

# INSPECTION REPORT

## THE CASTLE SCHOOL

Thornbury, Bristol

LEA area: South Gloucestershire

Unique reference number: 109297

Headteacher: Adrian Verwoert

Reporting inspector: David Morton  
13154

Dates of inspection: 14th - 17th February, 2000

Inspection number: 186643  
Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Park Road  
Thornbury  
Bristol

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Ray Tyrrell

Date of previous inspection: January 1996

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

The school is a mixed comprehensive school, larger than most, with 1607 pupils on roll, including 343 students in the sixth form. The school has increased in size since the previous inspection in 1996 and is greatly oversubscribed. The school population is generally stable; few pupils join or leave the school except at the usual times. The school serves the immediate community of Thornbury. In addition, a significant number of pupils come from further afield, giving the school a broad social mix; however, pupils mostly come from a comfortable socio-economic background. Just over one per cent of pupils comes from ethnic minority communities; the proportion for whom English is an additional language is very low.

The attainment of pupils when they join the school in Year 7, taken as a whole, is average. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals, just over five per cent, is below the national average. The percentage of pupils on the register of special educational needs, nine per cent, is below the national average; the percentage with statements, about two per cent, is broadly in line with the national average. There is open entry to the sixth form although most students have achieved results in General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations in five or more subjects that are well above average. The school is part of a national High Reliability Schools Programme that involves strategies that strive to ensure pupils achieve educational success. The school has recently had its Investor in People status successfully reviewed.

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

The Castle School continues to be a very good school. It has improved significantly over the last four years and has numerous excellent features; one of these is the school's capacity and will to continue to become even better. The governors, headteacher and staff strive systematically for excellence. Leadership that is notably very good creates an environment in which the quality of teaching and learning is well above average. Demands are made of pupils and sixth form students with the expectation that work of a high standard will be produced. The school manages its resources prudently and gives very good value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- Very good leadership ensures that the school has a clear sense of direction and purpose; it is a consistently improving school.
- Very good relationships help to ensure that the personal development of pupils is very good. Pupils' attitudes to learning are characterised by high levels of motivation.
- Teaching is almost always good and frequently very good or excellent. This contributes significantly to examination results that are well above average at GCSE level and very high in the sixth form.
- The school's thorough analysis and extensive use of performance data lead to targets being set which extend and enhance significantly the achievements of pupils, teachers and departments.
- The school's initiative to develop the levels of literacy of all pupils is impressive and successful.

### What could be improved

- Although some effective developments have been achieved, aspects of teaching and learning at Key Stage 3 still do not give sufficient attention to the learning needs of different groups of pupils; subject teachers on a day-to-day basis do not make sufficient use of the individual education plans of pupils with special educational needs.
- Information technology is insufficiently used in many subjects to enhance learning; pupils' skills in its use are too rarely assessed to ensure appropriate National Curriculum levels are achieved.

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

### HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

It is an improving school and one that seeks constantly to evaluate its practice and improve on its previous best. All issues raised at the previous inspection in January 1996 have been addressed and very good progress has been made in overcoming areas of concern raised at that time. In particular, the provision and practice for pupils with special educational needs have improved significantly and many features are now a strength of the school, although the regular attention to targets in individual education plans is missing in many lessons other than English and mathematics. However, the department of special educational needs is well managed and coordinated; many new initiatives for lower attainers and underachieving pupils with under-developed literacy skills have been successfully introduced. There have been significant improvements in programmes for religious education in Years 10, 11 and the sixth form and statutory requirements are now met. Although the school has improved its provision, restrictions of accommodation cause the requirements for a daily act of collective worship still to fail to meet statutory requirements. Some time, but less than previously, is still lost in movement between the two sites. The curriculum now fully complies with statutory requirements and new specialist accommodation has been created for design and technology, modern foreign languages and information technology. The use of research skills, the setting of homework and the marking of pupils' work are now generally effective. The take-up of a second language remains low and despite good results some pupils lack enthusiasm for this area of the curriculum. Teaching was good at the time of the previous inspection; however, the quality of teaching overall has improved significantly, especially in the proportion of teaching that is very good or excellent. As a result, levels of attainment and results in examinations at GCSE, GNVQ and A-Level are much improved on those of 1996. The school is exceeding the targets it sets itself. The quality of education is richer and more effectively managed by the senior management team, heads of year and heads of faculties and departments. The school has established an ethos of improvement and has a very good capacity for continuing and developing its improvement.

### STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A
A-levels/AS-levels	A	A*	A*	

**Key**

well above average    A

above average        B

average                C

below average        D

well below average   E

Pupils' National Curriculum test results at the age of 14 have consistently been above or well above average. In 1999 results in these tests were well above average in mathematics and above average in English and science when compared with all schools. Compared with similar schools results were above average in English and mathematics, but below average in science. In GCSE examinations, pupils' results have been consistently well above average compared with all schools; results in 1999 were also well above average compared with similar schools. Results at A-Level have been amongst the highest five per cent of all schools in the country in 1998 and 1999. Girls perform generally better than boys, although the school has taken steps to improve the performance of boys and in 1999 at the age of 14 boys performed better than girls in mathematics and science tests. However, the proportion of girls obtaining five A\*-C grades at GCSE was higher than that of boys. Best results in the 1999 GCSE examination were in art, English literature, food technology, German, history and sociology in relation to expectation. All other subjects achieved results that were above or well above the national average, although, relatively, the added value achieved was less. At A-Level in 1999, the subjects with the best results in relation to added value based on the students' own GCSE scores were English, German, mathematics, further mathematics and media studies. However, results in all subjects were such that the average total points score per student was very high compared with the national average. Results in the GNVQ (Advanced) vocational examinations were also above the national average and amongst the best found locally. The work seen throughout the school during the inspection was generally above and often well above average. Most pupils individually achieve well and exceed expectations. The work being undertaken by the school to encourage success is paying dividends as results improve steadily each year, especially at GCSE, GNVQ and A-Level.

### **PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES**

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Attitudes to the school	Pupils and sixth-form students have very good attitudes to their work and are keen to learn.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils' behaviour is very good; the number of pupils on fixed term exclusions is similar to that found nationally.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are very good; pupils and sixth-formers have a real sense of social responsibility in lessons and other activities of the school.
Attendance	Attendance is well above the national average.

Pupils' attitudes and values overall are a strength of the school.

### **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

<b>Teaching of pupils:</b>	<b>aged 11-14 years</b>	<b>aged 14-16 years</b>	<b>aged over 16 years</b>
Lessons seen overall	Good	Very Good	Very good

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

Teaching overall is very good. The teaching of science is generally good and in English and mathematics teaching is usually very good. In most lessons teachers seek opportunities to develop skills of literacy and numeracy; not as many opportunities are taken to use

information technology to enhance learning. In some subjects, insufficient effort is made to meet the differing learning needs of pupils; however, the teaching of English and mathematics to pupils with special educational is very good and these pupils make very good progress, especially in these subjects. Teaching in all lessons observed was satisfactory or better, in 88.6 per cent of lessons teaching was good or better and in 37.2 per cent the teaching was very good or excellent. Teachers know their subjects well and are enthusiastic about sharing their enjoyment of them with pupils; most teach with an energy and intensity which promotes very good learning amongst pupils.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	All pupils and sixth-form students have a broad, rich and balanced curriculum. They are consistently provided with tasks that challenge them. The school provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities to which many pupils respond enthusiastically.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision for pupils with particular learning needs is very good. These pupils make very good progress in the acquisition of basic skills of literacy and numeracy. However, individual education plans are insufficiently used by subject teachers.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Teachers are good role models. Pupils and sixth-formers are encouraged to take responsibility in the life of the school. The provision for their social, moral and cultural development is very good and good for pupils' spiritual development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school cares for pupils as individuals. Health and safety requirements are well managed and procedures for child protection are secure.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher, senior management team, heads of year and heads of faculties and departments provide visionary leadership to the school, giving a clear sense of direction and purpose. Efforts to consistently improve overall standards are a feature of this leadership.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are well informed of the priorities of the school, oversee effective medium and long-term planning and successfully hold the school to account.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The use of data to evaluate the performance of pupils, sixth-form students, teachers and departments is excellent and a strength of the school; it has a significant impact upon the improving standards year by year.
The strategic use of resources	The financial management of the school is very good. Resources and insights gained by involvement in the High Reliability Schools Programme have contributed significantly to the improvement of the school. Through its development plan the school ensures that it makes the best use of available resources and sets itself challenging targets for improvement.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their children like attending school.</li> <li>• They feel their children make good progress.</li> <li>• The quality of teaching is good.</li> <li>• The school is approachable and parents feel welcome.</li> <li>• Their children are expected to work hard and achieve success.</li> <li>• The school is well led and managed.</li> <li>• The school is helping children to mature and become responsible citizens.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The amount of homework that is set; a few believe too much is set, others too little.</li> <li>• A small minority of parents expresses some concern about the behaviour of pupils.</li> <li>• A small minority thinks there are too few extra-curricular activities.</li> <li>• A small minority do not think the school works closely enough with parents.</li> </ul>

Inspectors agree with all the positive comments made by parents. They found the amount of homework set to be about right; homework seen during the inspection was relevant and marked promptly and helpfully. Inspectors found behaviour to be very good at almost all times, even during the lunch period when poor facilities cause pupils to have to wait a long time to be served. The school provides a range of activities that is comparable in its scope with other good schools. The inspectors were unable to get first-hand information of how well the school works with parents, but noted that there is a regular newsletter and the school has an open-door policy for parents to visit and consult about their children's work and progress.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

**Very good leadership ensures that the school has a clear sense of direction and purpose; it is a consistently improving school.**

1. A significant reason for the continuing success of The Castle School is the very good leadership of the headteacher, senior management and governors. The headteacher has led colleagues and governors to a clear view of what makes a successful school; in particular he has ensured that in all areas of the school teachers and other adults working in the school work to the principle of improving on their previous best. This means that results in examinations are expected to improve in relation to pupils' identified potential year by year; teachers are always seeking to extend their skills and have high expectations of their own performance and that of pupils and students in the sixth form; all aspects of the life of the school seek to strive for high standards as can be seen, for example, in the quality and maintenance of pathways, fencing and gardens by the school's own maintenance staff. The Castle School is a school that strives for qualities of excellence at all times. As a result, a continuing pattern of improvement can be traced; it is a significantly better school now than at the time of the previous inspection even though it was deemed then to be a very good school. For example, National Curriculum test results and successes in public examinations have shown a trend of improvement broadly in line or above that found nationally. It is demanding to sustain such improvement when previous attainment has been above or well above national averages.

2. The leadership of the headteacher is supported effectively by the senior management team and the governing body sets appropriate targets for improvement. Governors take steps to make sure that they are well informed about key issues related to the school's striving for excellence. The development plan sets clear, achievable objectives that have a sharp focus and respond to immediate areas of short and long-term need identified through considered patterns of consultation. Such need is never of petty issues but of those that will ensure the school becomes even more effective in meeting the needs of pupils.

3. Heads of year and heads of faculties and departments also make effective contributions to the quality of education provided by the school. A feature of their work is a willingness to put into practice the outcomes of their own research or that of other educational bodies. They show a willingness to lead and innovate. In many ways they are the driving forces that lead to the strategic development of teaching, learning and pupils' attitudes and motivation. Teachers of subjects are encouraged to develop their practice and knowledge; form tutors are given a coherent focus in monitoring the academic and pastoral development of pupils. The headteacher has been successful in ensuring that senior and middle management has a shared vision for the continuing development of the school. This is translated into daily practice at departmental and year group levels.

**Very good relationships help to ensure that the personal development of pupils is very good. Pupils' attitudes to learning are characterised by high levels of motivation.**

4. The school's provision for the personal development of pupils is very good. Teachers are good role models and pupils and sixth-formers respond with clear views of right and wrong that are seen in their behaviour and generally mature demeanour. They exercise social responsibility and contribute significantly, as they get older, to the needs of the school to be a purposeful learning environment. For example, some take the sports

leadership awards and help with a range of sporting activities; others help younger pupils who experience difficulties in reading. Pupils help with the management of school events. For example, some not participating in the forthcoming production of 'A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum' will help with a range of front-of-house and administrative tasks related to it; they will help to ensure that the audiences experience a successful social occasion in the life of the school. The school ensures that pupils are aware of the interdependence of people in the world-wide community. Educational visits to the Gambia, Europe and of the steel band to the Caribbean help to make pupils aware of the contributions and needs of different communities throughout the world. Pupils are not insular in their outlook; they show respect for a range of cultures and faiths.

5. The school has created a very positive ethos amongst pupils and students. Pupils behave very well and are attentive in lessons. Very good attendance reflects the approach of pupils to their learning and to the wide range of opportunities provided by the school. They enjoy coming to school. Almost always, they get on well together and work effectively together when required; relationships between themselves and with teachers are very good. They have an excellent understanding of how they each have a part to play in the creation of a happy and purposeful community. The attitudes of sixth-form students to their learning are responsible and positive. A suitable ambience has been established in the sixth-form centre which encourages participation in joint events, for example the debating society, but also a recognition that success in academic study enhances self-esteem and creates the potential for a range of choices to be made. Students are very responsive to the mature environment that has been created and which still allows them to express their emerging individuality.

**Teaching is almost always good and frequently very good or excellent. This contributes significantly to examination results that are well above average at GCSE level and very high in the sixth form.**

6. The quality of teaching is a significant strength of the school. In well over a third of all lessons teaching is very good or better. In nearly nine out of ten lessons teaching is good or better. All lessons were satisfactory or better. During the inspection no teaching was found to be unsatisfactory. These statistics are significantly better than those found in secondary schools nationally during 1998-1999. The quality of teaching is another significant reason for the quality of education provided by the school being very good. Teachers know their subjects well and are enthusiastic about them. Teachers are hardworking, energetic and confident. There is an intensity of endeavour in the teaching which is seen rarely in some schools and only in the best teaching. Teachers assume that pupils will do well and quickly put appropriate strategies in place if pupils' performance falls below the expectations the school has of them. In most lessons thorough and effective planning sets clearly the objectives for the lessons; these are shared with pupils and at the ends of lessons checks are made to see how effective learning has been. Teaching has an impact on learning and in the majority of lessons pupils learn something new, more fully understand concepts or acquire and develop new skills. Teachers manage pupils well, demand high standards and full attention. They give appropriate help to those who need it and extend those capable of higher performance.

7. Work in the humanities is a strength of the school. In a history lesson with Year 9, for example, pupils were challenged to think about why events occurred as they did in the early part of the twentieth century; in religious education in Year 8 pupils were articulate and thoughtful in reflecting on the impact ideas stimulated by religious artefacts have on the lives of people. Work in geography at Key Stage 4 is detailed and analytical with a very high standard of investigation. The range of work in the arts is impressive: in dance, drama

and music pupils perform to levels which are consistently above average; public performances and concerts add significantly to the very rich cultural and social life of the school. Standards in the visual arts are generally well above average; the visual awareness of pupils is enhanced by the teaching and the exhibitions of work about the school on both sites. Throughout the arts, teaching is secure and enthusiastic; teachers intervene sensitively in helping pupils achieve their artistic intentions. A particular feature is the links which GNVQ students of art have made between their own work and that of established poets; eventually this will be used to enhance the learning environment in lessons in English. Work in art is generally well above average, especially in the sixth form. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, pupils and students are in charge of their writing and work well as young writers. They study the work of established writers and use what they learn when drafting their own work. They write well and fulfil their intentions. Teaching is effective in giving pupils responsibility for developing their own insights during this key stage. In mathematics and science work in the sixth form is systematic and meticulous. Reasoned arguments are developed with excellent use of language and notation, for example in theoretical and practical ecology. At Key Stage 4 in science, very good use is made of formulae, equations, graphs and calculations to develop a theme and demonstrate application and understanding; in mathematics, very good levels of accuracy allow specific attention to be paid to developing argument through calculation and showing clear understanding of the principles involved in mathematical investigation. Sixth-form work in modern foreign languages produces high standards in writing; it is largely accurate and shows a good understanding of grammar. At the end of Key Stage 4 pupils produce extended writing in French and German and show good understanding of the patterns in the languages. They are fluent in writing about past, present and future events. The faculty of design and technology achieves high standards of making and evaluating; teaching is strong and teachers intervene and interact with pupils individually and as a class; they use demonstrations well, linked to effective questioning to develop understanding and a sense of purpose in the making of artefacts. Demonstration is also used effectively in physical education. It marks the standards expected of pupils. In one lesson in Year 8 in basketball, the teacher successfully used non-participants as coaches in preparing tactics to establish or break through the tactics of zone-defending. Teachers of physical education have high expectations of pupils' work rate and ensure that lessons move at a demanding pace. In summary, teaching in the school achieves standards from pupils which are nearly always above and often well above average. Pupils are prepared well for examinations and achieve standards that, overall, are well above average and high in the sixth form. This is owing to well-planned, confident and committed teaching borne of a love of the subject and teachers who are continually open to suggestions for improvement and development. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved significantly in the four years since the previous inspection.

8. The standards achieved in examinations are well above average and high in the sixth form. In the national tests at the age of 14, results have been above or well above average in English, mathematics and science in the last three years compared with all schools and with similar schools. In recent years there is little difference between the performance of girls and boys; the school has taken steps to raise the performance of boys and at Key Stage 3 boys perform better than is seen nationally.

9. GCSE examination results have improved steadily since 1994 and overall results in 1999 were well above the national average for pupils achieving five or more passes at the higher A\*-C grades and at the full range of A\* - G grades. The results of boys and girls have been well above the national average over the last three years. In all but 1998, girls, however, performed better than boys. The school is taking steps to improve the boys' performance further at this key stage. The school's results in art and design, English

literature, food technology, German, history and sociology were better than expected in 1999; in this sense, therefore pupils' attainment in these subjects had the greatest value added in relation to pupils' starting points. However, even in subjects that, compared to these, were less successful, results were still above or well above the national average. The school's performance in GCSE examinations is also well above average when compared with those of similar schools.

10. Results at A-Level were very high compared with the national average in 1998 and 1999 and well above average in 1997. The standard of work seen in lessons in the sixth form was also generally high. This is the result of consistently good teaching, much of it inspirational, yet recognising the need for students to have independence and control of their own learning. From a starting-point established in overall GCSE examination results, students were especially successful in 1999 in English, German, mathematics, further mathematics and media studies. However, students achieved highly in all subjects; the overall average points score of A-Level students was very high in comparison with the national average in 1999 and over the previous three years. Students following GNVQ Advanced courses were also successful; their average points score was also high, above the national average and better than almost all found locally in other schools.

**The school's thorough analysis and extensive use of performance data leads to targets being set which extend and enhance significantly the achievements of pupils, teachers and departments.**

11. On entering the school the overall attainment of pupils is average. This has been the pattern in recent years. Pupils come from over fifty primary schools and show a wide range of attainment between them, but almost all learn well and make good progress at Key Stage 3 and very good progress at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

12. Pupils' progress is enhanced because of the excellent use made by the school of its comprehensive data analysis. Its work in data analysis has been recognised by the school's inclusion in the national High Reliability Schools Programme. This, in turn, has been beneficial to the school. The school has evolved an effective philosophy to support its central purposes based on the notion that no pupil must fail. In order to realise this, the school has used instruments skilfully to analyse the performance of individual pupils against that of similar individual pupils nationally; this has allowed it to set pupils individual targets that are challenging but achievable. These are carefully monitored by subject teachers and form tutors. This approach to striving to celebrate the success of all pupils has driven the creation of an effective school development plan. This has a small number of clear, achievable goals, most of which are centred on pupils' progress, quality of learning and success in examinations. The plan aims for pupils to achieve beyond expectations, that is to make more progress than they would make naturally if the school did not set ambitious targets; in evaluating the success of its planning the school uses its data bank to identify the extent to which the school has added value for each pupil at the end of Year 11 and Year 13. Using such criteria, the school has shown itself successful, for in 1999 pupils in Year 11 exceeded expectation by ten per cent and at the end of the sixth form by fifteen per cent. Individual pupils and students agree action plans if their performance appears not to be measuring up to the agreed targets. Parents appreciate these measures and value being able to take a part in target-setting with their children.

13. The school does not see collecting and collating statistics as ends in themselves. The data provides information that allows the school to discuss approaches that will maximise success in individual pupils. As a result, target-setting is used as a means of motivating pupils, ensuring that they are informed of the level of their performance, especially in Years 10 to 13; this knowledge is less assured amongst pupils in Years 7 to 9. Work continues in analysing the relative performance of boys and girls and that of pupils of differing attainment levels in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. It raises questions as to why girls tend to achieve a higher proportion of grades A\* and A than boys in GCSE examinations (15.2 per cent against 10.1 per cent) and then considers the implications of this information in efforts to improve teaching even more in raising the performance of boys, since over the full range of A\*-G grades there is little difference between the performance of girls and boys. Improving boys' attainment in response to this analysis is being tackled with some success by the school.

14. Of significance, additionally, is the school's further focus in more recent times given to the implications of these objectives for the performance of teachers and individual subject departments. At the beginning of each school year the examination results of classes taken by all teachers and the collective results of subject departments are analysed. Strengths and weaknesses of performance by individual teachers and departments are identified and strategies for improvement agreed. This has resulted in a driven teaching force, one that works with intensity and endeavour yet one which mutually supports its members and gives focus to areas for improvement. Lessons are monitored and supported by heads of department and by teachers supporting each other. The school's planning and management ensure that there is time for this support and monitoring to be undertaken effectively. As a result, the school is experiencing some success in sharing its best practice and seeking ways of improving upon it further. Sometimes departments look at the good practice in the same subject in the departments of other schools. The focus is on improving and developing teaching strategies that will allow all pupils to make good or accelerated progress and achieve success. Teachers expect the best possible of pupils. Thus, the sophisticated use of carefully and relevantly collated data is acting as a spur to all aspects of teaching and learning; pupils and sixth-form students are challenged to succeed beyond the minimum targets expected of them. Governors and senior management are linked to departments and contribute to the evaluation of the improvements explicit in the school development plan. In particular, the headteacher maintains an overarching view of how well targets are being met by pupils, teachers and departments. He is effective in listening to teachers' own evaluations and leading them to extended goals and further achievement. Through these means the school is effective, self-evaluating and continually improving.

**The school's initiative to develop the levels of literacy of all pupils is impressive and successful.**

15. The school has developed a very comprehensive programme over almost twelve months designed to improve the literacy of all pupils. This is intended to raise attainment and scope in reading and writing of all pupils in all subjects; a particular goal for lower-attaining pupils, however, is to achieve all pupils by the end of Key Stage 3 having a reading age at least in line with their actual age.

16. In order to achieve ambitious goals of extending advanced reading and writing skills and meeting the needs of lower attainers, an excellent programme has been established in which every department of the school is actively involved in planning and carrying through agreed practices. Significantly, this is led by a head of department other than English, thus emphasising the importance of the programme in all areas of learning. The wide

programme is managed with energy and innovation; most teachers are enthusiastic for its success and have, themselves, increased their knowledge of the nature of language and its use. A steering group meets regularly to monitor and evaluate progress. It is clear that the many-stranded approach to raising standards of literacy is most effective; thirty-one such strategies are currently in place. In particular, in Year 8 all departments during one week placed a focus on reading, followed by a week where the focus was writing and a third where the focus was on speaking and listening. This three weeks of intensive awareness in every subject area was monitored thoroughly and evaluated and the results disseminated by the literacy coordinator.

17. During the inspection many instances of the increased awareness of staff to literacy issues were observed. In a Year 8 lesson in physical education the teacher used questioning skilfully to check pupils' correct use of technical terms used in basketball, recording these on their own tactics-board. In a French lesson in Year 11 pupils were required to identify detail from authentic texts requiring good interpretation of vocabulary and structure. A Year 8 history class was required to read aloud and the teacher encouraged pupils to maintain fluency whilst coping with difficult words. In a Year 8 art lesson the class had been working on lino-prints which involved them writing their own evaluations of the finished prints; this was structured by the teacher so that the writing required was matched to the learning needs of different groups of pupils. Sixth-form students have prepared visual images of the first lines of poems which are to be the focus of work in English at Key Stage 3; Blake's 'Tyger, Tyger' and Beowulf are two examples that have already been completed. Pupils in Year 10 are encouraged to note carefully information gleaned from primary and secondary sources in history lessons; reading skills using skimming and scanning were employed by these pupils.

18. A significant contribution to the development of literacy skills amongst lower-attaining pupils is the regular paired-reading sessions taken with Year 8 pupils by volunteers from Year 10. Other volunteers amongst adults and sixth-form students support Year 7 in the use of a reading scheme to help lower-attaining pupils with phonic approaches. The encouragement of reading and writing through a range of initiatives is meeting with some success. For example, there are writing clubs, fun reading boxes, poetry days. More formally, direct teaching of strategies teachers have acquired through attendance on courses or from the guidance of specialists when supporting them in school are clearly having marked success. In addition, good work is celebrated by being published, for example, in the school's high quality 'State of the Art' magazine.

19. Many pupils' literacy skills are good and yet are being enhanced further by the focus being given to literacy in the school. Many read well and extensively. Spelling of key words is accurate. In many subjects demanding the use of reference material, pupils and sixth-form students are good at finding and recording information. The regularity of this range of work in developing skills of literacy is fostered by the teachers' own greater awareness and enthusiasm in encouraging more focused reading and writing. The initiative begun in April 1999 is already achieving significant success.

## WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

**Although some effective developments have been achieved, aspects of teaching and learning at Key Stage 3 still do not give sufficient attention to the learning needs of different groups of pupils; subject teachers on a day-to-day basis do not make sufficient use of the individual education plans of pupils with special educational needs.**

20. Despite results in the end of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests being above average and pupils making good progress during the key stage, by the high standards the school sets itself performance during Years 7 to 9 does not compare as well with similar schools as that of older pupils.

21. Teaching is generally good and often very good. However, especially at Key Stage 3, teachers do not always match their work rigorously to the particular learning needs of individual groups of pupils. In some lessons there is too little or inappropriate challenge and the pace of lessons is sometimes too slow. In a minority of lessons in English, for example in Year 9, pupils in classes covering a wide range of attainment are often given the same work and some struggle to keep up with the pace of the lesson. In some lessons there is less flair and imagination with few teaching strategies employed to meet learning needs. In some lessons in modern languages, higher-attaining pupils are not extended; there is a lack of opportunity for them to use more than one skill to complete a task or to put their skills to the test in real situations. Role-plays, for example, are often limited to the rehearsal of prepared dialogues and do not encourage spontaneous conversations in the foreign language. In a number of subjects the opportunities for pupils to participate are decreased by the teacher dominating spoken activities. In other lessons, for example history, there is over-reliance on printed note-sheets. In others, pupils are too dependent upon the teacher, have few opportunities to work independently and lessons lack the vitality seen in the best teaching.

22. The provision and practice for pupils with special educational needs have improved significantly since the previous inspection. They are now strengths of the school. The procedures for statements fully meet statutory requirements and lower-attaining pupils show some very good gains in skills of literacy and numeracy; for example, Year 7 pupils' reading ages have almost caught up with their actual ages since last October, improving in that time by five months. However, in many subjects the generally well-prepared independent education plans of pupils, from Stage 2 of the Code of Practice onwards, do not give subject teachers, other than in English and mathematics, clear academic targets. As a result, the planning of many subject teachers takes insufficient account of the particular learning needs of these pupils. In some cases where targets have been set, teachers take insufficient note of them in their planning with the result that the potential of some pupils is not realised. Individual education plans do not always give a focus to priority areas; some for example, are insufficiently specific to help subject teachers manage difficult behaviour or meet individual learning needs. A minority of lessons, therefore, are not planned to cater for a range of learning outcomes and this lessens the impact of some teaching despite many other features that are very good.

**Information technology is insufficiently used in many subjects to enhance learning; pupils' skills in its use are too rarely assessed to ensure appropriate National Curriculum levels are achieved.**

23. Since the previous inspection the provision and practice of information technology have improved considerably. At that time there was insufficient planned use of information technology and pupils' acquisition of skills was rather haphazard. Pupils are using information technology with some success when logging data during investigations in mathematics and science. Since September 1999 the use of information technology is theoretically planned within individual departments. Some careful mapping of this has been undertaken. Nonetheless, in a number of subjects there is little planned use of information technology to enhance and extend learning. Many teachers do not perceive it as a modern and useful tool for recording, handling, interpreting and retrieving information. It is as though the real world's continuous reminder of the information age passes them by. For example, it is not always used for creating bar graphs in geography, manual approaches are still being used. On the other hand, this subject did use information technology effectively with Year 10 during a programme of study centred on the Bristol dock area. A Year 8 English lesson in one of the information technology suites undertook satisfactory work in desk-top publishing to an average standard. A sixth form GNVQ group made presentations using information technology to a standard that was above average. The teaching in this lesson was very good and students learned very effectively and shared information gathered about using information technology through the presentation of graphs and graphics to illustrate market trends. However, such use is rare in the main school. It is used infrequently to enhance the quality of pupils' work and presentation. For example, information technology is rarely used in modern languages, appropriate software programmes do not often form a part in the planning of lessons in this subject or in English. CD-ROMs are not often used for research, except in the sixth form.

24. The school has made good progress in creating information technology suites and providing appropriate hardware. However, these are not used fully. For example, during the inspection two of the rooms were only used for about a half of the available time. There is a developing programme of training for staff. The monitoring of the cross-curricular use of information technology, however, is insufficient. Subject departments do not generally record the levels of use of information technology being achieved by pupils. The school does not maintain records of individual pupils' overall information technology capability. Assessment of the skills pupils are acquiring is infrequent. The monitoring lacks focus, is insufficiently sharp and pupils' attainment in information technology is not formally assessed until the end of Key Stage 3. This is too late and too infrequent. Departments are not using information technology effectively because of their failure to assess pupils' attainment in its use, using the criteria of the National Curriculum.

#### **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

25. In order to continue its commitment to improvement the school should now:
- (1) Ensure the learning needs of different groups of pupils are fully met at Key Stage 3.
  - (2) Improve and extend the use of information technology to support and enhance learning across the curriculum, ensuring that regular assessment of pupils' attainment takes place.

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed

70

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

35

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
8.6	28.6	51.4	11.4	0	0	0

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

### Information about the school's pupils

#### Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1264	343
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	70	

#### Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	39	3
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	151	5

#### English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	3

#### Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	54
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	36

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.0
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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	122	123	245

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	101	99	89
	Girls	108	86	77
	Total	209	185	166
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	86 (85)	76 (74)	68 (63)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	31 (54)	53 (53)	28 (25)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	95	88	101
	Girls	105	76	93
	Total	200	164	194
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	82 (68)	67 (73)	80 (80)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	50 (31)	47 (37)	31 (37)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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

## Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	125	124	249

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	71	121	123
	Girls	88	123	124
	Total	159	244	247
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	64 (64)	98 (97)	99 (99)
	National	46.3 (45)	91 (90)	96 (95)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	47 (45)
	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	44	46	90

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	24.2	24.7	24.4 (25.6)	3	6	4.3 (2.9)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (17.6)	2.7	2.8	2.8 (2.8)

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

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

### **Ethnic background of pupils**

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	
Indian	3
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	1
White	966
Any other minority ethnic group	3

### **Exclusions in the last school year**

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

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

### **Teachers and classes**

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	94.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of education support staff	15
Total aggregate hours worked per week	402

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	72.6
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7– Y13]**

Key Stage 3	24.1
Key Stage 4	21.2

### **Financial information**

Financial year	1998/1999
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	£
Total income	3 538 488
Total expenditure	3 579 057
Expenditure per pupil	2 311
Balance brought forward from previous year	300 162
Balance carried forward to next year	259 593

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

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	1607
Number of questionnaires returned	281

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

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	51	43	5	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	50	45	3	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	27	62	5	1	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	25	54	17	4	0
The teaching is good.	39	57	0	1	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	32	57	0	1	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	54	39	5	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	64	32	2	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	26	57	13	2	1
The school is well led and managed.	63	34	1	0	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	48	48	2	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	42	43	9	1	6