

INSPECTION REPORT

BARTHOLOMEW SCHOOL

Eynsham, Oxford

LEA area: Oxfordshire

Unique reference number: 123239

Headteacher: Mr W Berry

Reporting inspector: Mr W G Goodall
15127

Dates of inspection: 28 February-2 March 2000

Inspection number: 186675

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 students:	11 to 18 years
Gender of students:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Peter George
Date of previous inspection:	January 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Bartholomew School is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive school situated in the village of Eynsham, approximately five miles west of Oxford. There are 880 students on roll, of whom 110 are in years 12 and 13. The numbers of students admitted into the school have grown over the past four years, and the school is now over-subscribed. The numbers in the Sixth Form, in which students study for A/AS examinations, remain steady and there are good relations with local further education colleges which offer vocational courses. The school population is very stable, with few changes in the students who attend. 6.6% of students in Years 7 to 11 are identified by the school as eligible for free school meals which is below average. Almost all students are of white European ethnicity, although 11 students have English as an additional language, which is a high number for shire county schools. 12.4% of students have special educational needs, and 2% have statements. This is lower than in most secondary schools. Students are drawn from a wide area around the school. The local area is quite advantaged in economic terms. Students have above average attainment on entry, with a high percentage of students achieving level 5 and above in the end of the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum tests, but also a below average percentage of students at level 4.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The overall effectiveness of the school is good. The academic standards of the school are above the national average by the end of Year 9, are well above average by the end of Year 11, and in line with the average by the end of Year 13. Although Key Stage 3 test results are low compared to those of similar schools, the overall patterns of attainment are in line with those that could normally be expected from the range of ability that is present in the school. Students have a very positive attitude to their learning and behave very responsibly, the work on improving boys' attitudes to learning has been particularly effective. Almost all of the teaching is satisfactory or better, and in seven out of ten lessons it is good or better, with over one third of lessons being judged very good or excellent. Respectful and engaging relationships are developed that support students. As a consequence all students, including those with special educational needs, are learning well. A generally broad curriculum is offered to students, which includes drama and personal, social and health education (PSHE), but opportunities for art and music are limited in Key Stage 3, and there are no accredited vocational courses. There are very good arrangements for the care and guidance of students, who are closely involved in pastoral initiatives and parents are kept well informed about their son's or daughter's progress. It is well led and managed and governed effectively. Resources are used in a cost-effective way, providing good value for money.

What the school does well

- Most students make good progress from the time that they arrive in Year 7 to the time that they leave Year 11, and this is continued for those that stay on to Year 13.
- GCSE results are well above the national average, with boys doing particularly well.
- Good teaching encourages students to learn well and develop independent skills.
- Students respond very well to the friendly, supportive and safe learning environment that is provided for them by working hard and maintaining very good relationships and attitudes.
- Students with special educational needs are very well supported and integrated into the life of the school.
- There is effective leadership and management from the headteacher and key staff of the school, supported well by the governors.
- Students, especially the Sixth Form and school council, are involved in counselling and support which has created a strong school identity and positive ethos.
- A very strong extra curricular provision.

What could be improved

- Standards attained in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3, particularly in mathematics and science.
- Setting and achieving more ambitious learning targets based on the students' previous achievement.
- The consistency of the implementation of policies and procedures across the whole school.
- The provision of sufficient time for religious education for the older students to deliver the Agreed Syllabus.
- The timetable provision for art and music in Key Stage 3.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made satisfactory progress in addressing the key issues for action from the previous inspection in January 1996. Decisive action has been taken to develop the special educational needs provision, and to establish procedures for planning and monitoring whole school and departmental development. Time for religious education is still not sufficient in Key Stage 4 or the Sixth Form, and a daily act of collective worship is not provided for all students. Test results for students at the end of Key Stage 3 have risen in line with the national trend, and GCSE results have remained above the national average and that of similar schools in terms of 5 A*-C grades. A-level results remain broadly in line with national averages. Much has been done to raise the expectations of boys, and their results have improved faster than the girls' have. The school has the capacity to achieve its planned improvements.

STANDARDS

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

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

At the end of Year 9, students reach standards in National Curriculum tests that are well above the national averages, but compared to schools in similar contexts the standards are very low in science, well below the average in mathematics and close to the average in English. At the end of Year 11 overall GCSE results are very good. Results are best in science, information studies, drama, music, history and textiles. Governors have set targets for students taking GCSEs in 2000 and 2001 that are below the results obtained in 1999. They have done this on the basis of individual predictions from teachers and are confident that these are challenging. Since the previous inspection GCSE results have risen slightly, in line with national results. At A-level, results have remained around the national average points score. Boys' achievements have improved as a result of school initiatives.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Attitudes are very good in all respects.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is very good, both within lessons and around the school. Students are mature and are very considerate to others.
Personal development and relationships	Students respond well and show initiative and take responsibility. They form good relationships with others.
Attendance	Attendance is good.

The high standards of conduct are a strength of the school. Students of all ages, including the Sixth Form are involved in a wide range of pastoral and supportive initiatives that are beneficial to all concerned.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	good	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.

In 66% of lessons teaching is good or better, in 38 % of lessons it is very good or excellent and in 96% of lessons it is satisfactory or better. This represents an improvement since the previous inspection and confirms that the quality of teaching is a strength of the school. Teaching is good in English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 3 and is generally good in all three subjects at Key Stage 4. Important strengths in all subjects are teachers' knowledge, the use of effective teaching methods, the management of students and the use of time and resources. Weaker aspects are the consistency and accuracy of marking, and the monitoring of students' progress in relation to National Curriculum levels in Years 7 to 9.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum provided generally meets legal requirements, apart from religious education. It includes drama and PSHE. But time and continuity in art and music are lacking. In Years 12 and 13 the range of subjects offered at A and AS level is adequate. No certificated vocational courses are provided.
Provision for students with special educational needs	The provision for students with special educational needs is very good in all years.
Provision for students' personal education, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Students experience a well-designed programme for personal and social education, and receive good career guidance. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very well.
How well the school cares for its students	The arrangements for the safety and well being of students are very good. An especial strength is the way that students are involved in counselling and pastoral activities. Assessment arrangements, particularly in Years 7 to 9, do not provide students with accurate advice on how to improve further.

The time allocation for religious education in Key Stage 4, and in Years 12 and 13 is low. There are no certificated vocational courses offered. The schools works well with in partnership with parents.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Managers provide a clear sense of direction and purpose which is reflected in the positive ethos of the school. Development plans show a clear insight into ways in which the school can improve although the strategies for doing this are still being evolved.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are well informed and play an important part in shaping the direction of the school and in setting standards. They use their considerable financial, business and community expertise well.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school is in the early stages of evaluating its performance. Detailed analyses have been carried out but are not yet used to plan for future improvement. There is not yet consistent monitoring of the way policies are put into practice.
The strategic use of resources	Much of the accommodation is good, and resources used well. Arrangements to overcome recent fire damage are efficient.

Leadership is good, with particular strengths within the team of subject and pastoral leaders. However, the best practice in applying school policies and in monitoring and evaluating outcomes needs to be identified and disseminated in order to follow the clear direction given by the headteacher and governors. The principles of best value are being interpreted and implemented well.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers and staff know the students individually, give time to get the best from them and have high expectations. • Smooth transition from primary school. • The quality of teaching. • The progress their children are making. • The high standards of maturity and involvement in education that all students, particularly boys, develop. • The quality of leadership and management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A regular allocation of homework. • Some areas of the accommodation. • A very few instances of poor behaviour.

Inspectors were able to endorse all of the strengths that were identified by parents. Of those who expressed concern over homework, some felt that more should be set and others less. Inspectors considered that most homework was set in a satisfactory way, but agreed that students are occasionally overloaded. Behaviour was very good during the inspection, and is a strength of the school. There will always be occasions when individuals misbehave, but the school dealt with most of these very quickly and took appropriate action. A few parents clearly have had negative experiences, but the overwhelming consensus is that the school is successful and does its best for the students.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. Overall, taking account of students' standards of learning when they arrive, the circumstances of the school and the provision for students with special educational needs, the great majority of students attain standards that are at least satisfactory and frequently good at the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4 and also at the end of Years 12 and 13.

Key Stage 3

2. In 1999, the percentage of students gaining level 5 or above in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 was well above that achieved nationally in English, just above in mathematics, and in line in science. Over the last four years the results in English have remained consistently well above national levels, but mathematics and science results are satisfactory and have declined to be closer to them. The average total of the points scored by each student in the three core subjects is below that of schools in similar contexts. English standards are consistently in line with those found in similar schools. Observation by inspectors of work in school highlights the difference between students' actual attainment in mathematics and science and the low scores they achieve in the tests. The attainment in these tests reflects the curriculum focus and lack of preparation that each subject provides. Given the pattern of attainment on entry indicated by the school's analysis of Key Stage 2 results, the attainment identified in lessons indicates that the majority of students make satisfactory gains in their learning as they progress through Years 7 to 9. The progress in boys' achievement is good and has been improved by creating positive attitudes to their learning. However, the lack of confidence that some staff have in the national tests means that the analysis and use of information about attainment is not consistent across departments, and comparing the school's data with national figures is not secure.
3. Students' achievements in other subjects are often good. The majority of students reach commendably high standards in information technology and art and very high standards in drama, history and religious education by the end of Year 9. Elsewhere, achievements in the foundation subjects are as expected. In nearly all areas, the difference between the achievements of girls and boys is less than is the case nationally, and there are not variations in achievement amongst the different groups of students in the school.

Key Stage 4

4. Over the last five years, the school's GCSE results have usually remained consistent and well above the national average apart from a dip in performance in 1996. The recent results have reflected the generally rising trend shown nationally. In 1999, 65% of Year 11 students gained five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C compared with a national figure of 46%. The average total of the points scored by each student was 43 points compared with a national figure of 38 points. Within this overall figure, boys at the school scored well above the national average for boys whilst girls scored closer to, but still above, the national average for girls. Thus the pattern of boys achieving comparatively well, compared to girls, continues.
5. The 1999 GCSE results in the core subjects, show students performing around the expected levels in mathematics and well above them in English, with results very high in science. Other GCSE subjects are taken by a smaller proportion of the year group, in all of these, overall attainment is above average.

6. In comparison with schools with a similar proportion of students known to be eligible to free school meals, the GCSE results are high in terms of students gaining five or more A* to C grades. The average total points scores are average, but the percentage of students gaining A* to G grades is below average compared to similar schools. Results in mathematics are low, but English and science are well above the averages. However, given the attainment of students when they enter the school and provision of non-examination courses, (which provide valuable experiences but depress the A* to G figures), the overall attainment represents standards that are at least satisfactory and are good for the majority of students and their standards improve steadily during their time in the school.

Sixth Form

7. Since the time of the previous inspection, the quality of students' A-level results has steadily improved. In 1999, the average points score was 15.7 per candidate, which is close to the national average. Very few students who complete their courses fail to gain a GCE A-level or AS-level certificate.
8. Observations indicate that the majority of students following A-level courses are achieving in line with their predicted grades. Students taking languages continue to build on the high standards in earlier years and achieve very well. In other subjects, achievements are broadly satisfactory.

Students with special educational needs

9. Throughout the school, students with special educational needs are very well supported and most make good progress in their learning through Years 7 to 11. In most subjects, progress for most students with special educational needs is good and is enhanced by effective use of support staff, careful interpretation of individual education plans and overall knowledge of individual students' needs. In the core subjects, progress is good overall. In the Sixth Form, focused support generally ensures that the small number of students with special educational needs make good progress.

English as an additional language

10. Eleven students from a wide range of backgrounds for whom English is an additional language are all fluent in English. They make good progress in English, attaining levels above or in line with the national expectation, and progress appropriately in other subjects.

Gifted and talented students

11. Providing for the more able is a central issue in the school development plan. Individual subject teams have successfully supported the progress of gifted students by providing a variety of opportunities for students with particular interests and talents. These have been effective in that both within and outside classes, the nature of the activities often allows students to demonstrate unusual flair and commitment. This is a particular strength of the extra curricular activities. A task group of staff volunteers meets to extend and co-ordinate ideas across subjects and throughout all years and the use of strategies for identifying able students who would benefit from additional stimuli has ensured their progress is continued.

School targets

12. Governors have set a target for 2000 of 60% of students achieving five or more GCSE passes at A* to C grades. Given the positive learning culture of the school, this is not very challenging, particularly in the light of previous trends and the figure of 65.4% achieved in 1999, which was in line with previous years. The equivalent target for 2001 is 56%. On the

evidence of recent attainment patterns this is also a conservative target. Governors are confident that these are challenging targets based on predictions about individual students' performance by their teachers, but these are based on a variety of practices in Key Stage 3 assessment, and on depressed National Curriculum test scores. Inspection evidence suggests that, based on current performance in lessons at the time of the inspection, results are likely to be higher than this and could match or exceed the 1999 figure. Other GCSE targets for 2000 include an average point score of 42 and 98% of students gaining at least one GCSE pass. These targets appear low and evidence suggests the school is on course to exceed them. Neither represents an improvement over the 1999 achievements. Improving on each of these targets in future years is a worthwhile aim which should be seriously considered. If these targets are not exceeded, the school would be in danger of being identified as 'underachieving' and this is a key issue the governors should address.

Students attitudes, values and personal development

13. Students display very positive attitudes to learning and show an interest in their lessons and other aspects of school life. They indicate in discussions that they enjoy coming to school and this is confirmed by their parents. Attendance levels are above national averages.
14. In lessons students are keen to participate and contribute. In extra curricular activities such as a debate on censorship, younger students not only express their own opinions with confidence but also listen with interest to the views of others.
15. The previous inspection report judged standards of behaviour as good and this remains the case. Students behave well in lessons and when they are moving around the school they act sensibly even though at times there is a great deal of congestion in corridors and communal areas. At the end of the day many wait patiently before getting on the buses for home. During lunchtimes and breaks they use computers, library resources and other facilities with minimal supervision and the school site and property is treated with respect.
16. The incidence of students being excluded is much lower than that at other similar sized schools and last year there were no permanent exclusions. A well-established code of conduct containing provisions for both rewards and sanctions is understood by students and contributes effectively to the underpinning of the high standards.
17. Relationships throughout the school are very good. Students are clearly known well and valued by school staff and their achievements are celebrated in extensive displays of photographs around the school. Students confirm that bullying or other oppressive behaviour is not a major issue and if it does occur it is dealt with promptly. The school places great emphasis on the promotion of good relationships and the measures it has taken to provide counselling and pastoral support to achieve these have ensured the creation of an orderly and caring community where learning can take place. The school is carefully monitoring and intervening in the behaviour of some students, for example, in Year 8, where a significant minority is allocated additional resources in order to establish and sustain behaviour. When inappropriate behaviour does occur, most teachers, including the newly qualified, exercise authority to intervene effectively.
18. The school is very successful in promoting personal development by providing students with an extensive range of extra curricular activities, residential visits and opportunities to take responsibility. For example, an elected school council with representatives from each year group is active in projects connected with the school environment including litter control. A group of Sixth Formers have been trained as student counsellors to provide advice to other students in a well structured and supported programme which also includes them running a daily drop-in session. In Year 7 students accompany staff to primary schools to talk to and

reassure Year 6 students who will be joining the school. Students are also active in supporting charities and undertake voluntary work in the community.

19. Students for whom English is an additional language write positively about the school in the personal comments of their reports. Their attendance records are good and none have been excluded.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

20. In the previous inspection in January 1996 it was reported that the teaching was sound in the majority of lessons and often had good features, some of which were outstanding. However, some shortcomings were noted in important areas particularly in the lower school.
21. The current inspection has found that significant improvement in the overall quality of teaching has taken place since the previous inspection and that the quality of teaching is now good overall. Teaching is satisfactory or better in 96% of lessons; it is good or better in 68% of lessons and is very good or excellent in over a third of lessons (38%) taught across all age groups.
22. The overall quality of teaching is similarly good in Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in the Sixth Form. Whilst teaching in all subject areas demonstrates strengths, the quality of teaching is consistently good and often excellent in religious education, English and drama. The small minority of lessons (4%) where teaching is unsatisfactory is not found in a specific subject or related to a particular weakness. No teaching is judged to be poor or very poor.
23. The overall strength of the teaching is linked to very constructive relationships, and ensures good progress and consolidation in students' learning. With few exceptions, learning is at least satisfactory and is very good or excellent in over one third of lessons.
24. In all subjects, teachers display secure subject knowledge and a good understanding of how to present lessons in ways that support and consolidate learning. Teacher expertise is good, and ranges from demonstrating clay modelling techniques in art that presented a formidable but achievable challenge that extended students' knowledge and skill, to an English lesson on '*An Inspector Calls*' where detailed knowledge of the Edwardian era enhanced students' learning and understanding. In one Year 9 history lesson, covering the Nazi treatment of Jews, the teacher's knowledge and sensitivity fired student interest and generated poignant moments of empathy.
25. Teachers' subject knowledge is often reinforced by learning support assistants who demonstrate a good understanding of students with special educational needs by presenting lesson tasks and information in an appropriate context. In a minority of lessons, for example, in English, religious education and the non examination Enhanced Provision course, the contribution of learning support assistants is significantly improved by the teacher discussing specific strategies to enhance the learning of special educational needs students; this sharing of planning and expertise is an important area that needs to be developed in all subjects. The contribution made by Sixth Formers, for example, during library lessons, to support the learning of lower school students builds on the respectful relationships prevalent in the school and is valued by both parties.
26. A range of teaching and other support strategies have been promoted through the school development plan to focus attention on developing students' literacy and numeracy skills. Reading and writing projects that link with primary schools and involve parental support have been developed. Although examples of these strategies, such as the use of writing frames, key word lists, spider diagrams, drafting and adapted texts are evident in most subjects, their potential to enhance learning is not applied consistently by all staff.

27. The best teaching practice is seen where teachers and learning support assistants are planning and using different approaches and resources with students targeted for support; this is reinforced with marking and feedback that correct and guide students in how to improve. The learning support assistants make a valuable contribution to the teaching of students on the register of special educational needs; much of this success reflects the high quality relationships that are prevalent between students and the assistants. Their work is effectively monitored and co-ordinated by the special educational needs co-ordinator.
28. A particular strength of the school is the literacy and numeracy support that is targeted and provided for students with special educational needs by teachers and learning support assistants; this is particularly enhanced by all special educational needs staff in their 'home-base', for example, through the learning support assistants' out of hours clubs. These clubs provide good quality learning support, targeted at, though not exclusively for, students with special educational needs.
29. Most teachers plan the content of their lessons well, giving all students an appropriate range of tasks and demands that meet their needs and promote gains in their knowledge and understanding. In the best of these lessons teachers set out clear objectives that build on students' prior learning and link them to high expectations and time limits. The application of this best practice which, although evident in all subjects, needs to be more consistently applied by all teachers, particularly in science, music, mathematics, physical education and geography.
30. In these subjects there is often less clarity regarding attainment outcomes and in some instances in Key Stage 3, there is no difference evident in the planned outcomes expected from students with widely differing capabilities. The shortcoming of this lack of planning is sometimes overcome when learning support assistants are available to provide support and intervention. The need to tackle shortcomings in subject planning has been recognised by the school in the current school development plan. The plan indicates that most subjects are reviewing and updating their schemes of work with a recognition that there is the need to share good practice, improve the detail of planning and recognise the differing needs of students.
31. In the two thirds of lessons where teaching is good, very good or excellent, teachers capitalise and reinforce their good relationships with students to inspire and challenge them through the use of stimulating tasks. In addition to the use of appropriate textbooks and well planned and presented worksheets teachers commonly employ engaging techniques including: role play, video clips, the internet, 'hot seating', investigations, stimulating debate and humour; all of these lessons are characterised by their brisk pace and sharp focus. The student access to and use by teachers of information technology is predominantly good and often very good. The application of wide ranging strategies, presented in a respectful atmosphere help build students' self-confidence and commonly engage all, irrespective of gender or capability, in the extension of their knowledge and understanding.
32. In religious education lessons lower attaining students in Years 8 and 9 are confident to make sensitive and perceptive observations and can justify arguments with thoughtful comments. The high quality relations between teachers and Sixth Formers encourage sophisticated and challenging dialogue, for example, in business studies and English. In the very small number of lessons across all subjects that are unsatisfactory, there is limited planning of a narrow range of activities that are delivered at a pace that is pedestrian with poor attention to the range of student capabilities.
33. The standard of behaviour in lessons is, with very few exceptions, very good and reflects the respectful culture of the school community and the overall quality of teachers' classroom

management. In the great majority of lessons students are engaged with appropriately challenging activities and require very few serious teacher interventions to keep them on-task.

34. A particular strength throughout the school is in the high quality of teacher/student dialogue that promotes better understanding through praise, encouragement and challenge. In all subjects, students' work is monitored and many teachers provide constructive guidance that judges quality and effort and indicates necessary corrections or how it should be improved. The frequency, diligence and value of these marking assessments do however vary within and between subject areas and across year groups. This variation is evident in differing responses by teachers to the correction of literacy errors. In many instances in both Key Stages 3 and 4, teachers' comments focus on presentation at the expense of informing students how to improve further to achieve learning targets.
35. In some of the Key Stage 3 exercise books where little monitoring is evident, there is deterioration in the standard of work as the year progresses. In much Sixth Form work and Year 10 and 11 assignments, good quality and consistent diagnostic comments are written by teachers, for example, in English, history, religious education and drama; the application of these comments is often apparent in students' subsequent work. The marking of special educational needs students' work is consistent with that of other students, with notable exceptions such as in some areas of English teaching where it is considerably enhanced. Whilst the aims of marking are set out in staff documentation, the response to these ideals varies greatly and, consequently, the reviewing and monitoring of the teachers' application of these expectations is an issue that should be addressed. Teaching of both English as an additional language and gifted students are both good.
36. Homework is used effectively and integrates with class-work and course programmes. Most set-tasks allow students to work independently and demonstrate their varying levels of attainment. A significant quantity of homework across subjects and years makes good use of information technology both produced at home and using school resources. A minority of parents raised concerns about homework arrangements. The concerns, which were echoed by several students who were interviewed, centred on inconsistencies in the quantity and frequency of homework setting. Inspectors found that whilst homework allocations were easily tracked and generally set to the prescribed schedule in Years 7 and 8, the arrangements for Years 9, 10 and 11 allowed greater flexibility and therefore more chance of days with no homework followed by an excess. Students reported that the quantity often built up towards the end of the week. Homework guidelines produced by the school provide good advice for students and parents and emphasise the need for students to manage their homework timetable; parents are encouraged to monitor completion using homework diaries, but students are still occasionally overloaded.

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

37. The school provides a broad and generally well-balanced curriculum which is enhanced significantly by extra-curricular activities, but statutory requirements for religious education are not met and the art and music curriculum arrangement is unsatisfactory. The school's development plan identifies the need to enhance its range of teaching and learning opportunities through additional vocational and work-related learning programmes. The 23 hours 20 minutes taught time is less than the national recommendation, but is sometimes extended when taught personal, social and health education (PSHE) activities occur during tutorial sessions. The use made by tutors of this time varies greatly.
38. All students have appropriate access to physical education, information technology and personal, social and health education programmes.
39. In the previous inspection in 1996 the co-ordination, support and monitoring of the special needs provision were identified as a key issue for action. The findings of this inspection show significant improvement; students with special educational needs are fully integrated into all school activities and resources are well co-ordinated and targeted at their identified needs. The liaison among teachers, learning support assistants and the special educational needs co-ordinator is a growing strength that contributes to measurable gains in students' learning. The students identified as having English as an additional language are fluent speakers and writers who, where necessary, have access to appropriate support. The school development plan has identified 'providing for the more able' as a particular focus for departments and other development groups. Many teachers showed good awareness of their needs and a willingness to adapt work to support individuals.
40. Students for whom English is an additional language are fully integrated into teaching groups. The school has limited additional arrangements for tracking the progress of students for whom English is an additional language as a distinct group. Form tutors monitor their progress within the normal procedures of monitoring the academic and personal development of all students in their tutor group.
41. Students identified with special educational needs follow predominantly the same pattern as other students and enjoy the same curriculum opportunities. In addition, however, special educational needs students benefit from the support of the special educational needs learning support assistant team which helps meet the needs of individual education plans and particularly target literacy and numeracy support. A small number of students are withdrawn from some mainstream classes for targeted support. The learning support assistants dedicate 77% of their time to Key Stage 3, and additional whole-school support is provided by staff through pre-school, lunchtime, and after school activities. The support programme enables students to achieve measurable gains in knowledge and understanding that are monitored and enhanced by staff; special educational support is now a strength of the school.

Key Stage 3

42. In years 7 to 9, students study all National Curriculum subjects, religious education, and drama and receive appropriate instruction on health and sex education. All Year 7 lessons are taught in mixed ability groups whilst during Years 8 and 9 setting is introduced by the modern languages, geography, history and mathematics departments. Year 7 students follow modern language courses in either German or French and in Years 8 and 9 they study both languages.

43. The curriculum arrangements for art and music in Years 7 and 8 are unsatisfactory and result in students within the same year receiving a disjointed programme for differing lengths of time throughout each year. Insufficient time prevents clear progression and continuity of National Curriculum art and music and consequently, student attainment is limited; these findings reflect those of the previous inspection report completed in 1996, and there has been no improvement since then.

Key Stage 4

44. In Years 10 and 11 the majority of students follow nine full GCSE courses including, English, mathematics, science, design and technology and a modern foreign language plus a local certificate course in information technology and a short course in religious education. Additionally, a range of optional subjects is available including non-examination community craft and enhanced provision. Currently there are no courses apart from the Youth Award that would provide a nationally recognised vocational pathway for students, including those for whom a GCSE programme might not be suitable. This is most marked for students with special educational needs where development and accreditation of their vocational and key skills are limited. As was the case during the previous inspection, the time allocation for religious education is insufficient to meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus. A small number of students who do not take a modern language course have not been disapplied from the National Curriculum, and the school does not meet current criteria for compliance with the National Curriculum.

Sixth Form

45. The school currently provides open access to the Sixth Form for the 50% of Year 11 students likely to gain five or more GCSEs at grade C or above and who wish to follow A-level courses. The school has good arrangements for other Year 11 students, including those wishing to follow GNVQ or alternative vocational options who are directed to courses in neighbouring colleges or schools within the West Oxfordshire Learning partnership. A good range of A-level courses are offered and in addition all students follow courses aimed at broadening their experiences beyond chosen A-levels; these courses have developed to include general studies, key skills and religious education. There are some limited opportunities for students to re-sit GCSE courses and for a small number to re-sit A-levels as a third year sixth. Plans to introduce the new A1 and A2 courses, including the key skills programme, are well advanced. The time for students to study religious education is not enough for them to complete the Agreed Syllabus.
46. In addition to academic courses, Sixth Form students have their experiences significantly enriched by opportunities to help organise and participate in an impressive range of activities and events including, sporting, social, cultural, counselling, the Youth Award Scheme, Young Enterprise, Engineering Education and an annual arts festival. They work extensively with the school's counsellor to make a significant contribution to the activities and culture of the school. These opportunities, along with the provision of tutorial, personal and social, careers and higher education guidance, which are monitored through sensitive counselling and target setting are a strength of the school.
47. Currently the Sixth Form delivers a cost-effective provision by using its allocated resources efficiently across the carefully limited curriculum. The future changes in the post-16 curriculum and any efforts to provide for the broader needs of all those wishing to continue their studies set significant challenges for the school.

Personal, Social, and Health Education (PSHE)

48. A carefully structured and well-planned programme of PSHE is in place for all year groups. The programme ensures that sex and health education and attention to drug misuse are fully investigated. The Year 8 peer education approach to tackling the health hazards associated with smoking and the Year 10 work on drug awareness are particularly good. PSHE is also enriched through extra curricular provision, including, activity days, residential experiences and inputs from visiting guest speakers and theatre groups. Occasionally mixed age groups have been used to engage students successfully in the discussion of whole school issues like equal opportunities and bullying. Provision is further enhanced by an excellent system for peer counselling. In the Sixth Form the ASDAN award scheme is used to acknowledge and accredit students' key skills achievements.
49. The school's formal programme for career guidance provided by the external careers service and the school's own careers teacher is very good. The guidance is significantly enhanced by the students' ease of access to support and resources that are provided during lunchtimes by the careers teacher. The work experience programme which is organised by the careers teacher, and supported by many of his colleagues and the local community, is of a high standard.

Equality of Access

50. The school offers satisfactory opportunities for all students to benefit from the full range of school provision. The school community is successful in creating an environment where all students can thrive, and this allows boys in particular to make good progress by comparison with national expectations. Students on the register of special educational needs, those with English as an additional language and ethnic minority students all make good progress within this environment. The discrepancies in some music and art timetabling and the limitations in the range of accredited work-related experiences have been identified by the school and represent access issues that need to be tackled.

Community Links, Social and Cultural Development and Extra Curricular Activities

51. The school maintains a wide variety of very good links with the local community. Links with local primary schools are strengthening the knowledge and data that the school is able to build up and act on in order to support students' learning and monitor their progress. Partnership with secondary schools and colleges and liaison through the on-site youth centre and adult learning centre all reflect the school's commitment to lifelong learning. The information technology access, which is made available to students during and outside of lessons through Internet and email facilities, also reflects the school's commitment to engage students in the national and global community.
52. Many opportunities are available for students to discuss social issues and demonstrate their social awareness and responsibility. Students and staff work with mutual respect and many Sixth Formers provide good role models for younger students by engaging positively in their learning support and other activities.
53. The quantity and diversity of extra-curricular activities provided by the school community are excellent and provide superb opportunities for students and the wider community to enrich their social and cultural experiences and learning. Activities include a wide variety of sports, theatre visits, music, drama, Duke of Edinburgh and sports leadership awards, foreign exchanges, links with Norway and the Czech Republic, discos, an art festival and an annual Year 11 dinner dance.

54. Good access to library, information technology, special education and other specialist facilities, plus the support of many teaching and learning support assistant staff outside of normal lessons, provide very good study support for students. This study support is further enhanced by the work of the school's counsellor and other trained colleagues.

Spiritual and Moral Development

55. The school makes good provision for students' spiritual development. Since the previous inspection the overall standards have been improved, particularly in the move to raise awareness of the spiritual dimension in all areas of the curriculum. There are opportunities for reflection built into collective worship using devices such as the lighting of a candle, and a dedication is offered at the end of each act of worship. There are planned opportunities to consider beliefs and values in religious education, English, drama, history and general studies, for example, in discussions on euthanasia and abortion.
56. Provision for students' moral development is very good and the success of this provision is evident in the culture of the school which is firmly based on respect and consideration for others and for the environment. There are planned opportunities to raise and discuss moral issues in, for example, religious education, drama, English, PSHE and general studies.

Collective Worship

57. Meeting the full statutory requirements for a collective act of daily worship remains an issue from the previous inspection. However, within the organisational constraints facing the school there is a commitment from the governors and staff to collective worship and a recognition of the contribution it makes to the ethos of the school. It is used as an opportunity to celebrate what the school believes to be of worth. A cycle of themes and speakers, including local clergy, contribute well to the acts of worship and provide a variety of perspectives. During the inspection week, themes focused on moral issues, for example, Year 7 were challenged to consider what is of value in their lives by reflecting on the National Lottery.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

58. The school has effective procedures to deal with child protection matters. The headteacher and two senior teachers have responsibility for this and have received the necessary training.
59. The school receives good quality support from visiting professionals, particularly those involved with special educational needs and regular inter-agency meetings are held at the school. The school also pays for the services of an experienced school counsellor for part of the week who is available to work on a one to one basis with students experiencing problems with issues such as relationships and family tensions. The counsellor is also responsible for the training and support of a group of student counsellors who in turn are able to help their peers through difficult times and overcome problems which could otherwise have a detrimental effect on their learning.
60. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place covering the requirements of health and safety legislation. Site inspections are carried out regularly and a number of staff have been on training courses relating to their area of work. There are good first aid and fire precaution arrangements.
61. Accurate attendance registers are kept and regularly monitored, including checks by the Local Education Authority's social worker who visits weekly. Form tutors follow up any unexplained absences.

62. Behaviour is well monitored in part through the formal recording systems of incident sheets, detention records and student files but also most effectively through the informal exchange of information between staff who clearly know the students and are able to identify potential problems at an early stage. Policies on behaviour are regularly reviewed and valuable work has also been done in conjunction with local primary schools to formulate a common approach to the issue.
63. Detailed policies are also in place for the monitoring and recording of academic progress. These are centred around the form tutors, who generally move with students as they go through the school. Each year a 'snapshot' report is produced on each student, which is used in review meetings to identify and produce action plans for those requiring additional help. The action plans are monitored on an individual basis by tutors during tutorial time.
64. At present there are inconsistencies between subjects in the way that assessment is carried out and information used and communicated to students. This means that student's targets tend to be focussed on effort rather than specific curriculum attainments. The "F ,I and H" (foundation, intermediate, and higher) assessments used during Key Stage 3 do not give students, or indeed teachers, sufficient information about attainment and progress towards National Curriculum levels. However, the school is continuing to renew its policies in this area and is making increased use of computerised data bases, so that identified groups of students, for example boys, can be monitored more effectively. A restructuring of senior teacher responsibilities is aimed at ensuring improved co-ordination of pastoral and academic monitoring across the whole of each key stage.
65. Students are well supported from the time they join the school and this has a positive effect on standards. There is very good pastoral and some curricular liaison with feeder primary schools, which ensures a smooth transfer between Key Stages 2 and 3. Similarly the various options at the end of Key Stage 4 are clearly explained and appropriate advice made available. The school provides a safe, secure and caring environment for all its students.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

66. Overall the parents views of the school are very positive. The majority are satisfied with the way that the school works with them. They believe that the school is approachable and deals with their concerns.
67. The previous inspection report noted that parents were kept well informed and this remains so. The school produces a range of written material including regular newsletters and detailed attractive information packs dealing with the particular issues relating to Year 7, 10 and 12 students. This is supplemented by regular meetings to discuss progress and the school has also organised information evenings on specific aspects of the curriculum including religious education, languages and information technology.
68. The annual reports on students are detailed and personalised and also provide an opportunity for students themselves to comment on their own progress in each subject. In addition the school also sends out a short 'snapshot' report during the year. Both reports are helpful in keeping parents informed although the grading schemes used make it difficult to judge attainment against National Curriculum levels.
69. The school is conscious of the need to involve parents with their children's learning and has taken a number of initiatives including a reading partnership scheme for parents of Year 8 students. Some parents also assist in a number of ways with the careers education and general studies programmes. There is also an active parents' association which each year raises significant sums of money. These have been used to good effect for the benefit of

students to buy resources including computer equipment, musical instruments and new textbooks. Funds from this source are also used effectively to support the students' school council.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

70. In the previous inspection report the leadership and management of the headteacher and senior staff were reported to be effective, and they were supported well by the governors. Those strengths are still very much in evidence, as indicated by such features as above national average GCSE results, good teaching, high levels of parental approval for the work of the school, high standards of behaviour, very good pastoral support and a very friendly and supportive ethos.
71. The headteacher has a good strategic overview, a detailed grasp of finance, and continues to provide effective leadership and a clear sense of direction for the school. The headteacher is fully supported by a recently appointed team of senior managers with complementary skills and expertise and able and committed administrative staff. The heads of department have responsibility to interpret the school's aims and are given guidance to develop the strategies that are the most appropriate for their curriculum area. This means in practice that there is some variation in approach, and some middle managers are more pro-active and effective than others.
72. Heads of year and form tutors are very good at promoting good behaviour and are key people in the success of the arrangements for the guidance, welfare and safety of students. They play an active role in monitoring students' progress and personal development, but lack reliable assessment information from subject teams, especially in Years 7 to 9. The pastoral, counselling and monitoring systems, the involvement of all students, especially the Sixth Form, and the successful planning of the personal and social education programme are all very good.
73. Most of the heads of department provide good subject leadership and offer constructive ideas about how the school could improve further. Communication between the senior management team and individual departments is generally good. However, some aspects of school policy are interpreted differently in each subject area, this is particularly evident in each subject's contributions to the school's development plan. Not all plans are costed in detail or have quantifiable targets.
74. As at the time of the previous inspection, governors continue to provide good support and are keen to ensure that they fulfil their statutory obligations. They collectively have a very impressive range of expertise. This expertise is used well, especially in the work of the various committees. The current school development plan reports on progress towards meeting the previous year's targets, as well as establishing short-term targets for both the maintenance of existing strengths and the establishment of new ones. The plan identifies seven central issues, which are updating schemes of work, the development of literacy, 16+ courses, providing for the more able students, monitoring and evaluation, work related learning, and training. Very conservative targets have been set for the proportion of students expected to gain at least five higher grade GCSE results in 2000 and 2001 which the school is already exceeding.
75. The school monitors and evaluates its performance through both formal and informal approaches. Many of its strengths and weaknesses have been accurately identified and plans are in hand to extend these strengths and deal with these weaknesses. There is expertise amongst key staff in the analysis of performance data but little work is done on the constructive use of it within the process of setting learning targets and monitoring the progress being made to reach them. Formal arrangements for teacher appraisal and for

monitoring the quality of teaching are in place. Different departments are interpreting some aspects of school policy in different ways, leading to a lack of consistency in such areas as homework, marking and assessment. Special educational needs students' individual education plans are not translated into specific targets for each subject. Tight quality assurance procedures linked to precise success criteria are not yet evident and lead to inconsistency.

76. Good strategic use is made of resources, including specific grants and additional funding. The school's income per student is broadly in line with the national median, although the governors express the view that the funding has been historically low, creating a backlog of repairs. A very detailed spending analysis has been undertaken which gives a precise level of accountability. Governors, the headteacher, and the school accountant together ensure that decisions on spending are suitably linked to educational priorities. The principles of best value are being applied successfully to the use of the school's finances. The most recent auditor's report was four years ago, but was very positive about the efficiency and accuracy of the school's accountancy procedures, and the recommendations for additional improvements have now been acted upon.
77. The proportion of the total income that is spent on staff costs is in line with the average for similar schools. The amount spent on administration is higher than similar schools, but this is used effectively to ensure the smooth running of the systems and allows teachers to focus on their teaching. The school spends a lower proportion of its income on learning resources than most comparable schools, but uses its reserves and external funds to address any areas needing development.
78. Arrangements for the training and development of staff are effective, and much benefit is derived from having student teachers working in the school. The organisation of the professional development days for staff is a particular strength. The learning support assistants need to be more closely involved in training so that they can contribute more effectively in class.
79. The overall effectiveness of the school is good. This judgement is based on a consideration of the overall levels of achievement of the students (which are good); the attitudes of the students (very good); the quality of teaching and the leadership and management of the school (all good); the improvement since the previous inspection (satisfactory) and the contextual factors (above average). This means that the school also provides good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER

80. The school has many more strengths than weaknesses. In order to raise standards still further, the governors, senior managers and staff should:
- i) improve standards at the end of Key Stage 3, particularly in mathematics and science (paragraphs, 2,100, 110).**
 - ii) set and reach more ambitious end of key stage targets by:**
 - assessing and reviewing Key Stage 3 students' performance in relation to how well they have achieved against national standards (paragraph 64).
 - informing students of their progress against national information and what they need to do to improve (paragraph 64).
 - using benchmarks to compare performance with similar schools and use the information to set end of key stage targets (paragraphs 2, 12).

- iii) Extend arrangements for ensuring that policies and procedures are used consistently across the whole school (paragraphs 71, 73).**
- iv) Ensure that all foundation subjects have appropriate opportunities to cover the statutory orders, especially in religious education, art and music (paragraphs 43, 44).**

In addition, the school should take steps to ensure that the statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship are met, and that all students not disapplied from the National Curriculum study the appropriate courses.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

81. Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	184
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	51

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
15	23	30	27	4	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 students

Students on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	770	110
Number of full-time students eligible for free school meals	51	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	22	3
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	96	4

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

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	29
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	21

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	6.2
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.9
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 students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	70	74	144

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	48	49	41
	Girls	69	49	46
	Total	117	98	87
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	81 (84)	68 (73)	60 (71)
	National	64 (65)	62 (60)	54 (56)
Percentage of students At NC level 6 or above	School	36 (57)	38 (49)	21 (36)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	45	50	44
	Girls	67	53	56
	Total	112	103	100
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	78 (83)	72 (70)	69 (83)
	National	65 (61)	65 (64)	60 (61)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	39 (55)	41 (51)	33 (40)
	National	32 (31)	38 (37)	29 (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	63	67	130

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	40	59	60
	Girls	45	64	65
	Total	85	123	125
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	65 (64)	95 (97)	96 (99)
	National	47.8 (44.6)	88.4 (89.8)	93.9 (95.2)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score Per pupil	School	43 (43)
	National	37.8

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

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

Attainment at the end of the Sixth Form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		1999	65	43

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	15.3	16.1	15.7 (17)	2.2	1.3	2
National	17.7	18.1	17.9	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 students who achieved all those they studied	School	N/A	N/A
	National		N/A

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

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	1
Indian	1
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	3
White	855
Any other minority ethnic group	17

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	12	0
Other minority ethnic groups	1	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	49.9
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.6

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	20
Total aggregate hours worked per week	435

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.6
Key Stage 4	21.5

Financial information

Financial year	1998/99
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	£
Total income	1,996,532
Total expenditure	1,992,735
Expenditure per pupil	2,151
Balance brought forward from previous year	37,891
Balance carried forward to next year	41,688

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out 880

Number of questionnaires returned 402

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	43	46	7	4	1
My child is making good progress in school.	45	45	6	1	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	26	48	14	1	11
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	26	52	17	3	2
The teaching is good.	34	54	6	1	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	30	51	16	2	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	53	37	7	3	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	54	40	5	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	28	51	15	2	4
The school is well led and managed.	53	32	6	2	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	48	38	7	2	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	43	42	6	1	8

Other issues raised by parents

In personal notes attached to the questionnaire forms and at the meeting held by inspectors prior to the inspection week for parents to express their views, several additional points were raised. In general, comments were very supportive of the work of the school and apparent criticisms were mostly intended to highlight some aspects where further improvements could be made.

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

ENGLISH

82. Overall standards of attainment in English at the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4 are well above the national average, as they were at the time of the previous inspection, and they are in line with those of similar schools. A-level results are very good. Teaching and learning are both very good. The 1999 National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 indicate that 80% of students gained Level 5 or above. Girls achieved higher scores than boys and the total results were above the national average and broadly in line with those in similar schools. During the inspection students' attainment was judged to be at or above the national average in 88% of Key Stage 3 lessons, and only below the national average in 12%. Additional emphasis on skills development in English and on literacy development in the school as a whole is already resulting in improved reading and spelling performance.
83. GCSE English results over the last three years have not been consistent, but the 1999 results in both English language (65.4%) and English literature (73%) at grades A*-C are significantly above the national average and in line with the average for similar schools. The department is particularly pleased with the boys' literature results as these are well above the national average for boys. Nevertheless girls continue to do better and the department is developing strategies to improve boys' results even further. The attainment in over eighty per cent of the Key Stage 4 lessons seen during the inspection was at the level of average national expectations or better (14% was well above). Particularly commendable was the achievement of most lower ability students, for example, some Year 11 students whose preparation for interviews on the work of Simon Armitage's poetry showed clear knowledge and understanding.
84. Students' attainment in Years 12 and 13 is consistently high both in lessons and in examinations. In 1999 there was a 100 per cent pass rate at A-level English literature, which was 6% higher than the previous year. There is no significant difference between boys' and girls' attainment at this level.
85. Generally students of all abilities are confident and often competent speakers, although, as mentioned in the previous Ofsted report, there is still room for improvement with more formal expression. The English department is encouraging involvement in debate and formal interview to enhance progress in this area.
86. In all key stages students are excellent listeners and are able to respond very positively and confidently to questioning. For example, in a Year 8 religious education lesson, on prejudice, students gave clear and interested responses to their teacher's questioning. They work extremely well in pairs, groups and with their teachers to extend their thinking and learning. Learning support assistants are often key players in the success of group work with lower ability students.
87. The approach of students to reading is positive overall and this is very much encouraged by the consistent emphasis of the English department on the importance of literature, on silent reading sessions and on reading projects such as one involving parents. The library is also used for some English lessons and work with the librarian has resulted in an increase in book borrowing.
88. There is clear evidence of developing reading skills in all years, including reading aloud with expression and interest. This interest is exemplified in exciting Year 8 English work where students have used desktop publishing to create colourful book jackets, which express their

enjoyment of the text. In all years there is a developing grasp of literary terms and a large number of students, even some of the least able students in Years 7 to 9, are able to explain simile and metaphor and to use imagery in their writing.

89. By the end of Key Stage 4 the majority of students can write creatively, at length and for specific audiences, but there are still grammatical mistakes in evidence and presentation is still poor in some cases, particularly amongst boys. Some Year 7 boys expressed the view that they would like handwriting lessons. Re-drafting skills are being used well by many students, often with the aid of information technology. Some students, particularly at Key Stage 4, are effective note-takers, although others need more help in structuring and summarising facts and concepts. In some other subjects, such as religious education and design and technology teachers are providing very helpful support to those with literacy problems, for example, by using writing frames. In Year 13, most students can take useful notes, write discursively and discuss texts with considerable confidence and understanding and are enthusiastic and supportive participants.
90. Students' attitudes to their learning are in almost all cases very positive, and behaviour in most lessons is extremely good. In the best lessons students are very supportive of their teachers and peers. In these lessons they remain interested and keen to progress and are genuinely helpful. In a minority of lessons there are some instances when students, particularly less able boys in Key Stage 4, are inclined to become restless and inattentive, especially if tasks are lengthy and inappropriate.
91. The quality of teaching overall is very good, particularly at Key Stage 3 and at Post-16 level. English teachers have a very thorough knowledge of their subject, use a variety of methods, managing time, students and tasks well in the majority of lessons. The most successful teachers use pace, tone and humour superbly and there is excellent use of a wide variety of quality resources. These include much that has been produced by members of the department, for example, computer based records and schemes of work, as well as revision booklets for students. Teachers have excellent relationships with students, set relevant homework regularly and most have clear objectives for their lessons. However, objectives sometimes do not clearly relate to the development of skills, knowledge and understanding in students.
92. Most of the assessment comments by teachers are positive and constructive, helping students to progress, as does the use of self assessment where it is encouraged. The mixed ability teaching is very successful in most cases where tasks are appropriately targeted and support staff play a key role.
93. The English department is led by a very hardworking and competent team, who possess tremendous enthusiasm and flair. Because there are a number of part-time teachers and initial teacher training students, as well as key departmental staff who have significant other responsibilities, there is pressure on the head of department, but members of the team continue to provide enthusiastic, varied and relevant work for their students. Monitoring of work is done on a regular basis by the head of department and is facilitated by the use of 'colleague visits' to encourage the sharing of ideas and good practice. Much evaluation of the work of the department has been carried out and led to some planned improvements including the use of a departmental management information system to facilitate recording and sharing. The subject has continued to develop well since the previous inspection.
94. The English curriculum is providing opportunities for personal development as well as developing knowledge and skills in the subject. Liaison with primary schools is an important feature of a focus on improving transition; and liaison with businesses, and Further and Higher Education, could further enhance this. Curricular opportunities include debates, a creative writing club, extension work for Year 11 and visits to the theatre, as well as

residential for Post-16 students. The statutory requirement to deliver the National Curriculum is also met.

DRAMA

95. Attainment in drama lessons is very good. In Key Stage 3 the performance of students is exceptional. At Key Stage 4 and Post-16 levels students showed impressive knowledge of production and acting technique. 85% of students gained grades A*-C for GCSE drama in 1999. This was slightly less than the numbers gaining top grades in 1998. There was also a slight drop in A-level theatre studies results between 1998 and 1999. However the drama department is pleased with the results gained on the basis of the intake.
96. Drama is provided on a “carousel” basis with art and music in Year 7 and Year 8 to provide an expressive arts curriculum. In Year 9 students have two thirty-five minutes lessons per week. At Key Stage 4 drama is offered to GCSE level and in the Sixth Form A-level theatre studies is an option. The previous Ofsted report in 1996 praised the drama provision in the school and this provision has been maintained and enhanced.
97. Students clearly enjoy their drama lessons and all learning is very good or excellent, with students developing skills in movement, speaking, listening, teamwork and presentation. They demonstrate high levels of concentration, involvement and support for each other and for their teachers. In one Year 9 lesson, held last period on a very wet afternoon, the students’ enthusiasm and commitment ensured their concentration and involvement in thoroughly probing the characters of Willy Russell’s *‘Blood Brothers’*.
98. All drama teaching is very good or excellent. Apart from the occasional lack of focus on clear learning objectives for students, lessons are well planned, timed and paced. Teachers have good subject knowledge, use resources well, have high expectations of students and include positive assessment. The use of a variety of teaching and learning strategies is enabling students of all abilities to make good progress.
99. The department is well managed. Drama teachers work closely together and with other departments on cross-curricular themes and productions. They also arrange extra curricular activities including theatre visits and performances. Drama is a valued part of the school curriculum.

MATHEMATICS

100. Standards of attainment in mathematics are good in national terms, as they were at the time of the previous inspection, but in both Key Stages 3 and 4 the results are low compared to those of similar schools. Standards in the Sixth Form are good.
101. Test results in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 3 have remained above the national average since the previous inspection. In 1999, 68% of students attained the national target of Level 5 or better, but this was below the average for similar schools. Standards of work in Key Stage 3 lessons are good apart from in a small number of lessons where lower ability students were working on single sheets of paper rather than exercise books, resulting in unsatisfactory standards. There was no significant difference in the Key Stage 3 results gained by boys and girls. This is a marked improvement since the previous inspection.
102. GCSE results have fluctuated since the previous inspection but have always remained above the national average. In 1998 58% of students achieved a pass at grades A* to C, but in 1999 the percentage was 49%, broadly the same figure as at the time of the previous inspection. This figure is below the average for similar schools. The difference in performance between

boys and girls has narrowed since the previous inspection, and boys are now doing comparatively well.

103. The standard in A-level classes is good. In 1998 eight of the fifteen students entered, achieved grades A or B which is better than the national average distribution of grades. In 1999 all students entered gained a pass with a similar good distribution of grades.
104. Although standards have remained above the national average in Key Stages 3 and 4 since the previous inspection, the school's results in national test and examination have, however, shown no significant improvement, except in the narrowing of the difference in performance between boys and girls. The quality of written work has improved with the exception of the isolated examples in lower ability groups. The quality of note taking is consistently high and in Years 11, 12 and 13 is excellent. The students are particularly good at investigation work and finding innovative solutions. There are good, clear schemes of work being introduced in Key Stage 3 indicating National Curriculum levels, and these have led to an improvement in assessment. Individual target setting is now in use at Key Stage 4, and this is working well.
105. The quality of teaching is at least good in the majority of lessons and very good in a significant proportion. Lesson planning is invariably of a high standard with good, clear, well thought out worksheets. Teachers are able to vary their teaching methods and have a very good knowledge of their subject. Suitable homework is set in most cases but not always as a planned extension of the class work. Students respond well when given clear targets and time scales within the lessons. In the small number of lessons where teacher expectation is not made clear there are isolated instances of students 'switching off' or remaining passive. A full range of mathematical skills is being developed and numeracy skills are given prominence. The use of a tables test at class registration with each pupil responding in turn is particularly successful. The department is strongly supportive of the school's literacy policy with key words given prominent display and attention in all maths classrooms.
106. All the members of the department are aware of the individual students with statements of special educational need and their attainment. The deployment of learning support assistants is good and they know their roles within the classroom. In one Year 8 lesson the number of statemented students caused problems for the teacher which was exacerbated by a student with behavioural difficulties.
107. Higher ability students are always given extension work. Students are invariably enthusiastic about their learning and display very positive attitudes towards mathematics. The use of praise is noticeable in all lessons and students are almost always pleased to answer questions and are aware of and comment on their own progress. Relationships between teachers and students are good in all lessons and excellent in some.
108. The department has a satisfactory level of resources although there is a lack of provision of dedicated information technology hardware. The department is developing a computer based recording system to monitor the grades for attainment and effort. Assessment using differentiated tests in Year 7 is good and is guiding curricular planning. These two initiatives are planned to be extended to Years 8 and 9.
109. The head of department who joined the school in September 1999, with two new members of staff, has selected appropriate priorities and is making good progress with them. The mathematics office is being developed into an excellent resource for the department. The department's development plan has undergone a number of changes since September, but is still more of a job list, rather than a document which follows the aims of the school and has targets, with time limits and named responsibilities. Monitoring of teaching and learning is inadequate and consequently does not support the dissemination of good practice. The

students do not always follow their formal homework timetable, to enable them to plan their work. This prevents homework being built into curriculum planning effectively.

SCIENCE

110. Standards in science are very good overall as they were at the time of the previous inspection. The national test results at the end of Key Stage 3, although above national averages, are very low compared to similar schools, but the work in lessons does not confirm low standards. Results in GCSE examinations are very good compared to national averages and similar schools. Standards in the Sixth Form are good. Teaching and learning are both very good.
111. In 1999 students' results in standard assessment tests at the end of Key Stage 3 indicate that the proportion of students achieving level 5 and above was above the national average. However, it was well below the average for schools with a similar intake. The trend over the last three years 1997-1999, indicates that students' performance in these tests has declined. The proportion of students attaining level 6 and above fell in 1999 to its lowest level for five years. Boys performed better than girls in the science Key Stage 3 statutory tests at Levels 5, 6 and 7 for the last three years. Standards observed in lessons are much higher than this, and the teacher's negative attitudes to the tests affect the results drastically because little effort is made to prepare the students to achieve the appropriate national standards. They feel that the very good GCSE results justify this approach.
112. Throughout Key Stage 3 students work successfully in groups at practical and project work. Their good social skills are important in supporting learning. Students co-operate, share ideas and support one another. They exercise care for themselves and each other. Those with particular interest and enthusiasm for a topic motivate and help sustain the concentration of their peers. By Year 9 students demonstrate that they have reached average levels of attainment in their lessons. Practical skills are well developed and all students can use a range of laboratory equipment safely and effectively. They are suitably extending their knowledge of materials, living things and physical processes.
113. In Year 7 Cognitive Acceleration in Science Education (CASE) activities are developing students' thinking skills. Reflection on practical findings is improving students' understanding of balance and moments. Through problem-solving activities students' are led to improve their appreciation of physical relationships relating to conservation and proportionality. In Year 8 students are making force meters, and modelling elements, compounds, and mixtures, using role play and plasticine atoms. These activities illustrate further teaching strategies which effectively move students' understanding of science concepts from practical experience to abstract relationships of force, molecules and the behaviour of materials. In Year 9 students relate their prior knowledge of electrical circuits to explain and predict the operation of components in parallel and series arrangements. The activities allow students to engage the learning at different levels, and for students to share ideas and support each other. However, the maximum level of challenge is at level 6 and thus the highest attaining students are not challenged.
114. Opportunities are often lost for applying knowledge to real-life situations of importance and interest. In a Year 8 study of disease and immunity. for example, students' enquiries regarding their personal and family experiences of infections were not incorporated into the class discussion to enrich learning. Where students are required to spend lengthy periods copying text and diagrams, or listening to teacher exposition, otherwise stimulating and engaging learning activities can be undermined.
115. There is a lack of considered planning for pace and differentiation to improve the overall standard of activities. Planning through the scheme of work does not make it explicit how activities can be made accessible to students across a range of attainment. The National

Curriculum levels of activities are not made clear. Each student is not supported in assessing and monitoring his/her progress against each lesson's learning objectives pitched at the level appropriate to their learning needs. By the end of the key stage, students know many scientific facts but are not always able to express their understanding in novel contexts. Good practice observed in Key Stage 4 to prepare students to effectively demonstrate their understanding in written assessments, is not in place in Key Stage 3.

116. The GCSE attainment of students is very good. In 1999 the proportion of students obtaining an A* - C grade is well above the national average and compares favourably with similar schools. It compares well with other core subjects and the school's 5A*-C performance. Boys and girls tend to achieve more highly in science than they do, on average, in their other subjects at GCSE. All students entered for GCSE science examinations gained a GCSE grade. This is an improvement since the previous inspection.
117. In Years 10 and 11 students carry out investigative work and undertake guided research using books and other resources including the Internet. In Year 10 students are extending their understanding of bacteria and viruses, building effectively on work started in Year 8. The revision strategy deployed by the teacher encourages a cross-section of students to explain their ideas and uncovers their misunderstandings. Active, hands on tasks timed for appropriate pace, effectively reinforce and extend students' understanding, and boosts their confidence, in preparation for GCSE module tests. Students in Year 11 are systematically reminded to keep on top of their learning. Questioning during a demonstration of light behaviour exhibiting wave properties invites students to link new learning with old. Students are advised to revise refraction as the concept was necessary for a deeper understanding of dispersion. Pace in lessons, generally at Key Stage 4, effectively drives learning. By Year 11 a significant proportion of students are demonstrating above average attainment in relation to the course requirements.
118. A significant number of students are achieving well in A-level sciences in the Sixth Form. As examples of the high standards being reached in chemistry, Year 12 students are successfully linking their knowledge of the periodic table to explain the electro-negativity of halogens. They can use organic chemistry nomenclature to draw the shape of organoalkanes and predict their propensity to react with alkali. In physics, Year 12 students are able to enter into detailed discussion relating the concrete experience of observing the behaviour of a charged pith ball to the formula defining the strength of an electric field. In biology, Year 13 students are supported in a seminar approach to critique the statistical methods, such as T-test, chi-squared, Mann-Whitney U, that they are using to analyse project data. Practical skills in Sixth Form science are impressively high. Again, students work in a mutually supportive fashion.
119. The teaching across the science faculty is typically satisfactory to good, and occasionally it is very good. Teachers have comprehensive subject knowledge, good relationships, purposeful organisation and make good use of questioning. Lesson planning is largely linked to the organisation of activities and does not always specify a range of targets for the full range of abilities. Lesson learning objectives are not shared with students and individual targets for improvement are not set.
120. The display work in many laboratories and corridors is of a high standard and reinforces students' understanding of key concepts at Key Stage 3 and 4. Evidence of students' information and communication technology skills are present in the quality of word processed and desk top published materials. However, information and communication technology is under-utilised in science in enriching teaching and learning. Students' literacy is supported through the "Word Blitz" displays, which support students' learning and spelling of major scientific terms.

121. Students of all ages show an interest in science and work with a sense of purpose to acquire new knowledge, often independently of their teacher. Many are willing to talk about what they have done. However, students are not able to identify their own particular strengths and weaknesses. Students with special educational needs take a full part in lessons and are adroitly supported by learning support assistants. Their interventions would be further improved through teachers' planning specific support activities related directly to targets in students' individual education plans.
122. Excellent relationships between staff and students promote effective learning. Students are willing to share their ideas in class discussions and are supported in doing so through teachers valuing their contributions. Boys and girls make equally satisfactory progress in Years 7 to 9. Students on the register of special educational needs draw on the support they receive, from peers and adults, to take a full and active part in their lessons. Consequently, they make good progress.
123. Students' knowledge at Year 9 is not consolidated through effective revision strategies in order to help them demonstrate their understanding with confidence and facility in the end of Key Stage 3 statutory assessment test. Students' knowledge is suitably built upon in Years 10 and 11 with high attaining students beginning to apply what they know to show better understanding. Students' skills in successfully tackling written assessments are developed systematically. Progress continues for those students who stay on in the Sixth Form where they effectively link ideas across key topics and further develop their powers of analysis.
124. Subject staff understand their roles and their contribution towards the team's effectiveness. The head of science provides sound leadership and has clear views as to how the department can further improve. The technicians make a valuable contribution to the work in science, as do the learning support staff who work alongside students on the register of special educational needs. There are adequate learning resources and sufficient accommodation, when the burned laboratory is refurbished, to meet the demands of the current science curriculum. The science accommodation has been improved in line with recommendations made in the previous report. Textbooks remain in short supply at Key Stage 3.
125. Steps are being taken to involve staff in monitoring and evaluating by using paired observations to effectively share good practice and raise further standards of teaching and learning.

ART

126. Overall standards of attainment in art are good in all key stages. In Key Stage 3 students are achieving high standards, which is an improvement since the previous inspection, as is the good A-level performance. GCSE results have remained consistently high. Teaching and learning are both good.
127. By the end of Key Stage 3 standards of students' work are at least in line with national expectations, with many students achieving beyond this. Teacher assessment indicates that in 1999 the great majority of students reached the national expectation, and that girls did particularly well. Work in collage, clay and collagraph printing is particularly effective. All students develop some knowledge of contemporary Western art and craft. Drawing from direct observation is not strong in sketchbooks or in student portfolios.
128. The standards reached by the end of Key Stage 4 are good and build upon earlier experiences in Key Stage 3. In 1999 the proportion of students who gained GCSE A*-C grades in art was above national averages, with girls out-performing boys at the higher grades. Art is more popular with girls. Students' projects are thoroughly researched in terms of image development and set in the context of a variety of contemporary artists or some ethnic

sources. The presentation of completed works is well planned, but drawing from direct observation is not strong in either the sketchbooks or portfolios.

129. Standards of attainment at A-level are consistently good. Works are preceded by periods of experimentation and background research, and show the value and influence of trips to galleries and museums for first hand experience of looking at major art forms.
130. Since the previous inspection the art department has maintained external examination results above the national averages. The quality of learning has remained good overall. Students continue to have constructive experiences with a variety of art, craft and design forms, both two and three-dimensional, and show interest and technical competence with tools and materials. They have continued to engage with art forms from various styles and cultures. The quality of teaching has improved, with lessons having clear objectives and good use being made of the specialist language of art. Demonstrations of techniques such as clay construction and joining are an important feature of all lessons.
131. Information technology is now more widely available to students, in spite of the limited facilities within the studios. Students use CD ROMs for research, digital cameras for recording, and computer programmes for exploring creative images. The planning of schemes of work has improved since the previous inspection, and shows a good balance of creative starting points, materials, methods and visual elements.
132. The standard of teaching is good in all years and has improved since the last inspection. Lessons have clear learning objectives, which include good practical demonstrations of techniques to facilitate understanding. Teachers engage students in verbal responses to appropriate questions, and present them with a variety of two and three dimensional challenges that have stimulus and contexts from a variety of sources covering art, craft and design issues, mainly from a 20th Century perspective, and includes the teachers' own work. Lessons are well prepared and organised and appropriately resourced. Class management is effective. Staff establish good relationships with the students which encourages confidence in their approach to work. The units of study are appropriately matched to student needs and abilities, but lack detailed differentiation of content within each year group, especially where students of all abilities are required to do almost identical work. Homework is consistently set, although not always showing a mark or comment to set targets for continued development. Staff give generously of their own time and resources to help any student who wishes to take advantage of such opportunities.
133. All students make good progress in developing practical skills for a variety of purposes, and in establishing an understanding of the language of art through its constant use and application. They develop a knowledge of art mainly from a contemporary perspective. The work of women artists and art from earlier periods does not have a high profile. Students with learning difficulties make good progress through personal encouragement and enthusiasm. All students have positive attitudes, work at a good pace and concentrate well on the tasks they are set. They use information from a variety of sources to develop ideas for work. Exhibition visits are particularly effective, as too is the use of books and information and communication technology to inform planning. Collage work in Year 7, printing work in Year 8, portrait painting in Year 9, clay construction work in Year 10, and a variety of individually developed projects from older students illustrate the skilful use of materials, the effectiveness of research and the application of the visual elements of art.
134. In Years 7 and 8 the time allowance for teaching this foundation subject is low and is also inconsistent, in that while some students can be taught throughout the year, others are only taught for two thirds of the year. This adversely affects continuity and progression of learning at a critical time in the students development, and limits their achievement. The art

studios are alive with completed works and works underway, complemented by good displays of natural and made forms and artefacts to celebrate and stimulate visual education.

135. The management of the subject is good. The subject handbook establishes a series of aims which relate to National Curriculum requirements, but these are not supported by objectives to inform lesson planning. The structure for the programmes of study at each key stage is clearly documented, but it is difficult to track progression of learning, especially with the fragmented experiences that Key Stage 3 students have. Effective monitoring and evaluating are essential for this process. The learning and associated assessment objectives need greater clarity, which will in turn assist the art department to develop an efficient method of monitoring the schemes of work. Very good extra-curricular opportunities at lunchtimes and after school are available to students. Artists in residence and the opportunity to visit galleries and museums in the locality, nationally and abroad all combine to enhance learning opportunities for very many students. Technician assistance is available to the department, which is particularly valuable in the maintenance of ceramic materials and processes. Books in the library support those on open access in the studios, although many are of limited value in contemporary art education. The department keeps valuable photographic and portfolio records of work from all classes to use as references.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

136. Overall attainment in design and technology is good in all key stages, which is an improvement since the previous inspection, and it is above that found nationally. Boys are achieving standards lower than girls in National Curriculum assessments and GCSE examinations, as they were previously. Teaching and learning are both good.
137. At the end of Key Stage 3, 67% of students are indicated as achieving Level 5 or higher, slightly above the national figure. According to teacher assessment, significantly fewer boys reach level 5 than girls. This would suggest boys are performing significantly worse than nationally with girls performing significantly better. The work seen during the inspection did not support this, and boys and girls are achieving similar standards in lessons.
138. Key Stage 4 attainment has improved since the previous inspection and is now higher than the national average. Students also gain better results in design and technology than the average of their other subjects. GCSE textiles and food results were particularly good with 100% of students taking textiles gaining A*-C grades. GCSE results in all materials show an upward trend over the last three years. Students' performance in the different design and technology specialisms is marked, for example, students taking resistant materials gain 64% A*-C grades.
139. In 1999 all students entered for A-level design and technology gained an A-E grade against only 90% nationally. The number of students achieving A and B grades matched the national figure of 25%. Excellent Year 13 projects were seen during the inspection week, several of which are of a high standard.
140. Students are enthusiastic about design and technology and produce high quality products in a range of materials. Attitudes amongst students are excellent. Students behave well and are able to concentrate for lengthy periods. They show respect for equipment and materials provided. When working in pairs, students co-operate well and respect the views of others. Students are willing to seek help and accept the advice given. Students show considerable initiative. This is particularly so in examination project work.
141. A good balance of designing and making is planned into the teaching of food and textiles but in resistant materials and electronics at Key Stage 3, opportunities for students to engage in worthwhile design are limited. Students' confidence when designing increases as they

progress through the school with GCSE and A-level candidates producing stunning individual work in a wide range of materials. During a theme on recycling, textiles students in Year 11 made a turtle foot stool, chair cushions and baby bedding. The standard of work was superb, as were the A-level hi-fi cabinets that looked very professional.

142. Students are confident users of information technology and make use of the school computer rooms when making products, researching and for their design folios. A good example is the Year 8 food technology pasta project. Students skilfully use desktop publishing software to combine product information and graphic design onto the net for a box. Sixth Form students use CAD (computer aided design) software to produce complex, accurate technical drawings of their projects.
143. All students experience work with electronics through a door sign project in Key Stage 3. However, opportunities for computer control are severely restricted due to lack of suitable hardware and software.
144. The quality of teaching observed was never less than satisfactory with many good lessons and some very good or excellent. The best teaching was observed in food, textiles and A-level work where skilled teachers with extensive knowledge and experience, engage students in a wide variety of projects using a range of materials. Teachers challenge students to develop innovative designs, refining them to accommodate the limitations of available materials and processes. Teaching in resistant materials relies on a number of experienced part time teachers and some groups are taught by more than one teacher. Difficulties were observed where one student described conflicting advice he was receiving from the two teachers who taught him. The subject has gone to great lengths to minimise the disruption by detailed planning and thorough record keeping. Standards of work for these groups seen during inspection were in line with recent results. A recent full-time appointment has addressed this problem from September.
145. Students rise to the challenge presented by design and technology, producing high quality products. They become self critical of their own work and that of others. One student overcame problems with staining solid and veneered oak components to achieve a consistent effect. The technician support in resistant materials is used more effectively than reported in the previous inspection report. His time is spent maintaining equipment, preparing materials and as an 'expert' consultant by students. The lack of any technical support in food and textiles means that teachers are currently diverted from essential preparation and management tasks to carry out basic cleaning and preparation of materials. This is an inefficient use of their time and expertise.
146. Students with a statement of special educational needs were seen to make good progress. They were well supported by teachers and learning support assistants were very effective in enabling these students to access the work in design and technology. Gifted and talented students were seen being challenged to produce high quality work, evidence of which is the number who gain high grades in external examinations.
147. The quality of students design folders is a clear indication that project management remains a strength as was highlighted in the previous report. They contain ample evidence of students' ideas and decisions as they become refined into final working drawings and plans for production. The range of graphic techniques and media is narrow. Pencil drawing, coloured pencils and some pastels are used but little evidence is seen of other media.
148. Accommodation for the subject is adequate although group sizes in the high 20s is causing overcrowding in several rooms. One of the workshops is inadequate for the group of 27 Year 9 students doing practical work. Crowding around machines is a potential safety hazard that requires urgent attention. Statutory requirements for health and safety are being

met with records of equipment inspections and risk assessments in place. Workshops for resistant materials have benefited significantly from recent self-help redecoration and the fitting of design worktables. The excellent displays of work seen throughout the specialist rooms are used very effectively to celebrate good work, motivate students and directly support teaching and learning. This extended to a very good display of work in the school entrance hall.

149. The leadership and management of design and technology is very good. The experienced head of department leads by example and enjoys the support of subject staff. There is a clear ethos, thorough planning and effective organisation. Teachers co-operate well and a collegiate approach is evident with teachers being comfortable when other adults are in the room during lessons, which enables monitoring and evaluation to be effective. The balance of projects and materials is good except for the previously mentioned lack of CAD/CAM and computer control up to Year 11. Key Stage 3 experiences provide a good basis for the range of courses offered in Key Stage 4.
150. Currently design and technology does not offer alternatives to GCSE and A-levels. A small number of students are offered a community crafts course in Key Stage 4. This is valued by the students who engage in projects around school and in the local community. These include making new seats to replace broken ones in the lecture theatre, gardening around school and projects in local sheltered housing for the elderly. Although there is evidence that previous students, with the help of the teacher, have used this course as a route into local employment, this course does not currently attract any external accreditation.
151. Informal assessment of work during lessons is done very effectively. Teachers use sensitive questions and support, targeted at groups and individuals. Extensive records of formal assessments are kept and the subject is trialing methods of involving students in setting targets for further work. The subject is using four different sets of assessment criteria. This is confusing to staff and students and prevents an accurate picture of progress from being formed. A consistent set of assessment criteria related to National Curriculum levels and examination grades is not yet in place.
152. The high quality of students' work is possible due to very careful management of resources and by asking students to contribute to the cost of projects. There are also instances of teachers paying for resources which is not acceptable.
153. Since the previous inspection, strong leadership and hard work from a team of committed teachers has built on previous strengths, addressed issues and improved the quality of design and technology education at the school.

GEOGRAPHY

154. Overall standards of achievement in geography at the end of Key Stage 3 are just above the national average. They are above the national average by the end of Key Stage 4 and well above by the end of Year 13. Standards have improved in geography in Years 7 to 11 since the previous inspection, whilst in Years 12 and 13 the high standards reported last time have been upheld.
155. In the teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 just over half of students reached or exceed Level 6. The greater proportion of these were girls. The main reason for this lies in the assessment procedures that particularly reward diligence and good presentation rather than content. In Year 7 all students quickly develop good enquiry and data-processing skills through local fieldwork activities. By Year 8 many students are able to present valid arguments for and against planning decisions about land use. In Year 9 most students can understand the relative importance of siting factors for different types of industries and how

these factors change over time. Most students have a good factual knowledge and have a secure understanding of key concepts. In lessons students do not get sufficient opportunities to develop their reasoning and analytical skills through extended oral answers and presentations. Some students make very effective use of information technology in their homework activities.

156. Overall standards of attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 are good. They are outstandingly good for boys, but are only average for girls. This is in marked contrast to the situation at the end of Year 9 where girls outperform boys. In 1999, 79% of boys and 46% of girls obtained a GCSE grade in the range A* to C. More boys than girls opt for the subject at GCSE. Boys who take geography usually do better in this subject than in most of the other subjects that they take, whilst the reverse is the case for girls. Boys particularly benefit from the practical learning strategies that are adopted in the GCSE course. They do especially well in coursework assignments and make considerable use of information technology skills. The number of students who go on to study geography at A-level has traditionally been small, but more students than usual have been recruited into the current Year 12. A-level results have been consistently very good since the previous inspection, with a high proportion of A and B grade passes and no failures over the past five years. In Year 13 students speak lucidly and analytically about such issues as sustainable tourism and can evaluate their own performance in test questions using the marking criteria.
157. There have been some improvements since the last inspection in attainment in Years 7 to 9, especially with lower ability students, but there is insufficient progress on encouraging more able students to make fuller use of their thinking skills. In the previous inspection report it was stated that there was a need for more oral work, and this remains so. Opportunities for inter-active discussion, evaluation and synthesis are lacking. GCSE results have risen from 1996 to 1999, especially for boys and A-level results have remained very good.
158. The overall quality of teaching is good, and has improved since the previous inspection. The greater proportion of teaching at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory, whilst at Key Stage 4 most teaching is good and in the Sixth Form it is very good. At Key Stage 3 teachers follow a tightly planned route through a series of units of work. Teaching is methodical and expectations are often high. Sometimes too much emphasis is placed on the completion of written tasks from worksheets and textbooks at the expense of gaining new understanding from a range of sources, or on teacher expositions that are insufficiently illustrated with maps, diagrams and other visual images. In many instances, teaching at Key Stage 4 is purposeful and places a strong emphasis upon the skills required to succeed in examinations. Teaching at A-level is extremely effective in enabling students to take a great deal of responsibility for their own learning.
159. At the time of the previous inspection marking was considered to be too brief. Currently, most books and files are frequently checked and summary comments are offered. These comments tend to relate mostly to personal effort and commitment and do not provide enough structured guidance about how work could be improved further, especially in Years 7 to 10. Learning is usually very purposeful and behaviour is well managed. Students do not have a full understanding of their targets for each unit of work, and the extent to which they are reaching them. Arrangements for the assessment of students' progress are being improved with the help of computerised records, but marks and grades are inadequately linked to national standards in order to provide valid benchmarks for analysing performance patterns between students and over time.
160. A newly appointed subject leader has drawn up imaginative plans for the development of the subject that are based on a perceptive evaluation of the current strengths and weaknesses in the subject plus a recognition of the need to respond to changing national requirements. There is good support from two experienced and capable teachers. Together, these three

teachers have the capability, insight and determination to ensure that current improvement plans are realised.

HISTORY

161. Standards of attainment in history are consistently higher than standards nationally in all key stages. This is an improvement since the previous inspection report.
162. In 1999 and in previous years the results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were well above national averages in terms of the percentages of students achieving the expected standards for their age. Girls do relatively better than boys. Attainment at the end of Year 9 as demonstrated in lessons and in books is good. For example, students show good knowledge and understanding of the reasons the Nazis gave for the persecution of the Jews. The more perceptive can make links to other periods in history when persecution took place. However, the majority of students are insecure in their grasp of chronology at this stage.
163. At the time of the previous inspection GCSE results were in line with national averages and since then they have been substantially above. In 1999 80% of students attained grades A*-C, well above the national figures. However, relatively few achieved the highest grades so that students did better on average in their other subjects than they did in history. Current attainment in GCSE classes is good and Year 11 demonstrate a mature ability, for example, when they interpret the viewpoints of the different agencies involved in the Cuban Missile Crisis.
164. Results at A-level have been consistently above national figures. In 1999 all students passed , 38% of them at the two highest grades, this exceeds national averages, and the average points score in history is higher than the overall school average. Year 13 students demonstrate very keen analytical thinking and construct lucid arguments on topics such as female suffrage.
165. Standards of attainment have risen since the previous inspection. The subject team has responded well to the issues raised and has made good progress in assessment procedures, the use of computers and evolving methods and materials to improve the learning of students in Key Stage 3.
166. The overall quality of teaching in history is never less than satisfactory and is good or very good in 60% of lessons. The quality of learning is equally as good. In the best lessons, teachers make learning objectives clear so that students know what they are going to learn and can apply their prior learning to the new topic. Teachers' explanations are confident and staff capitalise on good relationships to fire enthusiasm and interest in their students. Good lessons are consistently characterised by methodical, clearly explained teaching points that provide routes to learning for the different ability groups. The adoption of writing frames, spider diagrams and well-displayed key words structures the students' learning and supports good extended writing. The progress of low attaining students and those with special educational needs is sound and sometimes good due to extra support, judicious use of group work and appropriately modified resources. Questioning is generally good and students are given sufficient opportunities to respond to ideas and information. Marking of the work of the examination classes is good, but it is less helpful in supporting younger students' understanding of how to improve. Some Year 7 class work and homework is insufficiently challenging for the most able students.
167. There is good leadership which fosters a sense of shared purpose. Development planning is sound, but lack clear links to standards, and information gained from closer monitoring of results, teaching and learning. Schemes of work are generally helpful but lack a clear identification of the key skills, concepts and understanding to be taught at each level.

Information technology is well developed in the use of word processing, desktop publishing and the Internet but the use of databases and spreadsheets is underdeveloped.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

168. Overall attainment in information technology is well above that found nationally. At the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 it is very good, and in the Sixth Form attainment in business studies A-level is very good. This is an improvement since the previous inspection
169. At the end of Key Stage 3, 86% of students are assessed by their teachers to be at Level 5 or higher, which is well above the national figure. Girls are achieving higher grades than boys, which mirrors the situation nationally. High quality work occurs during taught information technology lessons in Year 7 where students learn how to operate with a network and build on skills gained in primary school. In Year 8 information technology skills are taught through design and technology and maths. Year 9 students are taught information technology through planned activities across a range of subjects. There is significant evidence of the cross-curricular use of information technology during the extensive open access opportunities for students to use computer rooms.
170. Attainment in Key Stage 4 is very good. The high standards mentioned in the previous report have been maintained with around 90% of students gaining an A* to C grade in information studies GCSE over the last three years. Good work is seen in the Sixth Form, A-level business studies has been offered by the information technology department in recent years and examination results have been very good, 80-90% of students achieving A and B grades compared with 27% nationally. The small numbers of students taking business studies makes comparison risky but recent results show that able students achieve high grades.
171. Students are confident users of the Internet, researching topics, gathering information and then presenting this with analyses using desktop publishing software. Many students have taken advantage of the provision of email accounts and were seen to be actively using these for a variety of purposes.
172. Students are enthusiastic and motivated when using information technology and concentrate for long periods to produce high quality materials. They are well behaved, respect equipment and resources and relationships between students and staff are excellent. When working in pairs, students co-operate well and respect the views of others. Older students become increasingly independent users of information technology resources and demonstrate considerable initiative in their projects.
173. There are extensive opportunities for students to communicate using words and pictures and many subjects make considerable use of the school digital camera. This is used well for a variety of purposes including recording examination project work. Food technology is a prime example of this where products are photographed and the resulting images annotated before being printed and incorporated into students' folders.
174. Mathematics lessons involve students in data handling and modelling through projects based on birthdays, hotel bookings and a theatre project called "Bartholomew Thespians". Logo procedures are produced to explore patterns angles and distances. In science subject specific modelling software is used to explore predator/prey relationships in Year 11. However, opportunities for students to use computers to log data about experiments in science and to control models in design and technology are severely restricted due to lack of hardware and software.

175. Core information technology lessons in Key Stage 4 continue to extend the use of networks and office software using contexts relevant to students such as writing CVs and business letters. Several instances of projects were seen where students had used information technology to write letters requesting information. In design and technology lessons GCSE and Sixth Form students use specialist CAD (computer aided design) software to produce accurate technical drawings of their projects.
176. The quality of teaching in information technology lessons is good or better in all lessons. A significant number of the lessons are very good with some excellent teaching seen in a few lessons. The best teaching is in GCSE and A-level lessons. Skilful teachers use their extensive knowledge and experience to challenge students. Teachers encourage students to present their work to the highest standard using advanced techniques. Best practice is occasionally used to improve the teaching in other lessons. Where teaching is good, short-term objectives are set during lessons to maintain pace. Question and answer is not used consistently to check understanding and to challenge students. Opportunities for students to use information technology to bridge geographical and cultural divides are currently limited although modern foreign languages have recently introduced an email link with Latvia.
177. Students with a statement of special educational needs make good progress. Teachers and learning support assistant's work well together helping these students to access the work in information technology. Gifted and talented A-level students are confident and conscientious in their preparations for an assessed task. Web page design is being introduced and these students have made good progress in producing pages for the school site.
178. Teachers cope very well with two operating systems and different versions of the same software. On two occasions when problems occurred with the network and hardware, teachers dealt with the situation in a confident professional way minimising disruption for students. Information technology resources are mainly located in four computer rooms with small numbers of computers in subject areas such as science and design and technology and in the school library. The ratio of computers to students is broadly in line with the national average and an adequate range of software is available. The specialist rooms are adequate in size with two adjoining rooms being used for some large groups. The problems with this arrangement reported in the previous report were not evident during this inspection. One of the computer rooms is located in an old outside block in a poor state of repair. The environment of this room is not conducive to quality work. The information technology resources are very well used both in timetabled information technology lessons and when booked by other subjects. Rooms are open before and after school and at lunch times on every weekday. Sixth Form students supervise one of the rooms and also manage user accounts, resetting passwords for students. They take the role very seriously and are very effective in supporting younger students.
179. Information technology is very well led by an enthusiastic and skilled subject leader who works tirelessly to improve provision. There is a clear vision for the subject and policies and documentation are all in place. Delivery is planned in a deliberate and thorough manner consulting with the large number of staff involved in teaching the subject. The information technology task group is a key element in this. Support for teachers is freely offered and training has been organised on a regular basis. The subject leader is closely involved with a major initiative called the INTEL Project. This has already benefited the school training four staff on office software. The modern languages subject leader is one of these teachers and is very enthusiastic about the opportunities this project has brought to the subject.
180. Technician support is shared with science and their role in information technology is to support users and ensure equipment is operating effectively. Specialist training is not available for all technical staff.

181. Informal assessment of students' progress during lessons is very effective with staff targeting comments sympathetically to the capability of individual students. Formal assessments are well planned both in core information technology and through projects in other subjects.
182. Comprehensive records are kept and regular moderation meetings ensure consistent standards are being applied particularly where cross-curricular teaching takes place. The quality of display is very good in all specialist information technology rooms and these are being used to support teaching. They are also used to celebrate good work and motivate students.
183. Information technology consumables are very well managed with very little sign of waste. Hardware and software are well targeted with processing power well matched to the demands of tasks. There is a clear plan for developments but this is not costed to include a long-term replacement plan for hardware and software. The staff have high expectations and work hard to maintain and improve standards.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

184. Attainment in modern foreign languages is good in Key Stages 3 and 4, and very good in the Sixth Form. Many more students are entered for the GCSE examination than at the time of the previous inspection, and standards have been maintained.
185. Students study one modern foreign language in Year 7, either French or German, and both in Year 8 and 9. By the end of Key Stage 3 a high percentage of students is working at levels above the national expectation in their first foreign language and attaining higher levels than is expected in their second foreign language. Although more girls perform at high levels, the boys perform better than boys do nationally. Students recall a good range of vocabulary. They initiate and sustain conversations well, speak spontaneously in the foreign language and understand the key facts in written texts and recordings with some unfamiliar language. For example, Year 9 students interviewed a German visitor and noted information gained in appropriate sections on a form. Students on the register of special educational needs attain appropriate levels, particularly in responding to listening, speaking and reading tasks.
186. All students have gained a GCSE grade in a modern foreign language in recent years. In 1999 a higher percentage of candidates gained a grade between A* and C than candidates nationally with notable successes in German particularly at grade C. In lessons high attainers read full-page press articles and use their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary to extract and re-tabulate information. For example, in a Year 11 lesson on health, students completed a similar article in which words had been missed out. At times, average and lower attainers found tasks difficult, worked slowly or did not complete them.
187. At A-level the students have consistently gained grades in line or higher than students nationally. In 1999 candidates gained very high grades. Currently there are no Year 13 students studying a language. Year 12 students work at a high level for this stage. All students ably sustain communications in the foreign language. In a German lesson they made sense of very rapidly spoken information about stereotyping in jobs. In a French lesson they understood a text about homelessness and were able to discuss it using new vocabulary from the text.
188. Attainment at Key Stage 3 is now more consistent than at the time of the previous inspection. In 1995 the number of candidates entered for GCSE was small but, with the exception of a few students who are not studying a language, all students now take GCSE and in recent years all have gained a grade in either French or German. The percentage of students gaining a grade A* to C continues to be above the national average. The performance of boys has improved; they perform better than boys nationally and in 1999 they performed slightly

better than the girls in French. Success at A-level has been sustained and in 1999 students gained outstanding results.

189. Strengths in teaching, learning and subject leadership identified in the previous inspection have been sustained. Staffing has been improved so that all students are now taught by specialist linguists. The school continues to employ two part time foreign language assistants who contribute to the strengths of teaching speaking skills to the students.
190. The good range of residential visits to France and Germany noted in the previous inspection has been further enhanced and represents exceptionally good extra curricular provision. Foreign trips cater for different age groups and stages of learning and arrangements are in place for Year 12 to undertake work experience abroad.
191. Teaching is good or better in two thirds of lessons. Teachers have high expectations and provide well-judged challenges particularly for beginners and in Key Stage 4 for abler students. For example, students in Year 7 were challenged at the end of a lesson to say as much of the language taught in it without a prompt as possible. In another Year 7 lesson students were challenged to repeat the language practised with good pronunciation and to evaluate each other's speaking. In both cases all students were highly motivated and completed the task successfully. In Key Stage 4 teachers introduce texts drawn not only from course books but also from the press and the Internet on issues of current concern and interest to young people such as health and the environment. Teachers highlight key vocabulary on the board or on an overhead transparency and reinforce vocabulary in carefully staged steps. They set imaginative tasks which support and encourage students to progress from copying role plays or ranking statements or matching questions and answers to expressing their opinions and talking about their experiences. For example, in Year 11 one group simulated a debate about smoking while another group spoke about the actions they take to protect the environment.
192. Teachers are skilled at conducting the lesson and nurturing conversations with students in the foreign language and using English judiciously to discuss learning strategies and check understanding of grammatical structures. Correspondingly, students of all ages and attainment levels cope well with listening to their teacher, to visitors and to audio cassettes and frequently speak spontaneously in the foreign language with competence.
193. Setting writing tasks in which language and information technology skills are assessed has encouraged students to plan creative writing and presentation carefully particularly for the end of Year 9 assessment when students produce and complete an information form. Email links with peers in Germany is being trialled with Year 9 students.
194. Teachers promote vocabulary learning by their enthusiasm for a briskly paced variety of games such as choral repetition, guess the hidden word, describe the picture and computer games. All students enjoy these activities.
195. Teachers state learning objectives clearly at the beginning of lessons but rarely comment on the progress students have made by the end of the lesson. They set and explain homework clearly. When marking they indicate good points in students' writing but tend not to give advice about what the student needs to focus on next to improve.
196. In a few lessons there were weak features such as a lack of support materials, a shortage of course-books and no enjoyable consolidation activities for average and lower attaining students. In a couple of lessons with mixed ability sets in which a few students were uncooperative the lack of differentiated support was a contributory factor to students' disaffection. Learning support assistants gave effective reassurance and support to students

with statements of special educational needs and to other students near them. This helps the students to persevere with tasks they are finding difficult.

197. Teachers maximise the benefits of contacts with foreign language assistants, native speaker visitors and A-level student helpers through planned and targeted activities. For example, rehearsing questions and answers on current topics in small groups. In a Year 9 lesson students had a form to complete which guided them in devising questions to initiate and sustain an interview and note down their findings. The teacher facilitated the interview at times when unfamiliar language needed explanation or rephrasing.
198. Teachers provide well for students' particular needs. For the last two years teachers have provided an intensive language morning in June for students in Year 9 who opt to study their second foreign language in Key Stage 4. After school lessons in Latin provide an enrichment activity for talented students who enjoy reading and analysing texts. Year 10 students are making good progress towards gaining grades A* to C at GCSE. The department has entered three bilingual students for GCSE early in 1999 in line with their established procedures.
199. The subject leader encourages reflection on teaching and learning strategies by reviewing students' work and progress at the frequent departmental meetings. Subject planning is coherent and benefits from collaborative discussions on how to improve approaches. For example, peer contact by email is currently being trialled in Year 9 German. Teachers are well informed, they attend in-service training courses which relate to examination requirements and to teaching and learning strategies and disseminate new ideas to colleagues.

MUSIC

200. Attainment in music is lower than that reported in the previous inspection. Although a lot of very good extra curricular work is done in the subject, results in the teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 are low, and indicate that the boys are doing particularly poorly. GCSE and A-level courses have recommenced since the previous inspection, and standards are improving.
201. At the end of Key Stage 3 students' attainment is below national expectation in music. Very few students reach high levels of attainment. The majority of students work at or just above the standard expected nationally with over a third achieving below it. Girls are outperforming boys by over 25%.
202. Key Stage 3 students are developing well as performers, although attainment in all but one lesson was below that expected for their age. They are slowly developing pride in written work and presentation, but the rehearsal and practice for better performances, particularly in maintaining an independent part in an ensemble, is weak. They also do not always use their imagination more in composing and improve their retention of knowledge and skills in Years 7 and 8. A number of students from each key stage bring instruments to use in lessons, to the advantage of all.
203. GCSE results have shown a rising trend above national averages. Students are well motivated with respect for staff, each other and their environment. The most able Year 11 students are compiling compositions of substantial length involving advanced modulation, metre changes and interesting structure. Year 10 students respond well to the expertise of a jazz specialist in a session on improvisation.
204. A-level examinations begin this year. Year 13 students are well motivated and willing to recognise areas of weakness, seeking help, for example, in their reconstruction of four part chorales. Written work provides some good examples of analysis of a range of music text showing sound knowledge of keys, modulation, style and structure. Whilst composing, Sixth

Form students display awareness of a range of techniques and idioms as well as a familiarity with how to score for a number of instruments.

205. Since the previous inspection, the music department has undergone staffing changes. The present subject leader has been in place for two and a half years and progress is marked especially by the success of the GCSE groups and the commencement of an A-level course. This progress has been enhanced by a number of extra-curricular activities and visits, but the subject leader now has an unacceptable workload.
206. Teaching is always at least satisfactory with half of the lessons being graded good or better. Both teachers display very good subject knowledge backed by good organisation and classroom management. Long term planning is in hand but the music development plan does not yet prioritise its objectives. Lesson planning at Key Stage 3 does not always indicate the learning objectives, or differentiation, pace and challenge. The Key Stage 3 curriculum has strengths, especially its practical nature, but the scheme of work is weak and time allocation is low. Whilst the scheme of work fulfils the requirements of the National Curriculum, Year 7 and 8 classes do not receive enough time to cover the course in sufficient depth and breadth; this is compounded by the fact that some Year 7 students have music for half a year and some have music for two terms. Some of these lessons are split by a mid-morning break. This does give all students an equal opportunity to achieve high standards. Standards in Year 8 classes suffer from the discontinuity of having only two terms of music tuition over the year. Only Year 9 students benefit from music lessons every week. The GCSE and A-level courses work well due to the extra time provided by the subject leader. In order to cope with the curricular needs of all of its students, the school needs to address the timetable anomalies and the staffing implications.
207. The department is well served by some good and very good peripatetic support. One lesson observed was very good, whilst the absence of a pupil allowed another teacher to make a significant impact on a Year 10 class. Students appear to enjoy these lessons. Over 100 students benefit from these lessons. There is a lack of sufficient classroom instrumental resources, especially percussion. Some keyboards are out of date. Despite the use of “Cubase VST” and “Personal Composer” on one system, there is a lack of good information technology equipment in the music department. Much of the GCSE and A-level work is disadvantaged by the lack of access to an adequate provision of hardware and software. There is some, limited, provision but this is far from satisfactory: the computers available on these occasions do not have soundcards, speakers or headphones. The department does not have enough space, particularly for performances, group work and recording.
208. The department has good links with primary feeder schools and parents. It provides a variety of extra-curricular activities that are appreciated by the students, although take-up is variable. There are many opportunities for cultural visits to shows and concerts. The subject has also benefited from the visits of multi-cultural musicians in Gamelan and African Drumming.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

209. Standards overall in physical education are in line with national expectations, as they were at the time of the previous inspection. By the end of Key Stage 3 students’ attainment as indicated by teacher assessment is well above the national average, but GCSE results are lower than expected. A-level results are good.
210. At the end of Key Stage 3 standards are good, with nearly 90% of students being judged as achieving or exceeding national expectations. They show a good knowledge of the principles of an effective warm up and an understanding of the activities, which can be used safely to raise pulse rate, increase muscle flexibility and joint mobility. In game situations, students show good movement off the ball, use width in attack and show tactical awareness.

Assessments of their own and others technique is generally accurate, but seldom used to improve performance. In gymnastics selected actions are linked together with control and accuracy. Students show clear starting and finishing positions and are able to modify their actions and sequences. They are also able to describe what makes an acceptable sequence but use of technical language is lacking. Students work well together in mixed gender groups

211. GCSE results for 1999 indicate some underachievement, with only 43% of students achieving higher grades. This is similar to that at the time of the previous inspection, but in comparison to the national figure of 50% it is low. This has been the case for the last three years. An analysis of the results also indicates that students do not do as well in physical education compared to their achievements in other subjects. Girls achieved lower results, with only 16% achieving higher grades in comparison to 56% of boys. The department has not yet fully addressed these shortcomings.
212. By the end of Key Stage 4 there are wide variations in levels of performance in football, with boys exhibiting good basic control in game situations but girls lacking basic skills or positional awareness. In basketball there are no significant gender differences, students are able to catch, dribble, pass and shoot on the move, showing good control and consistent performance in closed practices. They play effectively within a game, showing positional awareness, appropriate shooting, dribbling and passing technique. Students understand why they have to improve their technique and sustain concentration to improve performance. They are able to take on the role of official and recognise and call travelling violations. Good note taking is a feature in GCSE lessons where students show an interest in their work, and a good level of understanding. Evaluative skills are well developed but these are infrequently used to plan practices to improve their own or others performances.
213. Post-16 students achieve very highly with an increasing number of students taking A-level and these regularly achieve 10% above the national average for B+ grades. The numbers achieving the Community Sports Leaders Award is increasing. The students study the subject thoroughly, and many bring knowledge and skills from other subjects they are studying, such as science, to benefit their work in physical education. They use facilities such as video recording well to prepare for their examinations. Sixth form students plan and run a swimming gala and sports day for children from a local special school, and they help during Key Stage 3 curricular physical education and support the running of school teams.
214. The previous inspection identified that students were enthusiastic and well motivated, and this is still the case. Mature behaviour, sustained concentration and controlled movements are observed regularly. Students apply effort to their work, they understand what is expected and always work at a satisfactory level on task showing an interest in their work and changing quickly. A large number of students independently start warm up routines. High participation levels are the norm however a number of the students arrive late for lessons. They listen to instructions and take responsibility for their own actions when working both co-operatively and competitively. Behaviour is generally very good, students help each other in most activities, sharing space, making good use of equipment and working well in mixed gender groups.
215. In Key Stage 3 lessons the quality of teaching is always at least satisfactory, with two thirds of lessons being graded good or very good. In Key Stage 4 teaching is less strong, three-quarters being graded as satisfactory or better. Teachers show a good understanding of the National Curriculum programmes of study and the activities being taught. In the best lessons planning is informative and identifies clear objectives, linked to earlier learning. However, this is not always the case and significant variations are seen in the quality of planning. A lack of differentiated activities hinders the progress of some girls and lower ability students and fails to challenge the more able.

216. Expectations in Key Stage 3 lessons are generally high and these promote high standards. Teacher expectations Key Stage 4 in core physical education and GCSE lessons are often good, but occasionally unsatisfactory. Good questioning develops understanding and links work to earlier tasks. A wide range of teaching styles is used to enhance learning. In the best lessons targets are set for future work and good use is made of demonstration and questioning. Efficient organisation and good behaviour management enhances learning. Weaknesses exist when lessons lack structure, efficient organisation, pace or fail to identify clear learning outcomes. The quality and use of diagnostic marking is inconsistent, but good use is made of formative assessment, especially in Key Stage 3.
217. In Key Stage 3 there is clear evidence of progression within and across lessons, but in Key Stage 4 this is less easily identified. However, there is a very close relationship between the quality of learning and the teaching method selected. Students' skills, knowledge and understanding are best developed where teaching is pitched at an appropriate and challenging level and is crafted to ensure that the correct methodology is employed.
218. The Key Stage 3 programmes of study ensure coverage of the statutory curriculum. At Key Stage 4 the statutory regulations are covered but there are significant gaps within the core options programme. Extra curricular opportunities are extensive and well supported with a large number of students continuing in sport when they leave the school.
219. The department provides a very caring atmosphere in which students can learn and grow, but monitoring of attainment and curriculum coverage lacks rigour. An assessment system is in place but completion has been inconsistent, criteria are not linked to the National Curriculum recommended outcomes and judgements are not based on specific pupil attainment. The department does not use teacher assessments to target individual students in order to raise attainment in GCSE.
220. Leadership of the department is supportive and informal, with many strengths. All teachers and students are valued and this leads to a department that works well together but lacks sufficient challenge. Standards in GCSE examinations are too low, and clear direction to remedy this is lacking. Documentation is helpful, schemes ensure progression, risk assessments have been recently completed and there is a shared vision and commitment within the department to provide the best possible experiences for all students. A department development plan is in place but outcomes have not been monitored for the last two years. Resources are well managed and deployed although large teaching groups and team teaching strategies can have a negative impact on the quality of learning. Learning resources are good and computer networks are available for teaching groups. The department provides extensive enrichment opportunities for all students and a significant number of students have gained representative honours, leadership or officiating awards.
221. The department has addressed most of the issues raised in the previous inspection. Teaching at Key Stage 3 now has few weaknesses and is always satisfactory, immature behaviour is no longer an issue. Although GCSE results have declined since the previous inspection, A-level results continue to be good. Students at Key Stage 3 are able to improve their own performances and accommodation is acceptable.
222. The strengths of the department are the team ethos, caring relationships, quality of teaching at Key Stage 3, the extra curricular programme and the high regard for moral values and emphasis on interpersonal development. Areas for development are related to leadership and educational direction and include curriculum planning and organisation at Key Stage 4, monitoring, evaluation, assessment and the use of data to improve standards at GCSE.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

223. At the end of Key Stage 3 the attainment of students is at least above, and often well above the average expectations of the locally Agreed Syllabus, these results are consistent with the previous inspection report. At the end of Key Stage 4 both boys and girls achieve high standards in relation to the Agreed Syllabus, and those taking the GCSE short course did particularly well. The small number of students taking A-level examinations achieve good results, but those taking AS-level do not. Overall the standards in religious education are higher than at the time of the previous inspection, but statutory requirements are not met for all students in Key Stage 4 or the Sixth Form.
224. Key Stage 3 students have secure knowledge and talk with confidence about the key features of a mosque, aspects of the Holocaust and details from the sacrifice of Isaac. They apply knowledge with maturity. This was evident in a Year 7 activity where individual students took the role of characters from the story of Abraham and Isaac. They demonstrate skill in developing reasoned arguments and show sophisticated understanding of concepts, for example when discussing personal choices in a lesson on the Holocaust and confronting racist issues in work on Islam. With little preparation, Year 9 students were able to offer sophisticated presentations explaining how God was like everyday objects, for example "God is like a coat hanger because you can hang your troubles on God - he is very supportive".
225. Students relate what they have learned to their own experience, talking about the importance of trust in relation to an activity where a blindfolded student relied on a friend to guide them around the school. They show interest and involvement, especially in the wide-ranging discussion which is a particular strength of the department. Students are able to talk articulately about what they have learned, what is expected of them and how they can improve.
226. Currently all students in Key Stage 4 follow the syllabus for the short course in GCSE religious education, and students may opt to enter for the examination. The first group of students opting to enter for this examination in 1999 achieved well above the national average. In class, students show knowledge and understanding of the issues involved in a debate on euthanasia, and are able to offer reasoned arguments suggesting where responsibility for terminating life should lie, relating this to religious perspectives. Boys and girls respond with sensitivity to images of prisoners on death row, and talk about homophobia with maturity. Students show particular skill in debating issues in a reasoned and mature way, showing respect for each other's beliefs. They respond very well to the brisk pace of lessons and the variety of tasks. Standards are high in the area of the syllabus they can study, but insufficient time is available to meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus or to deliver the examination syllabus in full, therefore statutory requirements are not being met.
227. A small number of students choose to pursue a course in religious studies at A-level. Generally they make excellent progress and achievements are well above the national average. The results of students who opt to take AS-level have been lower than national expectations, although this outcome can be explained by the small numbers of entries and factors outside the control of the school. Students demonstrate secure understanding of concepts such as utilitarianism and self-determinism and are able to apply and extend prior knowledge, for example, when debating the existence of purgatory, heaven and hell. High levels of curiosity and enthusiasm are maintained. Even when debate becomes impassioned, students respond with respect to the views of others.
228. Students who are not pursuing religious studies at A-level experience at least a short module of religious education in Year 12, although provision is not consistent for all students. This is an improvement since the previous inspection, but all students still do not receive their full

entitlement to religious education, and the school does not meet statutory requirements. No teaching in this category was seen during the week of inspection.

229. The standards of attainment reported in the previous inspection have been maintained and improved, as has the quality of teaching. Students on all courses make very good progress. They continue to be well motivated, enjoy the subject and particularly value the respect shown for their views. The main issue that was raised in the previous inspection, provision at Key Stage 4 and in Year 12 has improved, although statutory requirements are still not being met. The departments resources have been improved and extended and are now satisfactory.
230. The quality of teaching throughout the department is never less than good, and often excellent. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and share this appropriately with students, for example, drawing attention to the use of a prayer mat, as illustrated in the recently televised '*Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves*'. Planning is thorough, identifying clear learning objectives which are shared with the students. Effective use is made of timed tasks to maintain interest and support students of all abilities.
231. The best lessons contain a combination of strategies, for example, structured discussion, paired or group activities, written tasks supported by writing frames or structured questions concluding with a brief review of the main issues. Very good use is made of a few well chosen resources, for example, a brief video clip highlighting the perspective of different characters in the story of Abraham and Isaac, an emotive image of a prisoner on death row, a short story of personal experience in a session on racism. Students are encouraged by high expectations and respond appropriately.
232. Regular assessment of work incorporating helpful comments motivates students to achieve highly. A positive learning atmosphere is created where discipline is firm but does not draw attention to poor behaviour. Teaching is less effective where expectations are low, students are unclear what is required of them and activities are sustained for too long.
233. Teaching is appropriate to the needs of all students and supports effective learning. An environment is created where both boys and girls are able to achieve. Teaching methods are particularly effective in encouraging boys to discuss sensitive issues with confidence. Students with special educational needs are generally well supported. Insufficient use is made of challenging tasks for students who are gifted or talented. The teaching of literacy skills is good, particularly through the use of technical vocabulary and writing frames, and the department is extending its range of tasks to develop numeracy skills.
234. The leadership and management of the department is excellent. The strengths of the team are effectively deployed. Monitoring and evaluation of the subject is regular, detailed and effective. Accommodation is very good, allowing for flexibility of movement and the use of a range of strategies. Excellent use is made of a wide variety of resources. There are planned opportunities to use information and communication technology effectively, but there is a shortage of up-to date equipment in the department. All teachers of religious education implement the departmental policy for assessment, marking work regularly and offering helpful comments for improvement. New developments in religious education have been incorporated effectively into department practices. The subject leader ensures that the department is effectively briefed on current educational issues and uses these to promote a very high standard of teaching and learning