needs of the pupils. Teachers supported the learning of individuals and homework was used to good effect. A very good range of techniques was used. When Year 7 pupils played "The Game of Heaven and Earth" their understanding of the beliefs of people in the Medieval period was consolidated and advanced, and they enjoyed themselves! Work is marked promptly and thoroughly, gradings are understood by pupils who are able to interpret their level and progress from the information given. The department uses comments to guide and encourage pupils to further improvement and is increasingly setting learning targets. This is good practice.

153. The very high quality of teaching makes a substantial contribution to the development of literacy skills. Teachers correct errors, provide writing frameworks, encourage focused writing, and set a variety of tasks which allow pupils to practice the different forms of writing used in addressing different audiences. Though less progress has been made with regard to numeracy skills there are examples of good practice, as when a Year 10 group analysed details from a parish register of deaths in order to determine the course taken by an outbreak of cholera. Very little use is made of information technology in the delivery of the subject.

154. Pupils are able to rehearse and consolidate their learning as a result of the very good questioning techniques used. All are encouraged to become independent learners and opportunities to develop the skills required are included in the schemes of work. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject and this is seen in the very good and inspirational teaching at A-level. Here students respond to the challenging teaching with enthusiasm, as when Year 13 students discussed 'The Catholic Threat 1568-1585', the teacher intervening to sharpen the debate. Pupils show interest, work conscientiously and enjoy the subject. Behaviour was good in all lessons as a result of very good pupil management and the quality of the teaching. The pupils feel supported in their learning and contribute freely to lessons.

155. Curriculum planning is thorough, schemes of work give detailed guidance, and this underpins the quality of learning and teaching which takes place in the classroom. The department is expertly managed and led, the head of department providing an excellent role model. Since the time of the last inspection the department has increased the range of teaching resources available at all stages and the learning now includes ample opportunity for the development of literacy skills including extended writing. The learning in history is a great strength of the school. The department has the commitment and capacity for even further improvement.

156. Points for development

- Increase the use of information technology in history lessons.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

157. Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 in 1999 was below national expectations. The short time for which discrete information and communications technology is, and has been, taught for a number of years and lack of use of information technology in most subjects results in these standards. In the 1999 GCSE examination, more than half the pupils entered obtained grades C and D, but few pupils obtained higher grades. Girls' results were significantly better than boys, but overall results were below the school and national average and the average for similar comprehensive schools. In the sixth form, attainment in A-level computer studies is lower than national expectations and below the school average for A-level. A decline in higher A-level grades since 1997 has been mainly due to the lack of time spent in earlier key stages. Attainment in the majority of specific information technology lessons seen, throughout the school, was generally in line with national expectations. The recent arrival of a good number of new machines is resulting in substantial improvements currently.

158. At the end of Year 9 many pupils do not apply their information technology skills in a wide enough range of topics in other subjects. Fortnightly gaps between discrete lessons in Key Stage 3 are unhelpful as some pupils have forgotten skills previously learnt and time has to be spent relearning. The computer room in the lower school is too small for full classes so computers are shared, which reduces pupils' rates of progress. However, in lessons seen in both key stages all pupils, including those with special needs, demonstrated that they could use the main types of software skilfully.

159. Statutory requirements for information technology in several subjects are not fully met in Key Stages 3 and 4. Pupils use information technology insufficiently to solve problems involving communication with a wide range of audiences and setting up models to test their investigations.

160. The majority of pupils in information technology lessons made sound progress in developing knowledge and skills in the lesson time available due to good and sometimes very good teaching. As well as good computer use in business studies, there were a few examples of good practice in other subjects. Science coursework folders include well-chosen examples of data logging to measure heartbeat using wrist sensors. In English and mathematics pupils use desk-top publishing on their computers at home to produce newspaper pages, importing scanned photographs into word-processed text. Examples of spreadsheets, however, seldom extend beyond basic formulae to solve simple problems. Pupils with special needs use information technology effectively to improve their basic literacy skills and some use number games at lunchtimes to practise multiplication and division. In a French lesson, pupils used the internet to research information for pupils in their partner schools, importing scanned photographs into letters which they e-mailed.

161. Pupils on GNVQ and business studies courses have much better information and communication technology skills than many of their peers. For example, sixth form pupils on the advanced GNVQ business course produced a well-planned brochure describing the use of information and communication technology in the school's own administrative system; GCSE business studies pupils produced detailed cash-flow spreadsheets. Discrete information technology and subject lessons were very effectively linked for some of these lessons. Pupils on GNVQ courses are aware of their own standard as they assess and log their own progress. This is good practice.

162. Pupils' attitudes to learning in information technology lessons are satisfactory. Some higher attainers' negative attitudes become increasingly positive as they move through Key Stage 4 and improve their knowledge and understanding. Pupils co-operate well with each other and their teachers. Pupils with special educational needs have good relationships with their support teachers, who help them develop the capacity to work on their own.

163. Teaching observed was sound overall. In Key Stage 3 the overall quality was sound and good in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Although the pace of learning was reduced by pupils sharing computers, and the lesson rota system in Year 9, progress was always sound. Pupils are aware of the tasks they have to do and teachers frequently check pupils' records to ensure they are on task and improving. Most tasks match pupils' prior attainment but more able pupils in Key Stage 3 classes are infrequently given opportunities to extend their skills, for example by importing spreadsheets into text. Teachers work closely and effectively with learning support staff to help pupils with special educational needs. Homework is sometimes given but it mostly consists of catching up with any theory work that remains unfinished in lessons. This approach disadvantages those who work quickly, finish classwork and have no homework, as well as those who work slowly, and have a large amount of work to complete at home. Classwork and homework are marked promptly and clearly so pupils know how to improve.

164. The information and communication technology department is soundly managed. The head of department works closely with the technician to maximise use of the school's new facilities. Standards issues have resulted from concerns over resourcing and access rather than the quality of teaching of specific information technology lessons. This has also been true for the use of information technology in other subjects. Older rooms on both sites are well-maintained, but are cramped and have insufficient machines for larger classes. The school's good new provision includes a software laser link between the two school sites. The computer room with internet access is very popular at lunchtimes, and pupils extend their research skills, type up course work and play reasonable games as they enjoy this new facility. Most subject teachers are beginning, through specific training, to develop expertise in using computers in their areas, although several have some way to go. Improvement since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory, but recent significant additions to resources are resulting in rapid and substantial improvements. Resourcing and staff expertise remain below that needed for a school of the size of St John Fisher. The school is aware of this and further improvements are planned.

165. Points for development:

- Improve pupils' standards in information technology and ensure that statutory requirements are met
- Work to further improve facilities in order that greater use can be made of information technology in subject lessons
- Improve staff's information technology expertise so that they make greater use of existing facilities
- Monitor the use of information technology in subject lessons to ensure that appropriate use is made by all classes throughout the school.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French

166. By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment in 1999 was below national averages in French and this is also currently true. The pupils' results in the 1999 GCSE examinations at the end of Key Stage 4 were broadly in line with national averages and those for similar schools. By the end of Key Stage 4 the attainment of current pupils is likely to be in line with national

averages. The pupils' results in the 1999 A-level French examinations were below national averages, as are standards for current Year 12 pupils. No Year 13 pupils are studying A-level French this year.

167. In Year 7 French lessons, pupils' understood more than they could say or write in French. In Year 9, higher attainers had difficulty remembering the weather in French and spent time drawing symbols for weather vocabulary which should have been fully learnt in Year 7. Lower attainers have poor listening skills. They gave one-word answers to questions on nationalities; only one or two pupils replied with a full sentence. In Year 10, higher attainers used a variety of adjectives and structures and in Year 11 they used past tenses accurately when talking about the school and a daily routine. Lower attainers complete a variety of exercises but show little evidence of being able to produce the work for themselves.

German

168. The pupils' results in the 1999 GCSE examinations at the end of Key Stage 4 were well above national averages in German. The attainment of current Year 11 pupils is above national averages. The pupils' results in the 1999 A-level German examinations were below national averages as are standards for current A-level pupils.

169. In Year 9 German lessons, higher attainers wrote paragraphs of several sentences about themselves using a wide variety of adjectives. Lower attainers lacked self-esteem and confidence, however. Pupils absorb basic vocabulary to do with eating and drinking but almost all answer in English when asked specific questions and have to be prompted to reply in German. In Year 11, higher attainers worked well on computers, accessed the internet successfully and discussed the difficulties they were encountering in a mature and measured way. They have good skills in skimming and scanning for information. Lower attainers cover the past tense by copying out exercises but they are not using this knowledge effectively for themselves to reinforce their learning .

Both languages

170. In the sixth form in both languages, students have effective analytical skills in assessing the literature studied and understand a variety of authentic texts when working in groups or individually. They also use computers well, as when producing effective word-processed pamphlets in German. Overall, however, standards are below those expected and attained nationally.

171. Over the past three years, numbers entered for GCSE examinations have decreased by a third, with less than half the cohort entered in 1999. During the same period, the proportion of pupils gaining A*-C passes also decreased considerably in French, but increased in German. A-level results have remained constant, with pupils attaining a spread of pass grades A – E but few A/B grades. The attainment of the current Year 11s taking German is lower than the results of the 1999 GCSE, because a larger proportion of the group is now studying the subject for GCSE, including more lower attaining pupils. Predictions for Year 10 pupils in French and German show a continuing downward trend with below average results expected in the GCSE examination in French, and results in line with national averages in German.

172. The majority of pupils in Key Stage 3 are underachieving in French. Most pupils in Key Stage 4 achieve appropriate standards in both French and German and A-level pupils achieve good levels for their prior attainment (relatively low GCSE grades). Pupils with special educational needs achieve lower standards than they should in Key Stages 3 and 4. Many cannot understand the French and German being used by teachers and have difficulties with the activities provided. High attaining pupils achieve good levels and progress at a fast rate.

173. Since the last inspection, languages for all has been fully implemented at Key Stage 4 with every pupil studying a language to GCSE. The second language is now introduced in Year 9 and not Year 7 as it was previously. Nevertheless, there has been deterioration in standards at Key Stage 3, both in terms of attainment against national expectations and in relation to pupils' prior learning. Variations between teachers in the way pupils are taught have widened, with inconsistency both in the use of the foreign language and in teaching methodology. Reading for pleasure is underdeveloped and written work remains variable both in quantity and in quality of presentation. The overall quality of teaching and learning is now unsatisfactory in Key Stages 3 and 4.

174. The quality of teaching observed ranged from poor to good and was unsatisfactory overall. Teaching is good in both French and German in the sixth form where pupils learn well and make good progress. It is satisfactory in French in Key Stage 4 and in German in Key Stage 3 and unsatisfactory in French in Key Stage 3 and in German in Key Stage 4. In the best lessons, teachers plan effectively and provide pupils with interesting activities that engage their interests and develop their skills and knowledge effectively. They assess work well and inform pupils of their progress. Computers and the listening laboratory are used well to promote independent learning, enabling higher attainers to progress whilst teachers spend time with pupils requiring support. Some teachers use writing frames effectively in order to encourage pupils to

improve and extend their writing. Good teaching in the sixth form enables pupils, including those who did not attain the higher grades at GCSE, to transfer successfully to the advanced work of A-level. The mature attitudes of pupils and the atmosphere of mutual respect and cooperation in sixth form groups, contributes greatly to their effective learning.

175. Unsatisfactory teaching is characterised by sketchy planning and low expectations, both of performance and of behaviour. Some teachers rely entirely on the textbook when delivering lessons and do not present the work in a way that relates to pupils' interests and abilities. Lesson objectives refer to what the teacher intends to teach and not to what the pupils will be able to learn. Some teachers do not assess pupils' work often enough and do not provide pupils with adequate information to enable them to improve. Insufficient homework is set, particularly at Key Stage 3. Several teachers use French and German extensively with no visual support or checking to ensure that pupils have understood what has been said. As a result, pupils, particularly those at the lower end of the ability range, become insecure and upset. Classroom management techniques, aimed at managing disruption, include whole class punishments such as long periods waiting for silence, constant 'shushing' by teachers and detention after school or at the end of lessons. These strategies restrict learning opportunities for every child, not just the pupils who are causing concern, and result in negative attitudes to language learning, even in gifted linguists.

176. The head of department provides clear educational direction and has introduced a variety of good documentation aimed at supporting teaching and learning. Despite careful monitoring and some improvement in teaching and learning, insufficient progress has been made in implementing policies and the new schemes of work in French. Not every teacher shares the head of department's clear vision for the future. There are no schemes of work in German for Year 9 or the sixth form, which is unsatisfactory, restricting continuity in learning. There is a good match of teachers to the languages taught and the full-time language assistants enhance the development of listening and speaking skills in both languages. Provision for the use of new technology is good but there are too few resources to promote reading for pleasure.

177. Points for development:

- Improve standards in French and German
- Improve the quality of teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4, including: less reliance on the text book; better assessment of pupils' understanding, so work can be matched to their prior attainment; and improved management of pupils
- Increase the rigour in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and ensure that all teachers use the skills and techniques seen in the best practice in the department
- Prepare and use schemes of work for all Years in German.

MUSIC

178. Comparatively small numbers take GCSE in music and results fluctuate. In 1999, the proportion of candidates who gained A*-C grades was well below the national average but in the previous year the proportion was in line with the national average. The few A-level candidates in 1999 passed but with low grades, which the school considered to be in line with their potential. In the end of Key Stage 3 teacher assessments in 1999 an unrealistically high proportion were judged to have reached the national expectation, much higher than the standards being achieved in the current Year 9, where standards are below the national expectation. A small number of pupils in Year 9 who have previously developed performing skills reach or sometimes exceed average standards.

179. Key Stage 3 pupils achieve satisfactory and sometimes good standards on keyboards. They become familiar with notation from Year 7. By Year 8, higher achieving pupils can play tunes, such as 'Blowing in the Wind', rhythmically and add a supporting bass part with the left hand. In Year 9, pupils experiment with modal tunes, such as 'Kije's March', and show a basic understanding of scales. No actual composing was seen, but pupils were beginning to add elementary improvisations above a three-chord formula.

180. Pupils' knowledge of musical theory and types of music is below expectation because the present course is topic-based. It does not focus enough on systematically developing the technical requirements of the National Curriculum. Pupils do not acquire and retain musical knowledge effectively. Lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs achieve satisfactory standards in most practical activities. They are often at a disadvantage, however, when left to practise keyboards unsupervised and for too long. The standards achieved in written work vary greatly. Higher achieving pupils produce well researched and neatly presented work. Lower attaining pupils, for whom tasks are not modified, produce written work which is often incomplete, and they sometimes do not understand what they write. Pupils do not use computers in music in Key Stage 3, which is unsatisfactory.

181. In Key Stage 4, standards of performing vary. Pupils for whom the course is the extension of a hobby achieve good standards in performing. Others, who have learned an instrument seriously only since Year 10, achieve only modest

standards. Pupils' learning in Year 11 is impaired by the unsatisfactory accommodation, which is cramped and does not enable resources to be used to best advantage. These pupils received too little active teaching in the lessons observed during the inspection, which also restricted their progress. Pupils gain satisfactory skills in improvising as a basis for composing and they are encouraged to adopt a style of composing which appeals to them. Recorded examples were heard which indicated a consistency of style, a good understanding of the instruments for which they write and a good grasp of basic harmony and structure. Several pupils are competent in using a computer to aid composing. Most pupils gain a satisfactory understanding of different musical styles and eras. Pupils' ability to analyse music is deficient because they receive too little help when practising this skill. Overall, achievement is unsatisfactory in the key stage.

182. The few pupils currently studying for A-level music are making effective progress, particularly where they are building on their existing strengths. There are weaknesses, but pupil endeavour ensures that these are overcome.

183. Music receives a more generous allocation of time than at the time of the previous inspection, and now attracts considerably more pupils at GCSE level. However, as then, the National Curriculum is not fully taught in Key Stage 3 and the scheme of work does not indicate how the individual topics listed are to contribute to pupils' learning of the required skills by the end of the key stage. The quality of teaching is more inconsistent and the management of the subject is less effective than previously. Insufficient progress has been made since the last inspection.

184. Teaching was satisfactory in Key Stage 3, but unsatisfactory in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Teachers are well qualified and committed. Relationships with pupils are usually good. All lessons are prepared and resources are well deployed. In Key Stage 3, time is used effectively and lessons have clear and realistic aims. Topics in general appeal to pupils, but teachers do not sufficiently take into account the needs of either the highest or the lowest attainers. The messages gained from assessment do not result in the refinement of the presentation or content of lessons to cater for the full range of pupils. For example, in Year 8, all were expected to master a difficult accompaniment on tuned percussion to a song, when a variety of accompanying ideas would have suited the pupils better and enhanced the song more. In most lessons observed in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, the teaching did not use teachers' musical knowledge adequately to enthuse and inform the pupils. In a good lesson, however, a teacher's keyboard skills were used well to extend the sixth form students' understanding of harmony and cadences.

185. The short lunch break and the distance many pupils travel to school, preclude the development of regular choral or instrumental ensembles. These are convened only for particular events, such as masses. Music therefore provides fewer opportunities than is usual for pupils' social and cultural development. Nearly forty pupils, however, receive instrumental lessons from visiting tutors.

186. The scheme of work for Key Stage 3 requires urgent revision to meet pupils' needs. There is little effective sharing of good teaching practice and too little attempt has been made to overcome the deficiencies of the accommodation used for GCSE lessons in Year 11. The departmental handbook is an unsatisfactory working document and does not adequately inform staff how to implement the school's policies in developing the subject. The needs of the ablest and least able pupils are inadequately met. The department has made too little effort to implement the recommendations from the review of its provision in Key Stage 3, which took place in 1998. The management of the subject is unsatisfactory and the line management system has failed to set an appropriate agenda for the development of the subject at all levels.

187. Points for development:

- Link individual topics specifically to the requirements of the National Curriculum in Key Stage 3, and so ensure thorough implementation.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that high and low attaining pupils, and those with special educational needs, are thoroughly challenged. More active teaching is required.
- Improve curriculum planning and develop procedures for assessment.
- Improve the management of the department, rigorously implement the development plan and adopt more stringent criteria for measuring its success.
- Work to improve the accommodation that restricts pupils' achievements.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

188. The standards achieved by pupils in Key Stage 3 in all the activities seen were at least at the level of national expectations and in some activities, for example football, standards were above average. In rugby the standards achieved are now as expected nationally whereas at the time of the last report these skills were said to be underdeveloped. Pupils were able to handle the ball competently and showed understanding of the basic rules of the game. This represents a good improvement since the previous inspection.

189. GCSE results have been below the national average in the last three years whereas at the time of the last inspection they were at the national average. However, there is a steady upward trend and in 2001 the results are predicted to reach the national average again. At GCSE, girls have consistently performed better than boys. One cause of this has been the continuity achieved through greater stability of staffing on the female side, as compared with male staff. Standards in the lessons seen, for example in badminton, were generally average with a few pupils above average, particularly some boys who showed good hand/eye co-ordination. In dance, girls' standards were well above average, both in composition and performance.

190. Provision for physical education is not timetabled in the sixth form. Pupils are offered the opportunity to participate and, although it was reported that some post-16 pupils assisted with main school physical education lessons from time to time, no evidence was seen during the inspection of this, or of sixth form pupils taking exercise. The lack of timetabled provision has a detrimental effect on pupils' learning that exercise is important throughout life as part of a healthy lifestyle.

191. Teaching in all the lessons seen was sound and in most it was good or better. In about half the lessons teaching was very good or excellent and this is reflected in the progress pupils are making. The overall judgement of the quality of teaching is that it was very good in both key stages, resulting in very good achievements for the pupils. Lessons were well planned to make use of progressive practices and this led to good learning opportunities for pupils. There was a consistent and high quality lesson structure across the department and frequent opportunities were given to pupils to evaluate their work. Expectations of the pupils were very high which resulted in high quality learning. This is an improvement since the previous report and pupils are clearly improving their skills. Opportunities for pupils to plan or take responsibility for their work were less frequent.

192. Pupils' attitudes to physical education were generally good and sometimes very good; they were eager to participate and learn. However, instances of unsatisfactory behaviour of a small minority of boys were seen in some lessons and this did affect the learning opportunities of others. This was also the case where there was a number of non-participants who tried to distract the teacher and the other pupils from the lesson in hand. Where these negative attitudes showed, the quality of teaching was so good that for the class as a whole, the pupils' learning was never seriously disrupted. Pupils always made sound or better progress increasing understanding and improving skills.

193. Leadership of the department is very good and is a major factor in the improving standards achieved by pupils. Developments for the department have been clearly thought through and a very good monitoring system is in place that includes team teaching and in-service training opportunities for all staff. This ensures that the department is able to evaluate frequently the effectiveness of its work. New assessment procedures have been developed for Years 7 and 8 that are very effective in providing a record of each pupil's progress and achievement. It is planned to introduce a similar system in Key Stage 4 in the coming year. These procedures have been introduced since the last inspection and represent a good level of improvement in this area.

194. A range of extra-curricular opportunities is offered and is as varied as the limited facilities allow. These sessions do much to extend the curriculum provision and there is an increasingly high take-up from pupils. Sport is very popular throughout Key Stages 3 and 4.

195. A significant factor inhibiting further progress and higher achievement is the poor state of almost all the already limited facilities for physical education. The changing rooms in the lower school, apart from being too small, are in a deplorable state of decoration, as is the gymnasium in the upper school. The gymnasium has an appalling, quite unacceptable smell on entry at the start of the week. The equipment is well-maintained but it is all old and, for example for gymnastics, there are no modern or new pieces of equipment. At the lower school, apart from some fixed wall-bars, there is no large apparatus at all. The state of the limited facilities was highlighted in the previous report and there have been no real improvements since that time. It is unlikely that pupils will be encouraged to make even greater strides in achievement in this subject if the positive image currently being given by the teachers is not reflected in a great and rapid improvement in the facilities and resources used and in the physical surroundings in which they are asked to work.

196. Points for development:

- Improve opportunities for pupils to plan and take responsibility in lessons
- Identify and implement new strategies to employ with non-participants, ensuring that they do not try to disrupt the learning opportunities of other pupils.
- Prepare and implement short-term plans to improve the appearance of the existing facilities and longer-term plans to improve, and if possible extend, facilities, both accommodation and resources.

BUSINESS STUDIES AND ECONOMICS

197. Sixth form options are available in several GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualification) and vocational A-level courses: business at Intermediate GNVQ; business and finance at Advanced GNVQ; and A-levels in economics, business studies and government and politics. In Key Stage 4, GCSE business studies and economics options are popular and one or the other is taken by a fairly large proportion of the year group.

198. Attainment in GCSE business studies is above national averages (well above for girls), above the average for similar schools and amongst the highest in the school. Since the last inspection, where standards were unsatisfactory, there has been a great improvement, reflecting good and often very good teaching.

199. Business studies and economics standards in all GCSE, GNVQ and A-level lessons seen, and in scrutiny of coursework portfolios are above the national average for all schools. Intermediate GNVQ completion rates are 100%, well above average. Attainment so far on the first advanced GNVQ course is in line with national expectations for merit level. Pupils' achievement in Key Stage 4 and sixth form lessons, and over time, is very good. Pupils with special educational needs achieve better than expected when they receive additional learning support in class. The majority of pupils make good progress in gaining work-related knowledge and improving key skills of communication, information technology and number.

200. In a good GCSE business studies lesson seen, groups of Year 10 pupils presented business objectives to each other and evaluated their efforts. Year 11 pupils used information and communications technology effectively to incorporate cash flow spreadsheets into project reports for a new business idea they had chosen. Pupils find the set business problems challenging and realistic, which motivates and interests them. GCSE economics pupils discussed the rise and fall of the pound in great depth, aided by good teacher knowledge and effective guidance. The teacher's expectations were high and the pupils responded very well to the learning objectives for the lesson. In the very well taught sixth form lessons pupils showed a good capacity for independent study and GNVQ pupils' ability to use information technology as a tool was developed well by specialist staff.

201. Whilst databases are used well, spreadsheets are seldom used to model the possible consequences of increasing receipts and payments or developing new investment ideas. Well-presented assignments are sometimes spoilt by poor spelling which has gone unnoticed. An increasing number of GNVQ pupils obtain high standards, gaining merit grades, by planning and evaluating their work in great depth through drafting and redrafting. Pupils at all levels can clearly and confidently explain key concepts and how they are applied in business and economics. Year 13 pupils run their own business enterprises to help improve their knowledge and understanding.

202. Teaching of economics and business studies in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form was very good, resulting in very good learning. Never less than satisfactory, the quality of teaching was good or very good in more than three-quarters of all lessons seen. The high quality teaching resulted in learning where the majority of pupils make very good progress in acquiring knowledge of concepts, and developing key skills in communication, number and information technology. In both GNVQ and A-level business studies, pupils apply learning well in work-related situations such as work placements. Teachers are very experienced and have excellent subject knowledge and good industrial experience. They use it to stimulate class discussion on how to apply learnt theory to local and national businesses. Newspaper articles are used very effectively to extend pupils' ability to summarise and present topical issues such as the Budget. Pupils' ability to think critically is well developed. GCSE pupils with special educational needs are given relevant tasks, and in the best lessons work matches the several levels of ability within a class. Teachers' well-planned lessons and enthusiastic delivery help pupils develop pride in their work. Teachers support pupils closely and assess them carefully, using examining board criteria to grade work accurately. Marking of class and homework is prompt and thorough, giving pupils clear and constructive feedback and targets for improvement.

203. Teachers' use of local contacts is good; they bring in visitors to develop pupils' knowledge of job recruitment procedures. Formal business links are not yet fully developed.

204. On all courses, GNVQ practice of action planning and regular evaluation means that pupils gain confidence in judging their own strengths and weaknesses. Pupils are encouraged to develop responsibility for tracking their own key skills progress. Assessment procedures are very good and GNVQ staff have gained the appropriate national assessor qualifications. Courses have adequate base rooms but some rooms used for GCSE business studies are cramped for the numbers of pupils in a class and the resources for a base room are not always easily available to teachers and pupils. GCSE and GNVQ pupils have good access to information and communications technology in lessons and A-level business and economics pupils e-mail local businesses to obtain financial data.

205. School time is suitably allocated to team meetings and the internal monitoring of teachers' GNVQ assessments required by examining boards. Development plans for the future are focused and realistic, and provide an opportunity for the school to review the way the Key Stage 4 and sixth form curriculum is planned and managed, in the light of forthcoming National Curriculum changes. Management of these areas is very good

206. The business education subject area has made good improvements since the last inspection. GCSE standards have risen sharply from an unsatisfactory level to amongst the highest in the school. The quality of teaching has improved significantly, as have resources. Pupils are now very positive about these courses. The department has good capacity for further improvement.

207. Points for development:

- Extend and formalise links with local industry.
- Increase the use of spreadsheets and improve the quality of some pupils' spelling.