

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **GOSFORD HILL SCHOOL**

Kidlington, Oxford

LEA area: Oxfordshire

Unique reference number: 123241

Headteacher: Mr D J Rowley

Reporting inspector: Mrs J Wild  
2646

Dates of inspection: 3 – 6 April 2000

Inspection number: 186761

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensve

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 to 19

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Oxford Road  
Kidlington

Postcode: Oxford  
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Telephone number: 01865 374971

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs A Street

Date of previous inspection: 5 February 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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Jeanette Wild	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it? The school's results and pupils' achievements How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
Valerie Bradley	Lay inspector	Equal opportunities	Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Shona Walton	Team inspector	English English as an additional language	How well are pupils taught?
Philip Crumpton	Team inspector		How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
Robert Sawyer	Team inspector	Mathematics	
Nick Daws	Team inspector	Science	
Paul Clewes	Team inspector	Design and technology	
Jenny Hazlewood	Team inspector	Information technology	
John Barton	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
Dave Perrett	Team inspector	History	
Chris Durbin	Team inspector	Geography	
Stephen Belinfante	Team inspector	Art	
Garry Jones	Team inspector	Music	
Tony Bailey	Team inspector	Physical education	
Heather Farr	Team inspector	Religious education	
Gerald Lewis	Team inspector	Special educational needs	

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London WC2B 6SE

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Gosford Hill School is a larger than average comprehensive school, educating 1121 pupils in the 11-18 age group. There are currently 523 boys and 598 girls on roll. The school serves a typically suburban catchment area comprising Kidlington and a few smaller villages to the north of Oxford and all socio-economic groups are represented at the school. Additional pupils arrive in small numbers in Year 9 from Oxford City middle schools and the sixth form attracts approximately 14 per cent of its students from Bicester and other secondary schools in the area. The school also operates as the education centre for the local community and is open in the evenings and at weekends for a full community education programme.

The area is one of high employment and the percentage of pupils taking free school meals is well below the national average. Pupils are from a predominantly white background but the school population also includes a small percentage of pupils who represent a range of other cultures. Since the last inspection, the percentage of pupils with English as an additional language has increased and is now higher than at most schools. Similarly, the percentage of pupils identified as having special educational needs has also risen to 24 per cent and this is above the national average, although the percentage of pupils with formal statements is below that found nationally.

Key Stage 2 test results indicate that the overall attainment of pupils on entry to the school at age 11 is above the national average. However, the results of cognitive ability tests given to the Year 7 intake suggest attainment levels broadly in line with the national average, with further evidence that neither the most able nor the most educationally disadvantaged pupils are fully represented.

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

Gosford Hill School is an improving school and the overall standards achieved by pupils in national tests and examinations have steadily risen, in all key stages, since the last inspection. In 1999, overall results in the core subjects in Key Stage 3 were close to the national average. Over the last three years, GCSE examination results have improved in line with the national trend and in 1999 the school's overall results were above the national average. Standards achieved by students in the sixth form have also improved since 1996 and are now close to the national average. Overall, teaching is satisfactory and with the exception of a small minority, pupils' attitudes towards learning are very good. Very good extra-curricular provision, including many opportunities for pupils to become involved in community projects and charity work, has a positive effect on pupils' personal development. Rapid improvements in the quality of leadership and management throughout the school have increased its effectiveness. The school continues to give satisfactory value for money.

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

- The school has been successful in lifting the proportion of grades A\* - C gained in GCSE to above the average level.
- In 1999, every pupil in Year 11 obtained at least one GCSE qualification, which is above the national average.
- The school has been successful in improving the performance of boys in Key Stage 3.
- The attendance of pupils is very good.
- Arrangements for all aspects of education in the sixth form, including teaching, are particularly effective.
- Pastoral care is good.
- Extra-curricular provision is very good.
- The headteacher and the other senior staff provide strong leadership and are moving the school forward.
- Governors provide very effective and active support to the school and are knowledgeable about its strengths and weaknesses.
- All staff have the opportunity to contribute to decisions made by the school. This results in high morale, good use of staff expertise and effective professional development.

### **What could be improved**

- Standards in information technology, modern foreign languages and music should be improved.
- The attitudes and behaviour of the small group of pupils that are indifferent to learning should be improved by making activities, for them, more interesting and motivating.
- Pupils are not always clear about the purpose of a lesson and what teachers expect them to learn by its conclusion. This makes it difficult for them to assess what progress they have made, what they can do well and what they need to do to improve. Intended lesson outcomes should be shared with the pupils and used as a basis for assessment and subsequent lesson planning.
- Lesson planning does not always take enough account of the needs of different groups of pupils. Plans should identify more precisely how the needs of pupils with differing abilities, and differing strengths and weaknesses will be met.
- Development planning at all levels would be more effective if decisions were informed by information gained as a result of a regular cycle of self-review. This would promote a more systematic, rigorous and critical evaluation of current practice and provide secure evidence to underpin the identification of priority areas for improvement.
- There is some variation in the quality of teaching and learning. Current procedures for monitoring are not sufficiently systematic to effectively reduce this variation.
- There is too much variation in how teachers implement school policies, particularly on marking, assessing pupils' learning and handling poor behaviour. Policies are not reviewed for effectiveness regularly enough.
- Although the school's expenditure is closely scrutinised, there are insufficient mechanisms in place by which the governors can adequately assess the cost effectiveness of its spending decisions. Systems should be developed to help governors evaluate whether they are getting appropriate value for money.

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

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



Since the last inspection, the school has made satisfactory overall improvement and in some areas it has improved well. The school's overall results have improved in all key stages but despite improved resources for information technology, standards of achievement are still unsatisfactory in this subject. Since the last inspection, teaching has improved and continues to be of particularly high quality in the sixth form. Provision for pupils with special educational needs and for promoting spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has also improved and is now satisfactory overall. The school has addressed the issue of pupils' under-expectation and underachievement. While clear improvements have been made in this area there is still evidence of underachievement within groups in some subjects. Overall, in Key Stages 3 and 4, there is still insufficient rigour in assessing pupils' academic performance and setting appropriate targets for improvement and the regularity and quality of marking is inconsistent across staff and within departments. More open and effective management systems have been developed that maximise the expertise and involvement of all members of staff. There is still no daily act of collective worship and statutory requirements for religious education in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form are still not fully in place.

## STANDARDS

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

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

<b>Key</b>	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E
very low	E*

*N.B. A degree of caution needs to be exercised in judging the standards achieved in this school against those of 'similar' schools, a category currently based on the proportion of pupils entitled to a free school meal. The common conclusion from a low number of pupils taking free school meals is that the school draws most of its pupils from relatively advantaged families.*

Standards, by the age of 14, are in line with the national average. Results in the 1999 Key Stage 3 tests were average in English and science and above average in mathematics, with boys achieving results above the national average for boys in all three subjects. The girls achieved results above the national average for girls in mathematics, close to the national average for science and below average in English. These results reflect a significant shift in the relative performance of boys and girls in the school over the past four years. Taking all core subjects together over this period, boys' results are above average and those of girls just below. This is against the national trend, where girls are achieving marginally better than boys. This picture is broadly reflected in the standards of work observed in the core subjects during the inspection. In other subjects, standards were above average in history, physical education and design and technology and in line with the national average in geography, art and religious education. Standards were below the national average in music, information technology and modern foreign languages.

GCSE results have improved since the last inspection. In 1999, the percentage of pupils achieving five or more grades A\* - C in GCSE examinations was above both the national

average and the county average. Similarly, the percentage of pupils achieving five or more grades A\* - G was above the national average and the average total GCSE point-score per pupil was also above the national average. All Year 11 pupils obtained at least one GCSE qualification. The results of both boys and girls were above the national average for their gender group. The gap between the average point-scores for boys and girls has narrowed from previous years and is now in line with that found nationally. In relation to the core subjects, differences in the relative performance of boys and girls in English, mathematics and science are similar to those found in Key Stage 3. In English, GCSE results were slightly below the national average, with girls under-performing more significantly than boys in relation to their gender. In science, overall results were in line with the national average but with boys achieving standards above the national average for their gender group and girls below. As in Key Stage 3, in mathematics, results were above average for both boys and girls. Other subjects in which pupils achieved results above the national average in GCSE were physical education, design and technology, geography, English Literature, drama, business studies and religious education. Results were broadly average in art, below average in history and music and well below average in modern foreign languages. Within the school, in relation to their average performance in GCSE examinations, pupils achieved relatively better results in business studies, geography, mathematics, design and technology and the combined science double award. The standard of work seen at Key Stage 4 during the inspection generally reflected the patterns in recent GCSE results.

The table indicates that the standards achieved by students in the sixth form have improved since 1996. In 1999, the average A/AS level point score of candidates entered for two or more A-levels or AS equivalent was close to the national average. Pupils achieved particularly good results in physics, art and mathematics, where there was a high proportion of A and B grades. The performance of students entered for less than two A/AS levels and for candidates entered for Advanced GNVQs were also in line with the national average and in particular, the results for Advanced GNVQ, represent a significant improvement from the 1998 result. The standards of work seen during the inspection generally reflected the examination results.

Overall, pupil achievements, including those with special educational needs, are generally in line with their capabilities. Most pupils achieve the targets set for them and a number achieve better results than expected, particularly in the sixth form where pupils' progress is particularly closely monitored and evaluated. In some subjects there is evidence that the needs of some pupils with different abilities or with behavioural problems are not always fully met.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils like school. The attitude of most pupils to their learning is very good and particularly so in the sixth form. Many pupils participate in organised extra-curricular activities.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour in most lessons and around the school is good. A small minority of pupils are uninterested in learning and troublesome in lessons where activities are not interesting or sufficiently challenging. When inappropriate behaviour is not successfully managed it has an adverse effect on the learning of other pupils.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils are generally polite and the relationships between the majority of pupils are very good. Where bullying occurs, incidents reported are dealt with promptly, firmly and usually successfully. The school maintains its efforts to eradicate the few cases of bullying that persist over longer periods of time.
Attendance	The attendance of nearly all pupils is very good.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching was satisfactory or better in 90 per cent of lessons and was good or very good in 48 per cent of lessons. Ten per cent of lessons were unsatisfactory; the highest proportion of these were in Year 8 in the lessons where the majority of unsatisfactory behaviour was observed. Teaching was at its most effective in the sixth form. In English, mathematics and science, teaching was at least satisfactory in Key Stages 3 and 4, with the highest proportion of good lessons observed in Key Stage 4. Teaching was best in art, design and technology, physical education and religious education with many instances of good and very good teaching in all key stages. In geography, teaching was very good in Key Stage 4 but the quality was less consistent in Key Stage 3. There was no subject where teaching was consistently unsatisfactory. The teaching of literacy and numeracy within the school was satisfactory overall. In many lessons, learning objectives were not shared with pupils. This made it difficult for them to assess their progress and set targets for improvement. Also, in a number of lessons, planning failed to adequately address the needs of different groups of pupils.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school is providing a broad, balanced curriculum which offers its pupils a wide range of experiences and opportunities. Statutory requirements for religious education are not met in Key Stage 4 and post-16. There is inadequate provision for information technology. The modular approach to the teaching of humanities in Key Stage 3 has an adverse effect on progression and continuity.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision for pupils with special educational needs has improved and is now satisfactory overall. Better use is now made of pupils' entry assessment data and the new grouping arrangements in Year 7 enable the needs of pupils with special educational needs to be better targeted. However, individual education plan targets need to be more specific.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Provision is satisfactory and pupils are making sound progress in understanding, speaking and writing English.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Overall provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has improved and is at least satisfactory and sometimes good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Pastoral care is good. The teaching of personal, social and health education is less effective in some Year 7 lessons. Procedures to ensure the health and safety of the pupils are generally satisfactory, with the exception of systems for risk assessment. Systems for pupil assessment and marking need to be more rigorous. Poor behaviour is not always dealt with consistently or effectively.

The school successfully encourages and achieves a good working partnership with most parents. A minority feel they are not well informed and that the school does not respond effectively to complaints. The quality and range of information available to parents is satisfactory. Parental involvement through the Gosford Hill School Association is very good.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher's professional vision and values give clear direction to the school. Senior managers are conscientious and effective. Middle management is variable, but satisfactory overall. More rigour is needed in school and departmental self-review and in the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body is strongly committed to the school and supportive. They have a good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and a clear vision for the future. The cost effectiveness of services requires a more detailed evaluation.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school is effective in analysing its results in relation to local and national benchmarks and in setting appropriate targets for improvement. Monitoring of pupils' progress is well established but strengths and weaknesses of pupils in individual subjects are not sufficiently well analysed in Key Stages 3 and 4.
The strategic use of resources	Learning resources are deployed effectively and the school monitors its spending carefully. Some of the accommodation is in poor condition.

The school has sufficient, well qualified teachers, enough learning support, technical help and enough administrative support.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children like going to school.</li> <li>• The school expects pupils to work hard and do their best.</li> <li>• Children are making good progress.</li> <li>• The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behaviour in the school, particularly in Year 8, including bullying.</li> <li>• Closer partnership with parents.</li> <li>• Helping pupils to become mature and responsible.</li> </ul>

Inspectors generally agree with the parents' positive views and in part, with some of the negative views. They agree that inappropriate behaviour of pupils in some Year 8 lessons is having an adverse effect on the learning of others in the class. However, evidence from lesson observations indicates that the problems are caused by a small minority of pupils and that poor behaviour improves when teaching is at its most effective. The inspectors did not observe inappropriate behaviour outside lessons or bullying, during the inspection week. School records show that where bullying occurs, incidents reported are dealt with promptly, firmly and usually successfully. The school maintains its efforts to eradicate the few cases of bullying that have persisted over longer periods of time. The majority of parents have a good working relationship with the school but there are some weaknesses. In particular, the organisation and management of parent consultation evenings are unsatisfactory in Key Stages 3 and 4.

Inspectors disagree with the view that the school needs to do more to help pupils become mature and responsible adults. The inspection report cites numerous opportunities for pupils to take initiative and responsibility and to take positive action to support those in need of help.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

1. Pupils' standards are in line with national averages at 14, above the national average at 16 and close to the national average in the sixth form. Standards have steadily improved in all key stages since the previous inspection and most pupils achieve the standards of which they are capable in the majority of subjects of the National Curriculum. Examination and test results, evaluation of pupils' written work, discussions with them and lesson observations undertaken during the inspection confirm these judgements.
2. The report includes a comparison of the school's standards with those of 'similar' schools. A degree of caution needs to be exercised in judging the standards achieved in this school against those of 'similar' schools, a category based on the proportion of pupils entitled to a free school meal. In an area of high employment, the percentage of pupils claiming free school meals is well below the national average. The common conclusion from such a low number of pupils taking free school meals is that the school draws most of its pupils from relatively advantaged families. However, evidence shows that the school serves a catchment area with all socio-economic groups represented. In addition, the percentage of pupils identified as having special educational needs is above average for most schools as is the percentage of pupils who have English as an additional language. Together, these figures distort the equation and make simple comparisons with 'similar' schools unreliable.
3. Key Stage 2 test results indicate that the overall attainment of pupils on entry to the school at age 11 is above the national average. However, the results of cognitive ability tests given to the Year 7 intake suggest attainment levels broadly in line with the national average, with further evidence that neither the most able nor the most educationally disadvantaged pupils are fully represented.

#### **Standards by age 14**

4. In 1999, the school's overall test results for Key Stage 3, in the core subjects, were close to the national average for all schools but well below those for 'similar' schools. Results were average in English and science and above average in mathematics.
5. In English, 1999 test results were broadly in line with national averages, with the percentages of pupils achieving Level 5 or above and Level 6 or above in line with the national average. However, the performance of boys was both above the national average for boys and better than that of the girls which was below the national average for girls. No girls achieved a Level 7 and fewer girls than boys achieved a Level 6. In mathematics, both boys and girls exceeded the national average for their gender group and boys' results, in particular, were well above those expected nationally for boys. In mathematics, the percentage of pupils reaching Level 6 or above was above the national average and the percentage of pupils reaching Level 5 or above well above the national figure. In science, boys achieved results above the national average for boys while those of the girls were close to the national average for girls. However, overall,

the proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 or above was in line with the national comparison.

6. In 1999, teachers' assessments, in mathematics closely matched the test results. Assessments were slightly over-optimistic in science but much more so in English. Inspectors did not consider that such over-optimism in English was justified, when reflecting on the standards seen during lessons and in pupils' written work.
7. The 1999 test results reflect the trend that has developed over the past four years. During this period, taking all core subjects together, the overall standard of boys in Key Stage 3 tests has significantly improved and their performance is now above the national average for boys. Girls have not made similar improvements and their performance over time is just below the national average for girls. This result is against the national trend, where girls are achieving marginally better than boys, in relation to their gender. Over time, the same pattern is seen within the individual core subjects. This indicates that the school has been very successful in its drive to improve the results of boys but the performance of girls in Key Stage 3 tests has remained static in mathematics and deteriorated in English and science over the past two years. Evidence from the inspection indicates that boys' results have improved in the core subjects because teaching methods are often selected that particularly suit the way most boys prefer to learn. Also, in general, boys are more dominant in asking and answering questions in class and tend to make greater demands on teachers' time, while, overall, girls are inclined to be more passive learners.
8. In other subjects, standards by the end of Key Stage 3 are above average in history, physical education, and design and technology and in line with the national average in art and religious education. In geography, while overall standards are average they are unequal in different aspects of the subject. For example, in geographical enquiry, overall standards are well above average but well below in other aspects of geographical skills. Standards are below average in music, information technology and modern foreign languages.

### **Standards by age 16**

9. Over the last three years in Key Stage 4 GCSE examinations, standards have improved in line with the national trend and in 1999 the school's overall results were above the national average. In 1999, the average total GCSE point score per pupil was also above the national average for all schools and in line with that for 'similar' schools.
10. In 1999 the percentage of pupils achieving five or more grades A\* - C in GCSE examinations was above both the national average and the county average. Similarly, the percentage of pupils achieving five or more grades A\* - G was above the national average and the average total GCSE point-score per pupil was also above the national average. All Year 11 pupils obtained at least one GCSE qualification. The results of both boys and girls were above the national average for their gender group. The gap between the average point-scores for boys and girls has narrowed from previous years and is now in line with that found nationally.
11. In relation to the core subjects, there are similar discrepancies found in Key Stage 3 between the relative performance of boys and girls in English and science. In English, GCSE results were slightly below the national average, with girls under-performing



more significantly than boys in relation to their gender. In science, overall results were in line with the national average but with boys achieving standards above the national average for their gender group and girls below. As in Key Stage 3, in mathematics results were above average for both boys and girls. Reasons for the better performance of boys in English and science are similar to those indicated in Key Stage 3 results.

12. Other subjects in which pupils achieved results above the national average in GCSE were physical education, design and technology, geography, English Literature, drama, business studies and religious education. Results were broadly average in art, below average in history and music and well below average in French and German.
13. Within the school, in relation to their average performance in GCSE examinations, pupils achieved relatively better results in business studies, geography, mathematics, design and technology and the combined science, double award.

### **Standards post-16**

14. Standards achieved by students in the sixth form have improved since 1996 and in 1999, the average A/AS level point score of candidates entered for two or more A-levels or AS equivalent was close to the national average. Pupils achieved particularly good results in art and mathematics, where there was a high proportion of A and B grades. The performance of students entered for less than two A/AS levels and for candidates entered for Advanced GNVQs were also in line with the national average and in particular, the results for Advanced GNVQ represent a significant improvement from the 1998 result. Clear and convincing evidence from the school indicates that many of the students achieved results better than expected, based on their prior attainment. This is because of the excellent monitoring and guidance systems in the sixth form that ensure that challenging but realistic targets are set for individual students and their progress towards them reviewed with tutors, on a regular basis.
15. The standards achieved, in all key stages, within individual subjects from recent test and examination results closely match those observed during the inspection through lesson observation, scrutiny of pupils' work and discussions with pupils about their skills, knowledge and understanding across all subject areas. The subjects achieving the best overall standards across all key stages, within the National Curriculum subjects are mathematics, art, physical education, design and technology, geography and religious education. The weakest subjects overall are music, French, German and information technology.
16. Overall, pupil achievements, including those with special educational needs, are generally in line with their capabilities. Most pupils achieve the targets set for them and a number achieve better results than expected, particularly in the sixth form where pupils' progress is particularly closely monitored and evaluated.
17. The school does a thorough analysis of its results, which are presented clearly to parents in a booklet containing the results of all tests and examinations. The booklet compares results over time as well as providing a detailed breakdown of the figures for the current year. In the light of this analysis of data, the school determines examination targets for each department for the following year that are challenging but realistic for

the pupils in the following year. Most pupils achieve the examination targets set for them and some achieve better results than expected, particularly in the sixth form where pupils' progress is particularly closely monitored and evaluated to avoid underachievement and their strengths and weaknesses, in different subjects, clearly identified and addressed. Systems for monitoring and evaluating pupils' strengths and weaknesses in curriculum areas are not so rigorous in Key Stages 3 and 4. This is an area for improvement.

18. Overall, standards of literacy across the curriculum are satisfactory but the quality of support is inconsistent between subjects. In geography, the development of literacy is a strength of the subject: pupils are taught to consider audience and purpose and to discuss the criteria for effective writing in a range of genres, such as a publicity leaflet for a walk around Swanage in Year 8 and an investigative article on the effects of tourism on Majorca in Year 9. Teachers promote developed sentence structures and use a variety of DARTs (directed activities related to texts) activities to encourage effective reading and analysis of texts. In religious education, there is effective use of key words on bright wall stars, supported by teachers drawing attention to the spelling of technical terms. Pupils write poems and other empathetic pieces such as *The Cardboard Box Man* in Year 7 and texts for specified audiences, as in the leaflet composed by Year 9 students comparing Christianity and Buddhism. In most other subjects, skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening are practised, but are not systematically taught. The teaching of technical words and departmental approaches to marking are inconsistent.
19. A Literacy Working Group has begun to meet regularly and is currently well chaired by the school special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO). A brief audit of existing practice has provided an agenda for future work, and training is planned. A focus on writing frames, writing genres, word-walls and other common strategies for teaching spelling, marking errors and promoting speaking and listening has the potential to yield early and positive results.
20. Standards in numeracy are improving and are best developed at Key Stage 3. In Year 7, pupils have a good recall of number facts and they can use these to solve other number problems. They are able to partition number in calculations and make sensible estimates. At Key Stage 4, levels of numeracy are less well developed and for some lower attaining groups this impinges on their progress. Numeracy across the school is generally sound. In geography, a broad range of numeracy activities is planned throughout all key stages. In design and technology, pupils were able to calculate the selling price of food as a percentage of the cost price and in English, pupils were able to calculate the cost of holidays from advertising brochures. In vocational subjects such as GNVQ leisure and tourism, the application of number is well delivered.
21. Overall, standards in using information technology are unsatisfactory, despite the school's significant investment in resources for the subject. The low standards are due to the limited time for pupils to be taught to use information technology in timetabled lessons with specialist teachers and because of poor development of the use of information technology within the subjects of the curriculum. During the inspection, a few examples of good practice were noted in modern foreign languages, geography and English in the sixth form and in religious education.. For example, in religious

education, where there was a planned opportunity for pupils to use information technology to produce a revision leaflet illustrating the key aspects of Christianity and Buddhism in Key Stage 4, in office applications, where the development of pupils' information technology skills is integral to the course and in subject specific Advanced GNVQ courses. While there were other examples, they were few and far between, particularly at Key Stages 3 and 4. This is because many subject teachers are not fully aware of the benefits of using information technology as a teaching aid and the range of software that is available to support teaching in their subject. In addition, the majority of teachers have received insufficient training to give them the confidence and strategies to use and manage information technology work within lessons.

22. Overall, pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in relation to their prior attainment. This is because most teachers work hard to help pupils with special educational needs to do as well as they are able and because the learning support assistants are usually very effective in helping pupils to make progress in lessons. For example, in science, pupils attain well because they are fully involved in all activities and special worksheets are provided to ensure they are appropriately challenged. Similarly, in art pupils are also fully integrated in lessons and often achieve high standards in relation to their prior attainment. Other evidence indicates that pupils with special educational needs in Year 7 have made satisfactory progress in both reading and spelling over a six-month period. While there is some evidence to indicate that pupils with formal statements of special educational needs make progress, current systems make it difficult for the school to track their achievement effectively. This is because the targets set for pupils in their individual education plans are not sufficiently specific to enable their progress to be properly assessed.
23. Overall, pupils with English as an additional language are making satisfactory progress even though they are very rarely supported in lessons by the specialist teacher from the county service, who has only 2.5 hours per week in school. The eight identified pupils are generally withdrawn from lessons for specific language teaching which can be applied across the curriculum and does not require pre-planning with individual teachers. Within subjects, many teachers use praise to motivate pupils to persevere in developing their English speaking skills. For example, in a Year 7 English lesson, a pupil being withdrawn for writing support by the specialist teacher was praised by the class teacher for his valuable contributions to discussion and his good speaking and listening skills. Most pupils, particularly those who do not have special educational needs in addition to their language needs, are making steady progress. In several subjects, pupils with English as an additional language are encouraged to make a positive contribution to help raise the standard of pupils' understanding of different cultures. For example, in geography, a Brazilian boy has been able to contribute positively to a GCSE study of Rio de Janeiro by recounting his own experiences in English, supported by class members and the class teacher.

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

24. The attitude of the great majority of pupils within the school to their learning is very good, and is particularly so within the sixth form. In response to the questionnaire, the majority of parents reported that their children are happy at school. The positive feeling and attitude that most pupils have about the school was confirmed by

discussions between inspectors and pupils throughout the school.

25. In the great majority of lessons observed, pupils sustain a good level of concentration and are well motivated. Pupils work collaboratively together in pairs and in groups. They listen attentively and take part in discussions. In mathematics, for example, pupils in higher sets are able to articulate their work. They can apply reason and can explain and justify their findings to others.
26. Relationships between the majority of pupils are very good. Pupils are generally polite and courteous to each other and to visitors. They show respect for each other's feelings. Pupils with special educational needs also demonstrate that they can work collaboratively and supportively with their peers.
27. Behaviour in most lessons is good. Overall, the inspection findings support parents' perceptions that behaviour is generally good, that staff handle behavioural situations well, and that there is support for pupils with less acceptable behaviour.
28. There is a small, but significant, minority of pupils who are uninterested in learning and troublesome in lessons where activities are not interesting or sufficiently challenging. When inappropriate behaviour is not successfully managed it has an adverse effect on the learning of other pupils. This view was expressed by a group of Year 8 pupils. In the last report, when inappropriate behaviour was observed, it was commonly because the work set for pupils was not sufficiently challenging, or when the pace of the lesson was not sufficiently brisk. This continues to be the case. Evidence from lesson observations indicates that poor behaviour improves when teaching is at its most effective. Some teachers are particularly successful in eradicating inappropriate behaviour. For example, in physical education, the interest of all pupils is maintained because tasks are carefully designed to match their capability and are well organised and appropriately challenging. A few teachers require regular support in dealing with inappropriate behaviour and further help in acquiring and using a wider range of strategies to manage poor behaviour when it occurs.
29. In complying with Government policy guidelines, the school does not exclude pupils except in the most extreme circumstances. During the last academic year, there were 24 fixed period exclusions and only one permanent exclusion.
30. Parents and pupils report that bullying does occur although inspectors observed no incidents during the week of the inspection. School records show that where bullying occurs, incidents reported are dealt with promptly, firmly and usually successfully. The school maintains its efforts to eradicate the very few cases of bullying that have persisted over longer periods of time.
31. Pupils respond very positively to opportunities to take initiative and responsibility. The sixth form pupils actively assist Year 7 pupils in the 'buddy' system, and share reading experiences with them. Following a School Democracy Group initiative, lower school and upper school councils were set up, feeding ideas and opinions into a school council. The school council discusses whole school issues in a responsible way, making recommendations such as the review of the merit system in the upper school. Older pupils successfully undertake a range of community service placements.

32. The attendance record of nearly all pupils is very good. There are a number of pupils whose attendance has been identified as a cause for concern, in particular a group of Year 10 girls. There is regular and supportive monitoring of pupils' attendance, in conjunction with the education social worker, who works very effectively in conjunction with the school.
33. Since the last inspection, pupils' punctuality at the beginning of the school day has improved and most pupils arrive on time. The problems reported at the previous inspection with regard to punctuality between lessons have not been fully resolved with evidence of late arrival by both staff and pupils to some lessons. This leads to a late start and pupils slower to settle to their work. The problem is exacerbated by the lack of movement time allowed between lessons and the large area of the school campus. However, the school has done its best to address this issue through closer monitoring of pupils between lessons, minimising movement around the school between classes and by allocating staff to specific teaching areas where possible.

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

34. Overall, the quality of teaching in the school is satisfactory, and almost half of all lessons are judged to be good or better. Teaching is particularly effective in Year 7, the sixth form and all of Key Stage 4. The highest proportion of unsatisfactory teaching is in Year 8.
35. There are strengths in all key stages in design and technology, religious education and physical education. The teaching in art at Key Stage 3 and in geography at Key Stage 4 is consistently good, as is post-16 teaching in mathematics, history, science and modern foreign languages. There are some weaknesses at Key Stage 3 in geography and at Key Stage 4 in modern foreign languages.
36. In all subjects, teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge that meets the demands of the curriculum. In a Key Stage 4 history lesson, the teacher explained the problems of C19 surgery to Year 10 pupils, using the classroom environment effectively to explain the spread of germs. In religious education lessons, teachers use subject specific vocabulary such as forgiveness and reconciliation fluently and appropriately at all times to model their use and exemplify their meanings.
37. In general, teachers manage pupils well to create a purposeful working environment, setting clear expectations of behaviour and reinforcing classroom routines. In physical education lessons, appropriate dress is regularly emphasised and standards of presentation are extremely high.
38. However, pupils are not always clear about the lesson objectives and the intended learning outcomes are rarely made explicit. This makes it difficult for them to assess what progress they have made, identify what they can do well and where improvements are needed. A notable exception is in physical education where the sharing of lesson objectives and subsequent reflection on individual progress is a regular aspect of lessons.

39. The quality of relationships fostered in lessons is a strength across the school. In English lessons, for example, teachers know their pupils well and treat them as individual learners. Learning support assistants contribute significantly to raising the self-esteem of pupils with special educational needs.
40. Teachers nearly always plan their sequences of work and lessons thoroughly in terms of the content they want to cover. They usually plan a clear sequence of activities that help most pupils grasp the main points of the lesson. Activities are not always explicitly planned to suit the full range of abilities found in most classes, especially the more able in middle and mixed ability classes. When there are pupils in a class with individual education plans for their special educational needs, subject teachers only rarely take explicit account of these plans.
41. Teachers' expectations of pupils are generally satisfactory, and in higher attaining sets, learning opportunities are planned that are designed to challenge pupils' thinking, as in science lessons in Year 11 and mathematics at A-level. During a study of the GCSE poetry anthology in Year 11 English, pupils prepared in pairs a presentation comparing two poems from other cultures and traditions. They used overhead projectors and whiteboard diagrams to illustrate their arguments and the process of arriving at them. This approach successfully supported all pupils in exploring the ideas, styles and backgrounds of the poems.
42. The needs of the more able within middle and mixed ability sets, however, are often not being met adequately. In a Year 9 German lesson, for example, there were no opportunities for pupils who understood the use of the preposition with the dative to use it in an active way. In these groupings too, there is often a high proportion of passive learning and teachers need to develop a more flexible range of teaching strategies to cater for the needs of these learners. Middle attaining girls in particular suffer in English, science, information technology and in some other lessons where they receive insufficient attention and are given learning activities which do not challenge or motivate them to do their best. Information technology teachers, for example, need to develop strategies to encourage girls to be adventurous with new software and English teachers need to develop more engaging tasks for the significant numbers of girls who sit passively through large parts of some lessons at Key Stage 4. Boys, however, do benefit from the attention they receive, responding actively to questioning and offering a wide range of ideas. In some lessons, such as performing arts in Year 7, boys and girls benefit equally from the confidence building teaching strategies, as they collaborate to produce and share pieces of drama and music of their own devising.
43. Most teachers use a good range of basic teaching methods, and some are very skilled and occasionally, inspirational. The best practice could be shared more widely to stimulate debate about effective techniques, especially in the context of the literacy and numeracy strategy methods being used in primary schools. The current systems for monitoring teaching and sharing the findings are, in practice, unsystematic, and hence ineffective in achieving this.
44. The beginnings of lessons are often effective, as in the lively presentations at the starts of language lessons, usually in the target language, which set high expectations and hold pupils' attention. A Year 8 class learned about the weather, and a newly qualified

teacher stimulated the interest of a difficult Year 11 class by starting with a quick-fire question and answer session. The ends of lessons are less well handled, however, and few teachers exploit the value of a consolidating plenary where pupils review their learning and consider how it relates to other things they know.

45. Although questioning techniques are well used in physical education, history and geography lessons to check recall, prompt new thinking, encourage developed responses and probe understanding, they are less well used in some other subjects. Speaking and listening skills are not well developed across the school, despite some good examples. In a Key Stage 4 mathematics lesson, pupils were asked to explain their methods and justify their reasoning to other pupils as to why, in graphing inequalities, they would shade particular regions. In a GCSE child development lesson, a group discussed their understanding of the features of toys that they had studied. This type of activity supports pupils' own learning and that of their peers and should be a regular feature of almost every lesson.
46. In mathematics and history, the quality of exposition contributes significantly to pupils' understanding of the concepts, and in information technology lessons, previous work is reviewed effectively at the starts of lessons, as a basis for further learning.
47. Most lessons proceed at an appropriately brisk pace, and despite the widespread school site, begin punctually. Learning support assistants are used well within the learning support department and across the school. Classroom materials and resources are appropriately chosen and created to support the learning planned for in lessons.
48. Assessment procedures across the school are inconsistent and despite some useful developments in modern foreign languages and geography, this is an area of weakness. Marking practice varies both within and between departments in the support it gives to pupils' progress. In particular, the written work of pupils with special educational needs is not thoroughly marked or assessed; exercise books often lack comment to help pupils understand how to improve. In lessons, there are good examples of sensitive interventions by teachers, as in the Year 9 information technology lesson when the teacher worked alongside a group of pupils with special educational needs. She was able to make accurate formative assessments and give a high level of individual support in handling software as a result.
49. On a significant minority of occasions, in languages, science and English, for example, teachers are reluctant to hand over responsibility for the learning to pupils and the lesson becomes teacher-centred. However, when they are offered opportunities to develop skills independently, pupils respond positively. In a Year 9 information technology lesson, pupils were asked to conduct independent research and their motivation improved.
50. Most pupils make satisfactory progress in their learning both in lessons and over longer periods of time: in almost half of lessons seen, it was good or better. In three-quarters of lessons in Year 13, the rate and depth of learning was good, including all the lessons in mathematics, art, history and physical education. In four-fifths of lessons in design and technology and religious education at Key Stage 3, the quality of learning was good, and at all key stages in art. At Key Stage 3, pupils failed to make satisfactory

progress in two-fifths of geography lessons and across the key stage in music. In all other subjects, pupils make satisfactory progress in their learning, but in Year 8, almost one in five of the lessons observed across the curriculum resulted in unsatisfactory progress.

51. Although pupils with special educational needs generally make satisfactory progress in lessons, receiving some support from the teacher, some lessons are not well planned or organised to meet their needs and there is a small but significant minority who misbehave and remain off task for large parts of some lessons. For these, and the wider group of pupils with special educational needs, there is limited documentary evidence of their progress.
52. Pupils learn well in lessons when they are interested, clear about what they are doing and why they are doing it, and can make connections with the rest of their learning. In the sixth form, pupils' concentration, understanding and independence are good, and are generally satisfactory elsewhere in the school. Teachers work hard to develop these skills in younger pupils, and the many examples of success should be widely shared.

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

53. The school is providing a broad and balanced curriculum. It is effectively meeting its aim and the commitment in its home-school policy to offer its pupils and students a wide range of experiences. A new special educational needs policy provides a helpful framework for supporting greater inclusion.
54. The content of the curriculum is largely meeting statutory requirements, although there are some exceptions to this as will be seen below. In Key Stage 3, all the subjects of the National Curriculum are included, as well as religious education, drama (in performing arts) and personal, social and health education. In Key Stage 4, the curriculum covers all the National Curriculum subjects, religious education and personal, social and health education, and, through the option system, students are offered the opportunity to study business studies, child development, drama, economics and office applications.
55. The option system, where students choose two subjects from the range offered, is working effectively. Timetable restraints prevent very few students from taking the subjects that they choose, and there was no evidence during this inspection of the 'bias' in option choices identified in the last inspection report. Also, by offering a range of certificate courses, the school has improved its provision for those students for whom the full range of GCSE courses would be inappropriate – another issue which was raised when the school was last inspected. The combination of compulsory subjects and courses chosen by the students gives breadth and balance to the curriculum at Key Stage 4.
56. The school is meeting the requirements to provide sex and drugs education through its personal, social and health education programme. Drugs awareness is included every year, with the exception of Year 9. Sex education is part of the personal, social and



health education programme from Year 7 to Year 13. It is taught by teachers who are judged by senior managers to be skilled and qualified in this particular aspect. The programme effectively and appropriately progresses from an emphasis on factual information in Years 7 to 8 to an emphasis on attitudes and relationships in Years 9 to 13. An up-dating of the Years 7 to 8 programme is included in the personal, social and health development programme.

57. The school has a good and thorough programme of careers education and guidance. From Year 8 to Year 11, the course for personal, social and health education, taught to all pupils, includes well-structured units that introduce pupils to the range of career-related opportunities available to them beyond the age of 16. Pupils are taught by experienced teachers how to evaluate these opportunities in the light of their own aptitudes and interests, and helped to develop the skills needed to choose and apply for appropriate career opportunities. This course is well complemented by a well organised programme of work experience for all Year 10 pupils, and access to adequate careers information and to specialist guidance from outside agencies. The opportunities for further education and training beyond 16, at the school and elsewhere, are fairly put before pupils. Sixth-formers also experience a well-conceived programme of information, work experience and guidance that presents them with available options and develops their self-analysis, choice and presentation. The sixth form programme includes a multi-school conference that presents opportunities in employment as well as higher education. Year 12 students also undertake work experience in which they have to negotiate their own placement and to define the skills they intend to develop through the placement. This is good practice. The school has a useful careers library, although it does contain some out-dated materials. Pupils in Year 9 are given an introduction to the careers library during a single tutor period, but it is too short to be of maximum use. Generally, pupils and students are very appreciative of the careers education and guidance they receive.
58. The provision of business studies makes a very effective contribution to careers education and there is a good uptake by students. During the inspection, a Year 13 lesson in business studies was very effectively linked to work experience and students increased their understanding of communication systems by studying and comparing two businesses. Overall, students value the careers guidance they receive and this, added to the good quality careers education, work experience and business studies, makes careers education and guidance a strength of the school, particularly in the sixth form.
59. There is very good curriculum provision in the sixth form where a wide range of academic and vocational courses is offered. The rich sixth form education identified in the last report has been maintained. The range covers A-level, A/S level and GNVQ courses, and includes philosophy and ethics, psychology and sociology as well as those subjects included in the National Curriculum. There is also an effective one year programme which gives students the chance to re-sit GCSE examinations in English, mathematics and science, usefully adding to these work for the City and Guilds Diploma of Vocational Education and intermediate level GNVQ so that students have a full and rich programme.
60. The sixth form curriculum is driven by a strong philosophy of educating the whole

person. There is a concern not only for academic success, but also for preparing students for a whole life beyond school. The general studies course, which all students have to take, extends students' experiences beyond their study for examinations. The programme is kept up-to-date and has recently included current issues such as fox-hunting, the future of the monarchy, sexual health, drugs, and genetically modified food. The staff are very committed to preparing students for adult life and to helping them develop into 'rounded' people and this is having a significant effect on the quality of the curriculum. The sixth form curriculum is a strength of the school.

61. A very valuable aspect of the sixth form curriculum is the emphasis placed upon community service. Students help local people in need, elderly citizens and disabled people. There is a 'buddy' system where students counsel Year 7 pupils and there is a pilot 'reading buddy' system where students go to a nearby primary school for one hour a week to help Year 6 pupils with reading. This emphasis on community service is contributing significantly to the school's aim to develop 'rounded' individuals. There is very good take-up of community service by students.
62. However, there are some deficiencies in the curriculum provision. The school acknowledges that it is failing to meet statutory requirements for collective worship throughout the school, for information technology and for religious education at Key Stage 4 and post-16. All these were included amongst the key issues identified in the last inspection report. The school holds weekly assemblies for year groups but its hall is too small to accommodate the whole school in one collective act of worship and there is no collective worship in tutor periods. Insufficient time is allocated for information technology to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum and for religious education to cover sufficiently the locally Agreed Syllabus at Key Stage 4. This shortage of time is affecting standards in the two subjects.
63. When the school was last inspected, weaknesses in the continuity of the curriculum were identified. The way that the curriculum is currently delivered in some subjects is still causing problems of continuity. In humanities (history, geography and religious education) and information technology in Key Stage 3, the subjects are taught intensively for six week periods of time and rotate with one another. This is resulting in interruptions in the delivery of the programmes of study and in the individual subjects not being taught for long periods of time. The development of pupils' knowledge and understanding and their acquisition of skills are being fragmented and this is adversely affecting standards in these subjects. In performing arts, the curriculum is not planned sufficiently to ensure that the programme is effectively sequenced and builds upon pupils' previous learning.
64. The curriculum structure in Key Stage 3 is going through a period of transition. A new system has been introduced this year for Year 7, where pupils are grouped according to their literacy skills apart from in their mathematics lessons. In Year 8, still following the previous system, they are in mixed ability groups. When these pupils move into Year 9, they will be re-organised according to their abilities, as is the current year group. The arrangement in Years 8 and 9 is having a detrimental effect on standards in science and humanities. Standards are also being adversely affected in science at Key Stage 4 because it is not possible for students to transfer easily from one ability set to another. There is some uncertainty amongst staff about the basis for

grouping pupils in Year 7 and the placing of pupils is not adequately described in the school's Key Stage 3 curriculum guide. Parents' concern over the allocation of pupils to particular groups is justified.

65. As there was at the time of the last inspection, there is a very good range of extra-curricular activities which extends and enriches the curriculum. These activities include sport, Christian worship, computers, library, dance, choir and orchestra and a number of subject clubs. There is also a wide range of residential courses, foreign exchange and educational visits experienced by all year groups. Extra-curricular activities are well taken up by pupils and students and access to them is good.
66. There are strong links with primary schools through the Kidlington Schools' Partnership and the social and pastoral arrangements made for pupils to transfer from primary to secondary school are good. However, the curricular links with the partner primary schools are currently being developed in a range of subjects. In order to prepare students for the next stage of their education beyond the sixth form, the school is operating a useful pilot 'buddy' scheme with St. John's College, Oxford which involves a small number of the school's students being connected with students at the college.
67. In addition to its good programme of careers education, skill-training and guidance, the school is purposefully developing a number of initiatives to bring pupils into worthwhile contact with the worlds of work, commerce and industry. Through the 'Kidlington Voice' a forum of schools, community and employers, the school is developing fruitful contacts with a number of local employers and their personnel who are contributing their expertise and time to the school's programme. At the time of the inspection, the school was preparing to launch, in cooperation with local employers and colleges, a pilot programme of work-based activities for a small number of Key Stage 4 pupils whose aptitudes and interests are clearly not best served by the existing subject-based courses in Key Stage 4.
68. Provision for students' spiritual development is at least satisfactory, sometimes good and is a developing aspect of the school's provision. Religious education makes a significant contribution to spiritual development. Students are encouraged to discuss and reflect on fundamental questions, for example, in a Year 8 lesson which explored the nature of eternity. In Year 10, students discussed life and death issues during work on forgiveness and in Year 9 a moving poem about the value of individuals acted as stimulus for reflective work. Students in a Year 7 lower-ability group were excited and delighted to be taking part in a simulation of a Passover meal. Students are consistently challenged to relate situations discussed in class to their own experiences and to connect these with religious teachings and perspectives, for example, in a further Year 9 session which investigated the decision-making process for people with or without faith commitment, and in an A-level discussion on rehabilitation. Resources are carefully chosen to stimulate and provoke a response, and an appropriate atmosphere is created to allow students to weigh their own views and beliefs in the light of what they have learned.
69. The staff work hard to create a receptive and appropriate atmosphere for collective worship. Students arrive in an orderly and respectful manner, and maintain this

approach throughout. Appropriate music is played to support this positive ethos. Administrative tasks are carried out unobtrusively and any potentially disruptive behaviour is dealt with quickly and effectively. There are good arrangements for latecomers to be assimilated into the gathering with minimum disruption. The presence of tutorial staff is a pleasing and important indication of the value which the school places on this aspect of school life. During the inspection week, collective worship was led by three different members of the local clergy. Each spoke on the theme of Easter. Accounts of personal experiences were used to encourage students to reflect on the existence of a higher being. The challenge of personal faith and commitment was also explored. The invitation was given to consider the importance of Easter in the Christian calendar. Students were attentive and respectful but were not engaged or challenged at an appropriate level. There were no opportunities for students to take part and the occasion was missed to show respect for differing views by inviting students to respond to closing prayers in a manner relevant to their own beliefs and perspectives. There was little use of appropriate stimuli for the senses. Introductions by senior staff did not, however, set the tone for the occasion, and the respectful atmosphere was quickly dispelled by the giving of notices. The departure of students was less orderly than their arrival. Arrangements do not meet with statutory requirements to provide daily collective worship for all students and this remains an issue from the last inspection.

70. Teachers' awareness of the spiritual dimension in other aspects of the school's life has been raised by a detailed piece of research carried out by a member of staff. This is an improvement on the situation at the time of the last inspection. In art, a sense of awe and wonder was encouraged when students reflected on the transformation of a lump of clay into sophisticated ceramics, and this is supported by exhibitions of students' work, particularly in the sixth form studio. In music, a group of boys produced an operatic conversation to which the other students responded with delight and appreciation. Sixth form conferences focus on spiritual development through considering a range of issues such as genetic engineering and human rights. Opportunities for spiritual development were missed, for example, to consider the concept of infinity in depth in mathematics, and to discuss the inequalities of world trade in geography. This continues to be an area where support is needed for staff to capitalise on opportunities as they arise, and to plan for spiritual experiences in the curriculum.
71. Opportunities for the moral development of the students are good. Stated aims of the school are to promote a sensitive awareness of others' needs both within the school and other communities and a sense of worth and purpose through contributions to the school and outside community. There is a clear code of conduct establishing the rights and responsibilities of members of the school community. In physical education, codes of conduct, playing to the rules and loyalty are heavily emphasised. There was debate on the morality of development issues in geography, particularly through a role play activity concerned with living in a favela where students were encouraged to show empathy for people living in less fortunate circumstances than themselves. Respect for the beliefs and practices of others is engendered in religious education and in mathematics, students are encouraged to listen to the responses of others with maturity. There are well-structured opportunities offered by the 'Brave New World' conference for Year 12 to develop a sense of responsibility for the developing world.

Pupils who visited Auschwitz with the Holocaust Trust were praised for their sensitive and powerful presentation. Charity activities are promoted, for example, a recent appeal by sixth-formers to raise funds for flood victims in Mozambique.

72. Students' social development is well supported throughout the school. For example, in information technology, students worked co-operatively in an activity on 'My perfect day' sharing equipment without prompting, and some peer support for lower ability pupils was seen. In physical education, outstanding relationships were exemplified through an atmosphere of mutual respect which supported rapid progress. In modern foreign languages, a discussion explored social responsibilities related to the difficulties encountered in sport by people with disabilities. Personal, social and health education is taught throughout the school and is supported by a range of outside visitors. Residential experiences such as the Year 7 Kilvrough course are designed to develop social and personal understanding of a range of issues. There are opportunities to take responsibility, through the prefect system, the student/staff committee in the sixth form and the elected school council. Contributions to the school and wider communities are encouraged. All sixth form students take part in community service.
73. Opportunities for cultural development are satisfactory but there is little documentation to support the school's aim '*to instil in students an understanding of individual differences and an ability to celebrate diversity*'. A broad range of extra-curricular opportunities is offered, including extensive provision for sporting and musical activities, revision sessions and homework clubs. There are many trips and visits, including exchange visits, geography and biology field work and skiing trips. There are some good examples of multicultural education. In religious education, students study Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism at various points in their school career and visit different places of worship. A Festival of African Arts extends pupils' experience but much work in this subject is eurocentric. In geography courses, there are examples of cultural enquiries, for example, a study of Majorca, but there are few opportunities to tackle British multicultural issues. This is an area for continued review and development.
74. Overall, provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are at least satisfactory and sometimes good. This is an improvement on the situation at the last inspection and there is reason to be pleased with the progress that has been made, particularly in the area of spiritual development. The school should continue to review this aspect and seek to extend planned opportunities for development in all areas.

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

75. There are a number of strengths in the way that the school cares for its pupils but there are also weaknesses.
76. The pastoral care provided for pupils is good. The senior staff and almost all teachers form positive relationships with pupils, and are accessible and responsive to pupils' needs. The good relationships encourage a positive atmosphere within the school, which provides a good learning environment. Form tutors know their pupils well, but the modular system in the humanities subjects of history, geography, religious education and information technology in Key Stage 3, results in some teachers finding

it very difficult to get to know the pupils well, with a resulting lack of continuity. There are particularly good relationships between teachers and students in the sixth form, and a very effective system of regular individual counselling and mentoring.

77. The tracking system recently introduced across the school is an effective method of monitoring the personal and social development of pupils. Monitoring pupils' academic progress is less effective. For older pupils, there are records of expected grades in examinations, and some indications of how pupils are progressing towards those projected grades, but generally the lack of assessment data available precludes the effective monitoring of pupils' academic progress. The marking of pupils' work rarely informs pupils of their progress, contain developmental comments, nor contain targets for improvement.
78. Although individual education plans are in place for all pupils on the special educational needs register, there are insufficient targets for their work in separate subjects. Those that are set are not sufficiently specific or time-related to help teachers to plan for pupils to make progress. Pupils' progress towards individual education plan targets is not systematically reviewed by the SENCO or subject representatives regularly enough to ensure pupils are always appropriately challenged.
79. The school's code of conduct clearly states the behaviour expected of pupils, and pupils clearly understand the systems of rewards and sanctions. Pupils in the lower school value the merit system and, through the school council, older pupils have requested and achieved a system of award certificates. When inappropriate behaviour does occur, it is not always dealt with consistently, and there is a lack of communication between faculties and pastoral staff regarding the responsibility to ensure that ongoing inappropriate behaviour is dealt with over the longer term. The rota system of senior staff on call ensures that individual incidents of poor behaviour are dealt with promptly. Some teachers have inadequate strategies to effectively deal with persistent and recurring poor behaviour. There has been some very constructive group work with a small number of pupils whose behaviour is unacceptable, but other pupils report that the poor behaviour of a small minority of pupils continues to have an adverse effect on their learning.
80. The school has not been able to recruit as many lunchtime supervision staff as it would wish, but compensates for this lack of supervision by having areas designated for individual year groups during the lunchtime break. This does not, however, solve the problem of a few poor relationships between pupils of the same year group.
81. The school's programme for personal, social and health education continues to be comprehensive, and is now more clearly co-ordinated than at the last inspection. The personal, social and health education programme deals appropriately with careers education and guidance and includes an element of citizenship, together with health and sex education, including a comprehensive drugs education programme. In Years 8 to 13, the personal, social and health education programme is delivered by a group of suitably trained teaching staff, with a good range of visitors in specialist areas. However, in Year 7, it is mainly delivered during weekly tutorials by form tutors, some of whom recognise a need for further training and support.

82. The last inspection judged that the school should make better use of registration time across the school so that it contributes positively to the progress of pupils and students. Observations show that use of the registration time still varies greatly. In some tutor groups it promotes a good purposeful start to the school day. In others it is time wasted, with opportunities for pastoral support lost. A good programme for registration periods was devised following the last inspection but it is not consistently implemented.
83. The school's procedures for monitoring attendance are generally satisfactory, with only occasional errors in the completion of registers. The computer record is updated daily. Through regular fortnightly meetings, the pastoral staff, in conjunction with the education social worker, provide very effective support for pupils whose attendance is a cause for concern, and for those pupils whose personal problems are adversely affecting their achievements in school.
84. There are satisfactory child protection procedures in place, which meet statutory requirements. The deputy headteacher with responsibility for pastoral matters is the person designated as having responsibility for child protection. Liaison with appropriate support services, when necessary, is satisfactory.
85. The school's procedures to ensure the health and safety of pupils are generally satisfactory, but a number of concerns were notified to faculty staff during the inspection week. In particular, no risk assessments have yet been completed. Fire drills are carried out regularly, and electrical equipment checked appropriately. Parents raised concerns regarding the safety of pupils when entering and leaving the site, following the closure of the Bicester Road entrance. However, the additional security of the school site thereby ensured, and the fact that pupils exit onto a service road rather than directly on to the main road itself, diminishes the overall risk to pupils.

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

86. The school successfully encourages a good working partnership with parents and achieves it with the majority. Most parents are very supportive of the school, and appreciate the care and support given to their children. Information from parents' questionnaires returned, and at the parents' meeting with inspectors, indicates that there is a small minority of parents who do not feel well informed, do not feel that the school responds effectively to complaints, and who have concerns regarding, in particular, the organisation of parents' consultation evenings and bullying within the school.
87. Parental involvement through the Gosford Hill School Association is good. Through that association, parents have been involved in raising substantial funds for the school, and have participated in curriculum working parties. The school governors have monitored attendance at parents' consultation meetings, providing transport and creche facilities when a need has been identified. Parents are supportive of school productions and social events organised by the Gosford Hill School Association. They also support the school at sporting events, and help with transport to these when required.

88. Attendance at parents' consultation evenings is good but a number of parents are unhappy with their organisation and management. Parents maintain there is insufficient time for parents to consult the teachers they wish to see, the time schedule is not adhered to and long queues develop. The headteacher and governors realise there is a problem and are seeking strategies to improve the situation.
89. The quality and range of information available to parents is satisfactory. The governors' annual reports to parents fulfil statutory requirements, and are used effectively to inform parents about the school's progress and achievements during the year. The prospectus conforms to statutory requirements, with the exception of telling parents who currently holds the office of chair of governors.
90. In Key Stages 3 and 4, annual reports to parents give detailed information about the areas of work studied, but do not give sufficient information regarding what pupils know and can do. Not all report progress made during the year, and few give indications as to how the pupil can improve. These criticisms do not apply to reports issued to the parents of sixth form students which are of good quality and informative on all aspects of attainment and progress and in addition, contain targets to move the students forward. Results of school and National Curriculum tests are sent out to parents separately at the end of the key stage.

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

91. Overall, the quality of leadership throughout the school is satisfactory and the management procedures broadly effective. The school responded positively to its 1996 inspection report, is developing well and making steady improvement. The day-to-day management of information and the communication systems within school are good, ensuring that the school operates effectively on a daily basis.
92. The headteacher and other members of the senior management team demonstrate a strong commitment to raising standards throughout the school. This commitment is evident in the school's success in improving its overall examination and test results in all key stages and in raising the standards of boys' performance, particularly in Key Stage 3. This is because of the clear direction set by the headteacher, senior management team and the governors and the commitment of the staff, who work together as a team to decide on priorities for development and implement them. Non-teaching staff make a very effective contribution to the success of the school.
93. The headteacher is a committed and highly experienced, professional leader who has a clear vision and a strong set of underlying values that are consistent with the aims of the school. His belief in the principle of inclusion for all pupils permeates all school policies and procedures. For example, levels of exclusion are low because he believes that pupils' behavioural problems are not solved by sending them away. Similarly, required entry qualifications to sixth form A-level courses are lower than at many schools, with the main emphasis on students' commitment to work hard. The leadership of the headteacher makes a strong personal contribution to the success of the school in its wider community, for example, his work within the Kidlington Voice partnership.
94. The headteacher and his three deputies embody a considerable store of managerial



experience. They work well as a team and their duties are appropriately deployed, each being responsible for leading a key area of school management. They discharge these roles conscientiously and always with a view to improving systems and procedures. For example, the deputy head responsible for staff professional development is currently investigating systems that will allow him to monitor and evaluate the impact of training courses, conferences and professional meetings in raising standards of attainment. Each deputy is responsible for linking regularly with a group of subjects and is involved in reviewing the performance of each annually. For the most part links are effective, giving the senior management team a good knowledge of the work of individual departments and the departments a direct link with a member of this team. The recent retirement of a fourth deputy has resulted in less regular support for a few subjects in the short term but the resolution to this problem is currently being addressed by the senior management team.

95. Senior staff responsible for managing students in the upper and lower school, and Year 7, are hardworking and effective. They have a good knowledge of the pupils for whom they are responsible but are often severely pressed for time to perform their many duties. Parents consider them approachable and mostly successful when addressing any concerns about their children. The organisation and management of the sixth form is a particular strength of the school. It is greatly praised by its students who appreciate the efforts made by the joint heads of sixth form and the sixth form tutors to ensure their experience will be both academically productive and socially memorable. For example, a formal 'Leavers' Ball', is organised each year, which is very well supported by students.
96. The school is in the process of appointing a new SENCO. Another member of staff is currently undertaking this role, on a temporary basis, in addition to other major curriculum responsibilities. This dual responsibility has limited the time available for the acting SENCO to carry out all the jobs associated with the post. All statutory requirements are in place but there has been insufficient time for the SENCO to monitor the overall effectiveness of the school provision for pupils with special educational needs. For example, little has yet been done to identify and disseminate the teaching approaches, shown to be the most effective for pupils with learning difficulties or to assess the quality and appropriateness of individual education plans. The co-ordinator is well supported by the governor with responsibility for special educational needs.
97. Overall, the leadership and management of faculty and subject departments is satisfactory. They are good in science, mathematics, design and technology, religious education, art and physical education. In these subjects, leadership provides a clear educational direction with clear views on how to raise standards further and are generally successful in achieving their aims. For example, in design and technology, new initiatives are in place for the development of GNVQ courses that will improve the experience for all pupils, while in modern foreign languages, staff have begun to share good practice in teaching and learning.
98. The leadership and management skills of middle managers are being effectively developed through the recently established middle-managers' development group. Through this group, middle-managers are developing a greater understanding of whole

school issues and have the opportunity to contribute to staff task groups which are addressing a range of important initiatives, for example, literacy and the development of teaching and learning strategies. This is both good practice and effective professional development for middle managers. The potential impact of the group on the work of the school is immense because middle managers are vital change agents and in this large school are in the strongest position to promote and implement new ideas in their department.

99. Improving the management style was a key issue in the last inspection. This issue has been addressed successfully and the revised management structure is now a strength of the school. Management structures are now fully inclusive so that all staff share in the decision-making processes of the school and know what issues are under consideration. For example, meetings of the senior management team are open and agendas and minutes made available to all staff. Monitoring and task groups have been set up and encouraged to question and challenge existing practice. For example, the new school effectiveness group has a brief to make recommendations for change to the senior management team. During the inspection, a task group on quality assurance, involving more than a quarter of the teaching staff, from headteacher to newly qualified teacher, were seen to be vigorously debating the nature and appropriateness of teaching styles used in the school. This was in preparation for agreeing a procedure for involving sixth-formers in an evaluation of the quality of teaching they experience. Discussions with several staff indicate very positive support for the new management approach. Teachers now feel more involved in the management of the school and feel their views are taken into account. They particularly welcome the opportunities for professional development created by the new management structure through involvement in task groups and development groups, and many staff are enthusiastic to become involved.
100. Governors are clear about their responsibilities and fulfil them well. Since the last inspection, the governors have adopted a more pro-active involvement within the work of the sub-committees. Wherever possible, individual expertise is identified and used productively, for example, one of the governors on the curriculum sub-committee, with a business background, is involved in the development of the school's work experience programme. The governors know the strengths and the weaknesses of the school very well and demonstrated this clearly throughout their meeting with members of the inspection team. They are fully involved in establishing a direction for the school to grow and are active in devising the school development plan. Their views are sought at an early stage when major policy changes are initiated, for example, the new sixth form curriculum. They monitor and support the work of the school effectively, receiving regular reports on the quality of education and the work of the school, for example, subject departmental reviews. When possible, they visit individual faculties and departments and contribute to task groups. For example, the chair of governors attends meetings of the task group reviewing curriculum provision while another governor has spent time working with the design and technology department. Governors are therefore able to understand clearly where improvements are needed and this was very evident throughout discussions with representative members of the governing body. All statutory curriculum requirements are met except for religious education in Key Stage 4 and post-16 and the requirement for a daily act of worship throughout the school. Governors monitor the expenditure of the school's finances

very effectively but there are insufficient mechanisms yet in place that enable governors to evaluate how cost-effective expenditure has proven to be in terms of its impact on standards. For example, the considerable amount of money allocated to improving the quality and quantity of information technology equipment has not resulted in pupils achieving higher standards in the subject. Governors take appropriate measures to guarantee the pupils' health, well-being and safety, with the exception of the statutory requirements for risk-assessment, which are not yet in place.

101. The school development plan reflects the school's stated aims, identifies a range of relevant priorities and takes appropriate account of Government initiatives, for example, literacy. Development planning is also effectively linked to financial planning. However, school development planning is not yet informed by a regular cycle of school self-review that promotes a systematic, structured and critical evaluation of current practice to underpin the identification of priority areas for improvement. For example, there are no systems in place for regular evaluation of the effectiveness of whole-school policies and procedures or for monitoring the consistency of their implementation. The inspection team found the school's assessment policy, for example, to be inconsistently applied, particularly in relation to the quality of marking, which ranges from very poor to very good. Similarly, the school's behaviour policy and its procedures are interpreted differently by individual staff members. Nevertheless, the priorities identified under the current planning system are effectively addressed and detailed project plans are prepared for each aspect of the plan that identify time scales and success criteria.
102. Overall, departmental development planning is satisfactory but there are some weaknesses and inconsistencies between departments. Most development plans include useful action plans, showing how the development plan will be carried out and clearly identify the members of staff accountable for the implementation of specific aspects of the plan. However, the majority of departments fail to identify success criteria against which the effectiveness of their action-plan may be reviewed and assessed. Some plans identify relevant professional development in the context of the development plan but this is not consistent practice. Relevant costs for delivering plans are not sufficiently well identified; for example, the cost implications for 'extra time' or 'appropriate resources' is rarely specified. Departmental plans take full account of Government requirements and most plans rightly take into account the priorities identified in the school development plan, for example, information technology development. The majority of departments are able to identify a range of relevant and appropriate issues for development in the subject. However, their priorities do not usually include a detailed internal review of issues likely to have the most fundamental impact on standards. For example, no departmental plans specifically tackle the issues of monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and learning or assessing the quality and regularity of marking pupils' work. As with whole-school development planning, there is a lack of structured self-review within faculties and departments. However, there is evidence of analysis of strengths and weaknesses in some departmental reports to governors and this is the beginning of good practice.
103. An in-depth annual review is undertaken of all development plans. In a meeting with the appropriate deputy headteacher, the member of staff responsible for each plan is

required to account for progress made and to identify the impact the plan has made in relation to raising standards and the quality of education. Staff are rightly asked to demonstrate how money allocated to their development plan has been spent, for example, how the money identified for professional development needs has been used. The school has not yet established a system for regularly monitoring a department's progress in implementing its development plan in order to identify any problems in meeting targets at an early stage.

104. Middle managers are now also expected to be regularly accountable to governors by making a presentation of recent developments to them. Evidence indicates that these reports are increasingly focusing on a set agenda of the actual strengths and weaknesses of the area, rather than the area's aspirations and needs. This is good practice and the beginning of the development of a more structured approach to self review.
105. Every autumn term, each head of department formally reviews national test results and examination performance with members of the senior management team. These reviews are generally well informed by relevant data, produced by the senior management team, and take into account information on the comparative performance of schools locally and nationally. Analysis of each pupil's performance in individual subjects compared with their overall performance is more limited. As a result of the review, appropriate targets are established in each subject for the next year. Most heads of department are not fully aware of the range of national and local data that is available or how to use it effectively to raise issues for discussion and support target setting within their subject.
106. There are clear indications of progress in developing a culture of questioning and self-awareness but there are weaknesses in the school's processes for gathering and evaluating evidence of what goes on in classrooms, and its impact on pupils' learning. Middle managers have no common procedures or requirements for gathering evidence about the quality of teaching in their area, or for monitoring the quality of work produced by pupils. All senior and many middle managers take part in a 'support rota' which gives them time each week to observe lessons and assess pupils' work – unless they are called to give disciplinary or other support to a class. There are no guidelines or criteria for who or what should be observed in this process, nor for the feedback to be given to individual teachers, areas, or senior management. Consequently, managers potentially have a wealth of evidence available to them, but no system for structuring or evaluating it. This significantly limits the reliability and value of the evidence gathered and the use that can be made of it. This process typifies the current state in the school of a developing and positive culture of challenge and improvement that is inadequately served by systematic procedures for monitoring and evaluating the strengths of day-to-day practice.
107. Similarly, most subject heads do not monitor, challenge and evaluate teaching and standards against specific measurable targets well enough to see how to make improvements in teaching that will increase pupils' progress and raise standards. The head of department for modern foreign languages and art has rightly identified this issue as an essential aspect of effective departmental management and initiated the process within her department. While this example is an exception, it does provide an

example of good practice for other faculties and departments.

108. Overall, the school budgets systematically and well for all expenditure. Educational priorities are effectively supported through careful and efficient financial management and planning. Financial management and control are effective and rest on a formal schedule of procedures and regulations.
109. The governing body and senior management team set clear budgetary priorities and have a clear, long term vision for future developments, including detailed plans for improvements to the accommodation. Governors ensure that specific grants, such as the standards fund, are used for their intended purposes. The recommendations of the latest auditors' report, which was favourable, have been addressed. Since the last inspection, school development planning has been more closely linked to financial planning and the two planning cycles have recently been further integrated to further strengthen the link.
110. The systems for financial administration are unobtrusive, efficient and meet the needs of teaching and non-teaching staff. Systems are effective and secure without being unduly cumbersome or time consuming so that they support teachers in their work rather than adding unnecessarily to their burdens and taking them away from their principal roles. The senior administrative officer works very efficiently to ensure that the headteacher, governing body and senior management team all have the information they need about the budget in order to monitor the school finances effectively.
111. The governing body is well informed about the school's spending patterns and monitors expenditure well through regular reports that are prepared for the finance sub-committee. Despite significant cuts to the school budget in each of the last four years, the governors have made sensible decisions to avoid overspending. However, although expenditure is closely scrutinised, there are currently insufficient mechanisms by which the governors can adequately assess the cost effectiveness of its spending decisions.
112. As in the previous inspection, faculties and departments receive part of their annual capitation through formula funding and part through a system of bids linked to their development plans and associated professional development needs. This continues to be an effective method for encouraging new curricular initiatives.
113. Given the slightly below average unit costs, pupils generally achieving the expected standards, and the satisfactory quality of education, the school is providing satisfactory value for money, as it was doing at the time of the last inspection.
114. All staff are sufficiently qualified or experienced to teach the subjects for which they have been appointed. The deployment of staff to the curriculum is satisfactory and generally the strengths of the teachers match the needs of the pupils. However, the deployment of staff within some subjects is causing difficulties in some aspects of the curriculum. In some instances where the teaching of a subject is shared between more than one teacher over the two-week timetable, for example, in modern foreign languages, parents and pupils express concern about instances of poor continuity and repetition of work which adversely affects pupils' progress. Similarly, where the teaching is organised on a modular basis, for example, in Key Stage 3 geography, some

pupils talked about difficulties in continuity caused by the ‘chopping and changing’ of teachers and their view is endorsed by the inspection team. The deployment of learning support assistants is satisfactory.

115. The professional development of both teaching and non-teaching staff is well managed by one of the deputy headteachers. Detailed records for all staff are kept of training courses and professional meetings they have attended, together with evaluations of the effectiveness of the training and how new skills and knowledge will be used. The deputy headteacher responsible is currently developing strategies to better monitor and evaluate the impact, over time, of professional development on the standards pupils achieve. Professional development is effectively linked to development planning at both school and departmental level. Heads of department have started to carry out professional development reviews with staff to establish their strengths and development needs. The support offered to newly qualified teachers is satisfactory. Overall, the newly qualified teacher induction programme is relevant, well organised and effective. There is some inconsistency of support between subjects. For example, the opportunities for newly qualified teachers to observe the lessons of more experienced staff varies from few to many, being particularly good in science. Some newly qualified teachers identified the management of poor behaviour as an area in which they would welcome further support. The induction of trainee teachers (interns) is good. Discussion with interns indicates that they are well supported by the school.
116. Current arrangements for teacher appraisal are under review in the light of recent changes to legislation regarding teachers’ salary.
117. Technical support is good in the library, science and art and very good in information technology. Support is less satisfactory in food technology and teachers have to prepare most of the materials themselves.
118. Accommodation has improved since the last inspection and the school has also been successful in making savings on the maintenance of the building. For example, in heating, the school has reduced the heating cost over three years from £47,000 to £30,000 by installing a zone computer controlled heating system. Accommodation for art is excellent and particularly effective for the development of sixth form work. Food technology rooms are light and airy. In science, two new science laboratories have improved the accommodation, although the rest remains worn and in need of refurbishment. There are issues of health and safety in science; some of the floor tiles are loose and there are splinters on some of the benches. Accommodation is adequate in history but is cramped for large classes. There are still several subject areas where the accommodation is unsatisfactory and inhibits pupils’ learning. In English, some of the classrooms are drab and the chairs in some rooms are too small for the tables. Similarly, in mathematics, some of the classrooms are small and offer too little opportunity for teachers to use a range of teaching styles with large groups. In design and technology, some areas, such as resistant materials, have not improved since the last inspection. The school has ample surrounding space and this provides a good facility for physical education. However, the condition of some of the tennis courts and the fact that the soil is made of clay limits the use of this provision. The school has access to the adjacent sports centre and the facility is used effectively by the pupils. The sixth form building is well designed and modern but the rooms cannot

accommodate large A-level groups, in geography, for example, and this results in demands made on other rooms in the school.

119. Resources for learning are satisfactory overall and the staff, pupils and parents have made tremendous efforts to raise money to improve learning resources within the school, particularly in relation to information technology. Learning resources are good in art and physical education but unsatisfactory in music and for some aspects of mathematics and design and technology. The library is an effective environment and is used well. It is well stocked with some 15,000 books and contains a computer bay with five internet access computers.

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

120. In order to make this a more effective school the governors, headteacher and staff should:

#### **1. Improve standards in information technology, modern foreign languages and music by:**

- 1.1 Improving pupils standards in information technology in Key Stages 3 and 4 through:

- providing sufficient curriculum time for pupils to develop information technology skills, knowledge and understanding with specialist teachers; [8, 15, 21, 62, 136, 233, 234]
- ensuring staff in other departments have the necessary training, confidence and access to resources to develop pupils' information technology skill across curriculum subjects. [158, 175, 183, 196, 213, 233, 244, 246, 293]

- 1.2 Continuing the work to raise the standards of modern foreign languages Key Stages 3 and 4, initiated by the new head of department. [8, 12, 15, 35, 270]

- 1.3 Ensuring that pupils' basic musical skills are appropriately developed to provide increasing levels of challenge in Years 8 and 9. [8, 12, 15, 50, 275, 278,

#### **2 Improve the impact of teaching on pupils' learning by:**

- 2.1 Ensuring that schemes of work in all subjects identify specific learning outcomes for each unit of work, against which pupils' progress can be assessed, to enable strengths and weaknesses to be identified so that very focused targets for improvement can be set for individuals and groups. [17, 77, 90, 133, 141, 143, 178, 268, 285, 286, 294]

- 2.2 Sharing the intended learning outcomes of a lesson with pupils at the start of a lesson and leaving sufficient time at the end for pupils to reflect on their progress with the teacher. [38, 133, 142, 157, 184, 198, 202, 211, 230, 269, 319]

- 2.3 Planning lessons that identify how the needs of pupils with differing abilities in the class will be met, particularly taking care that the needs of pupils of higher attainment are met in those classes with a preponderance of pupils of lower attainment.  
[40, 42, 51, 166, 167, 168, 170, 209, 218, 228, 238, 260, 268, 271, 286, 287]
- 2.4 Developing a wider range of teaching approaches that will enable teachers to respond to the needs of pupils who learn in different ways.  
[132, 151, 159, 242, 243]
- 2.5 Ensuring that regular marking, by all teachers, provides sufficient information about pupils' strengths and weaknesses for it to contribute more effectively to pupils' progress and target setting.  
[48, 134, 157, 242, 294, 319]
- 2.6 Improving the attitudes and behaviour of the small number of pupils that are indifferent to learning by making activities more interesting and motivating.  
[28, 131, 173, 228, 229, 282]

### **3 Increase the effectiveness of management by:**

- 3.1 Establishing a regular cycle of self-review at school, faculty and department level, that is systematic and promotes a rigorous, structured and critical evaluation of current practice and provide secure evidence to underpin the identification of development planning priorities, and enable the cost effectiveness of decisions to be evaluated.  
[100, 101, 102, 111]
- 3.2 More regularly evaluating the effectiveness of school policies and procedures and monitoring the consistency of their implementation, particularly those for assessment and behaviour.  
[48, 101, 198, 294, 319]
- 3.3 Evaluating the impact of decisions about how best to group pupils, on pupils' progress and standards, at whole-school and departmental level.  
[63, 64, 258, 311, 312]
- 3.4 Establishing a whole-school approach to evaluating the quality of teaching and learning that enables senior managers and subject heads to monitor, challenge and evaluate teaching standards against specific, measurable targets in order to eliminate unsatisfactory teaching and to raise standards.  
[43, 106, 107, 138, 160, 174, 212, 213, 226, 230, 270, 296, 320]

**In addition to the key issues above, other less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the school's future plan of action.**

- Establishing and implementing systems for risk assessment.  
[85,100]
- Fully implementing statutory requirements for religious education in Key Stage 4



and post-16.  
[62, 100, 311]

- Meeting statutory requirements for collective worship.  
[62, 69, 100]

*The numbers in brackets refer to the main paragraph(s) in the full report where these issues are mentioned.*

## 121. PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	229
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	65

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

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1%	17%	29%	43%	9%	1%	0

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

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

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

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	912	209
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	63	1

#### **Special educational needs**

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	13	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	263	6

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

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	52

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

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	24
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	29

### *Attendance*

#### **Authorised absence**

#### **Unauthorised absence**

	%
School data	5.9%
National comparative data	7.9%

	%
School data	0.6%
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***

	<b>Year</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Total</b>
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	1999	75	92	167

<b>National Curriculum Test/Task Results</b>		<b>English</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>	<b>Science</b>
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	46	55	48
	Girls	55	58	42
	Total	101	113	90
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	61 (62)	68 (71)	54 (60)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	23 (26)	43 (42)	19 (24)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

<b>Teachers' Assessments</b>		<b>English</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>	<b>Science</b>
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	52	58	49
	Girls	75	59	54
	Total	127	117	103
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	77 (56)	70 (76)	62(100)
	National	64 (61)	64 (64)	60 (61)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	32 (19)	46 (49)	25 (24)
	National	31 (30)	37 (37)	28 (30)

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	1999	86	93	179

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	40	79	85
	Girls	49	90	92
	Total	89	169	177
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	50 (46)	94 (92)	99 (98)
	National	46.3 (46.3)	90.7 (87.5)	95.7 (93.4)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	42.2 (38.3)
	National	37.8 (36.8)

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

### Attainment at the end of the sixth form

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
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	1999	43	44	87

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	16.6	14.4	15.5 (13.9)	0.5	5.2	3.1 (2.9)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (17.8)	2.7	2.8	2.8 (3.0)

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

***Ethnic background of pupils***

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	1
Indian	10
Pakistani	3
Bangladeshi	2
Chinese	12
White	1052
Any other minority ethnic group	38

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

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	23	
Other minority ethnic groups	1	1

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

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

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	66.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

**Education support staff: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of education support staff	23
Total aggregate hours worked per week	511

**Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78.7
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**Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13**

Key Stage 3	26
Key Stage 4	20

***Financial information***

Financial year	1999
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	£
Total income	2,680,102
Total expenditure	2,693,962
Expenditure per pupil	2,370
Balance brought forward from previous year	96,887
Balance carried forward to next year	83,027

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

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	1121
Number of questionnaires returned	159

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

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	38	55	4	3	0
My child is making good progress in school.	46	45	6	3	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	16	57	13	7	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	26	47	22	4	1
The teaching is good.	24	60	8	3	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	37	43	18	2	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	51	37	8	3	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	51	42	3	3	1
The school works closely with parents.	23	55	17	3	2
The school is well led and managed.	27	53	9	3	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	30	52	13	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	43	46	4	1	6

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

### **ENGLISH**

122. Standards in English are broadly in line with national averages at the ends of both key stages and the sixth form.
123. In the sixth form, the percentage of higher grades at A-level has fallen since the last inspection and is slightly below the national average, but given the inclusive policy for entry onto the course, students' achievements are satisfactory in relation to their prior attainment.
124. In GCSE English, on a high entry rate, standards are slightly below national averages, with girls under-performing more significantly than boys. In English Literature, the percentage of pupils achieving A\* - C grades is slightly above the national average on a slightly lower than average entry. Girls' results are close to the national average for girls; boys' results are slightly below girls' but exceed the national average for boys. All pupils entered for either subject achieve a GCSE pass grade. When individual pupils' GCSE results in a subject are compared with their overall results, pupils have recently been performing less well in English than they have in mathematics and science.
125. At Key Stage 3, standards, judged by the results of national tests, are broadly in line with the national average overall, although well below average for schools deemed to be similar. English test results are below those for mathematics, a reversal of the national pattern. In the four years since the last inspection, the headline figure has improved considerably, largely due to the improvement in boys' results, whose achievement is about a term in advance of boys nationally. Girls' results, however, have been on a downward trend since the last inspection and compared to the national picture, leaving them almost a year behind in 1999. No girls achieved a Level 7, and fewer girls than boys achieved a Level 6. Teachers' assessments are significantly higher than test results; this optimism is not reflected in standards seen in lessons, especially in relation to speaking and listening, but is evident in pupils' folders of drafted work.
126. In general, the standards of work seen in lessons, pupils' books and from discussions with pupils match the standards judged from most recent test and examination results.
127. In the sixth form, the standard of written work in folders reflects the broad range of ability. All students produce work of high quality, showing good understanding of literature and ideas, and developing a personal written style. Standards of speaking and listening observed in lessons were less good, and pupils had few opportunities to develop these skills in some lessons.
128. At Key Stage 4, standards achieved in lessons by pupils in the highest sets are high, with speaking and listening well developed and written work which shows a sophisticated understanding of literature fluently expressed. In a Year 11 class, pupils gave presentations using overhead transparencies comparing two poems from the

GCSE anthology. They were articulate, confident and independent thinkers and showed a good grasp of the concepts and features of the poems. Some pieces of work included in folders are exceptional. Many pupils have developed a strong personal voice and use their imaginations well. Pupils in the lowest sets are well supported to achieve their best, and produce pleasing folders for the GCSE and Certificate of Achievement including a good range of structured and sometimes extended writing. They are reasonably competent in their use of information technology and can talk confidently about what they have learned in English. Pupils in the lower middle band sets do not achieve their potential; standards of speaking and listening are generally below average and girls in particular are under-performing. Pupils have a satisfactory understanding of a range of texts and work is presented well, but the development of ideas and strategies for independent learning are limited.

129. At Key Stage 3, standards are generally satisfactory, with pupils achieving in line with their abilities. The standardised cognitive ability test results for the current Year 7 predict Year 9 statutory attainment test results higher than the current national average, and this higher level of attainment is evident in lessons for this year group. In an upper middle ability Year 8 class, pupils were able to discuss Coleridge's *The Ancient Mariner* and the features of tabloid newspapers as well as to explain their learning and to work collaboratively on a joint piece of writing. They were fluent and confident users of several software packages.
130. Throughout both key stages, pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, as do pupils with English as an additional language. Although additional support for both groups is very limited in English lessons, teachers understand their needs and pupils have access to all the curriculum.
131. Overall, standards of literacy across the curriculum are satisfactory but the quality of support is inconsistent between subjects. In geography, the development of literacy is a strength of the subject: pupils are taught to consider audience and purpose and to discuss the criteria for effective writing in a range of genres, such as a publicity leaflet for a walk around Swanage in Year 8 and an investigative article on the effects of tourism on Majorca in Year 9. Teachers promote developed sentence structures and use a variety of DARTs (directed activities related to texts) activities to encourage effective reading and analysis of texts. In religious education, there is effective use of key words on bright wall stars, supported by teachers drawing attention to the spelling of technical terms. Pupils write poems and other empathetic pieces such as *The Cardboard Box Man* in Year 7 and texts for specified audiences, as in the leaflet composed by Year 9 students comparing Christianity and Buddhism. In most other subjects, skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening are practised, but are not systematically taught. The teaching of technical words and departmental approaches to marking are inconsistent.
132. A Literacy Working Group has begun to meet regularly and is currently well chaired by the school special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO). A brief audit of existing practice has provided an agenda for future work, and training is planned. A focus on writing frames, writing genres, word-walls and other common strategies for teaching spelling, marking errors and promoting speaking and listening has the potential to yield early and positive results.



133. Throughout the school, attitudes to English are generally good or very good. Some limited examples of poor behaviour and lack of commitment in some Year 11 lessons were related directly to the quality of teaching, when un motivating tasks and a lack of pace allowed pupils' attention to wander. In a further minority of lessons at the ends of the key stages, girls in particular are passive learners and are poorly motivated to work independently. When they are given the opportunity to be more active learners, pupils respond well and work with diligence and creativity.
134. In half the lessons seen, teaching was good or very good. In some lessons, the pace of learning flags, and too little is achieved in the hour. This is comparable with the findings of the last inspection. Teachers plan and organise well the activities in their lessons and have clear classroom routines to promote order. Relationships are good, resources well chosen and subject knowledge is good: all these, along with generally high expectations, contribute to promoting self-esteem and effective learning. In GCSE folders for, example, low attaining groups had successfully completed an assignment comparing *The Speckled Band*, a pre-twentieth century short story with *Lamb to the Slaughter*, a modern mystery story, in an extended essay. The range of teaching strategies is relatively limited in some lessons, and some pupils make insufficient progress, especially girls of average and below average ability in Key Stages 3 and 4. Speaking and listening activities are not sufficiently varied or structured in many lessons, though there were good examples in a Year 11 and a Year 7 lesson, where pupils took charge of the learning for the whole class. High ability pupils and those with special educational needs are appropriately challenged, but where pupils have individual education plans for their special educational needs, these are not systematically considered by teachers in their lesson planning.
135. Assessment procedures are not well co-ordinated or planned in Key Stages 3 and 4, although some initial developments have been put in train. Teachers do not usually have a precise enough view of what each pupil should learn from a task or a lesson. Such learning outcomes do not appear in lesson planning, are not shared with pupils, and are not used to assess achievement, so the progress of individuals and groups is difficult to track within a single lesson and over time. Drafting of written work is, as at the last inspection, a strength of the department: it is not simply the correction of secretarial features, but a real consideration by pupils of their choice of form, style and vocabulary. Teachers' marking prompts pupils to reconsider their assumptions, ideas and expression and in many cases contributes significantly to pupils' development as writers and to high standards.
136. Other marking of written work however, though encouraging, needs to be more consistent across the department and to identify learning targets more precisely. Procedures for assessing and recording progress in speaking and listening and reading are weak, although there is some good practice. The assignment cover sheets, proposed for Key Stage 3, are a useful way of monitoring progress.
137. The curriculum at present is generally broad and balanced, and the plans for September 2000 are detailed, imaginative and well advanced. There is a good range of texts, including those from other cultures and traditions, and the themes addressed promote effective social, moral and cultural development. Spiritual development is less easy to

discern in the planning documentation, despite recent staff discussions. The provision for speaking and listening is well embedded into the structure.

138. Teachers are all well qualified and deployed appropriately across the school. There is a professional openness to change and development, as evidenced by the positive attitudes to the use of information technology in English that were well exemplified in a Year 8 lesson where pupils created a tabloid newspaper front page using two types of software. Limitations on access to information technology are a frustration for the department and constrain achievement, especially for those pupils with no home access. There is some evidence of information technology being used effectively for display, but in general, wall displays are poor – they neither celebrate achievement effectively, nor demonstrate learning. An exception is the display of shifting tensions in the novel *I'm the King of the Castle*.
139. Text resources for learning are satisfactory in terms of quantity and quality, although paper resources to support the units of work are poorly managed and inefficiently stored.
140. Management of the department on a day-to-day basis works smoothly, but the development of strategies for improvement over time is unsatisfactory. The department's development plan is incomplete and does not address the raising of standards. Procedures for systematically monitoring the quality of teaching and learning are absent. Consequently, where good practice exists, it has not been consistently applied across the work of the team. The analysis of data on pupils' performance to chart progress and evaluate effectiveness is increasingly understood in the department, but has yet to have much impact on practice. In particular, a more careful tracking of girls in middle ability sets in Year 10 would help teachers to meet the learning needs of these pupils and to set them appropriate challenges.
141. The aims and values of the department are forcefully articulated in the handbook and are manifest in the inclusion practices, the expectations in lessons, and in the curriculum content. Practice is poorly documented, however, and individuals interpret the vision with a high degree of autonomy, which is sometimes wasteful of energy. The department leadership is collegiate, with all members of this very experienced team contributing to the development of new units of work and procedures when required. The recent improvement in boys' results has demonstrated the team's ability to implement consistent practices. Given the current pace of change, and the challenges posed to secondary schools by the National Literacy Strategy, leadership now needs to be more directive and vigorous.
142. Overall, this is an experienced and professional department with the capacity to improve. The lack of clear systems for ensuring consistency and high standards needs to be addressed urgently, particularly in relation to learning outcomes and aspects of assessment.

## **Drama**

143. Drama is one of the subjects in the faculty of performing arts and at Key Stage 3 is taught by drama specialists to all pupils in an integrated course with music. Within the

departmental documentation, the philosophy for drama is clear and imaginative. It offers good access for all pupils to a range of cultural texts and ideas and provides good support for spiritual, moral and social development. Although the course includes a good range of learning experiences, it is not made clear in teachers' lesson plans or during the lessons what skills, knowledge or understanding pupils are intended to gain. Consequently, pupils' progress is difficult to identify and assess. There is also a predominance of making and presenting over appreciating and appraising in lessons at both key stages.

144. In lessons, a significant number of pupils demonstrate a range of skills and techniques, including controlled movement and gesture, with imagination and feeling. They generally enjoy drama and remain on task, working well in groups to create and communicate effective drama. Overall, teaching is satisfactory. However, some lessons lack pace and opportunities for reflection, and there is a lack of emphasis on developing language within the creative context, so some pupils become indifferent and make insufficient progress.
145. At Key Stage 3, standards of performance are in line with national expectations, and at GCSE, although results have varied, in 1999, the proportion of pupils attaining higher grades was slightly above national average on a larger than average percentage entry. However, compared with the school results for individual students, there is evidence that pupils are underachieving. Closer attention to monitoring aspects of pupil progress in developing skills and knowledge would enable teachers to set higher individual challenges. At A-level, a small group is entered each year, which achieves good results in relation to national averages, but there is no analysis of progress in relation to previous examination performance.
146. For September 2000, there is early planning for parts of the new curriculum for English to be supported in drama lessons. This work could contribute significantly to the clarifying of learning outcomes.
147. There is a long tradition of major productions twice a year and opportunities for extra-curricular involvement are taken up keenly by both girls and boys. These productions contribute significantly to the cultural life of the school and to the personal development of the many pupils involved.

## **MATHEMATICS**

148. Standards in mathematics are above national averages. This is an improvement on the findings of the previous inspection report.
149. Standards in the sixth form are high. In 1999, of the 35 entries at A-level, including 14 at further mathematics standard, 10 A grades were achieved. These are good results and typical of those attained in recent years. In pure mathematics, sixth form students are confident in algebra; they can select the correct trigonometric identities and understand the principles of co-ordinate geometry. In statistics, pupils are able to apply one and two tail tests and understand when to use continuity corrections. In mechanics, pupils are able to manipulate differential equations in order to solve satellite systems.

150. Standards in numeracy are improving and are best developed at Key Stage 3. In Year 7, pupils have a good recall of number facts and they can use these to solve other number problems. They are able to partition number in calculations and make sensible estimates. At Key Stage 4, levels of numeracy are less well developed and for some lower attaining groups this impinges on their progress. Numeracy across the school is generally sound. In geography, a broad range of numeracy activities is planned throughout all key stages. In design and technology, pupils were able to calculate the selling price of food as a percentage of the cost price and in English, pupils were able to calculate the cost of holidays from advertising brochures. In vocational subjects such as GNVQ leisure and tourism, the application of number is well delivered.
151. At the end of Key Stage 4, standards are above national averages, which is an improvement since the last inspection. In 1999, 50.6 per cent of pupils achieved grades between A\* and C compared to 45.6 per cent nationally. Almost every pupil entered for the examination achieved an A\* - G grade. Pupils performed well at the highest grades of A and A\*. Overall, and in terms of relative performance, pupils did significantly better in mathematics than in other subjects. Boys did better than girls both in terms of the percentage of grades A\* - C and in terms of the average point score. The difference between boys and girls is most significant at the highest grades with 10.9 per cent of girls achieving A or A\* compared to 16.9 per cent for boys. However, the percentages of higher grades for both boys and girls are well above those found nationally.
152. Standards in mathematics, on entry, are broadly in line with the national average. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards are above the national average, indicating above average improvement over the key stage. In the 1999 Key Stage 3 tests, the percentage of pupils achieving Level 5 or above was 68 per cent compared to 62 per cent nationally, although this is below average when compared to similar schools. Boys performed better than the girls, 66.3 per cent of girls achieved Level 5 or above compared to 82.4 per cent of boys achieving Level 5 or above which is well above the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher grades of Level 6 and above is above national averages and boys again perform better than girls at this level. The department is quite rightly proud of the four pupils who achieved Level 8, an exceptional performance. Pupils make sound or better progress from Key Stage 2. On average, pupils made an increase of 1.8 levels between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. These results are indicative of the steady improvement that has taken place over the past four years.
153. Overall, standards in lessons observed during the inspection and discussions with pupils reflected test and examination results. Standards observed during A-level lessons were particularly high.
154. Overall, pupils' achievements are generally in line with their capabilities although some average attaining groups do not achieve as well as they might. Higher attaining pupils make good and often very good progress and pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. Pupils in some average attaining groups, however, do not make as much progress as they could because teachers do not use a sufficiently wide range of teaching approaches to ensure pupils are given the opportunity to learn in the ways that best suit them.

155. Attitudes towards mathematics are positive and this is a significant strength of the department. In the majority of lessons and across all key stages the levels of pupils' response is consistently good, often very good and sometimes excellent. Pupils in the higher sets often demonstrate very high levels of motivation. Pupils are careful with their work. At Key Stage 4 and at A-level, pupils' work often includes their annotations to support their understanding. Relationships between pupils and teachers are generally very good. In the majority of cases and even when the teaching lacks challenge, the pupils respond well and are attentive to the teacher's exposition.
156. Teaching is satisfactory overall. Teachers are well planned although their planning does not always contain clear learning objectives, which are shared with the pupils prior to the start of the lesson. This makes it difficult for pupils to assess their progress against the expected outcomes for a lesson. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and is sufficient to meet the demands of the curriculum. The learning environment created by teachers in the great majority of cases is good and this results in good relationships and positive attitudes towards the subject. Teaching style is very consistent across the department and is often characterised by clear exposition and the use of questions to promote learning.
157. Teaching at Key Stage 3 is generally satisfactory. In lessons where teaching is good, the teacher's exposition is precise and accurate, the use of teaching aids such as overhead projectors supports the exposition and questions asked are focused and very effective. In the small minority of lessons where teaching is unsatisfactory, pupils are given insufficient opportunities to engage in the learning. Concepts and methods are presented as a set of rules with little or no explanation and no questions are asked to support the pupils in understanding the concepts. A lack of understanding leads to underachievement by some pupils who find the subject more difficult.
158. Teaching at Key Stage 4 is satisfactory or better. In lessons where teaching is good, pupils are asked to explain their methods and justify their reasoning to other pupils, this supports not only their own learning but also facilitates the learning of others. In these lessons teachers actively encourage the accurate use of mathematical terminology by pupils. This promotes discussion, helps consolidate learning and provides opportunities for extension tasks.
159. Teaching at A-level is good overall. Where teaching is good, subject knowledge is secure and teachers understand the demands of the curriculum well. Expectations are high and the relationships and attitudes are very positive. The level of independence is high, the great majority of the pupils are independent learners and this supports the learning even during isolated instances where the teaching fails to challenge the pupils.
160. Teachers use questioning to assess what pupils have learned and what needs to be done next. This is a useful assessment tool in lessons. However, learning outcomes for each unit of work are not yet sufficiently specific to allow teachers to assess pupils' individual strengths and weaknesses in the subject, so that very focused targets for improvement can be given and lessons planned accordingly. The majority of work is marked and at A-level, the marking is effective. Detailed comments provide information on errors and give guidance for improvement. Marking at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 is less well developed. The majority of work, although marked, gives no information on achievement and progress and gives little guidance on strategies for

improvement. Although individual education plans are written for pupils with special educational needs by the SENCO, they do not contain specific curriculum targets to help teachers plan appropriate work in mathematics.

161. Pupils benefit from a well balanced curriculum with sufficient attention given to all aspects of the national programme for mathematics. The use of information technology in mathematics is underdeveloped and insufficient use is made of this medium to enhance pupils' learning in the subject. The department has already identified information technology as an area for development.
162. The head of department provides sound leadership and works well with the second in department and the rest of the team. The head of department, whilst recognising the strengths within the department, is also aware of the need to broaden the range of teaching styles for those groups of pupils for whom the current approaches are not effective. Schemes of work are being developed to include more guidance for teachers on resources and learning approaches. Accommodation, whilst generally satisfactory, includes some rooms that are cramped and poorly resourced. This limits the range of teaching methods that can be used. Learning resources are generally satisfactory although the department is in need of more interactive resources such as digit cards for pupils and teacher.
163. The development plan is brief and does not contain success criteria through which to evaluate the work of the department. There is currently no systematic monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning in mathematics. Consequently, for example, the department is not able to judge how successful its approaches to teaching are for different ability groups. The head of department recognises that closer and more systematic monitoring of teaching and learning is an area for improvement in the department.
164. The department has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection. Standards have continued to rise. Most significant is the improvement in the attitudes towards the subject. This should be built on further by developing a broader range of interactive teaching styles to support the needs of all pupils.

## **SCIENCE**

165. Overall, standards in science are in line with the national average. Standards at Key Stages 3 and 4 are in line with national averages but they are below average for schools deemed to be similar. Boys achieve better on average than girls. At A-level, students' overall science performance exceeds the national average.
166. In 1999, pupils' results in national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 indicate that the proportion achieving Level 5 and above was in line with the national average. Boys performed better than girls by an amount equivalent to a term's progress. The trend of the last three years' results, 1997 to 1999, indicates pupils' performance at Level 5 and above, has declined.
167. In 1999, pupils' GCSE science results for A\* - C grades were in line with the national average but six per cent below the department's target. However, 98 per cent of pupils gained an A\* - G grade in the examination. Pupils' performance in science was slightly better than their average performance in other subjects. Overall, boys achieved

significantly better in science than they did in their other subjects at GCSE. Boys achieved better than girls, by 5.5 per cent for A\* - C grades. However, girls' A and B grade performances were good. All pupils were entered for double award science. Science results have fluctuated over the last four years. The trend over this period indicates a slight decline in pupils' A\* - C performance.

168. Students' science A-level performance in 1999 was above the national average and compared very favourably with the school's average points score. In physics, there was 100 per cent pass rate and half of the 12 students achieved A grades. The pass rate for all science A-levels was 90 per cent. Recruitment to chemistry is low compared with the numbers of students studying biology and physics at A-level.
169. Over Key Stage 3, middle and higher attaining students are not stretched sufficiently, thus the number of pupils achieving at Level 5 and above at the end of Year 9 is depressed. In Key Stage 4, high attaining pupils achieve in line with their capabilities. Middle and lower attaining pupils make less progress over the key stage. The department should ensure that girls' results rise to match those of boys. Standards are highest in the sixth form where, particularly in physics and chemistry, all students demonstrate high levels of skill and understanding. This pattern in standards remains essentially unchanged since the last inspection.
170. In Year 7, pupils in middle and lower attaining sets build effectively on prior knowledge and their investigative skills are developed effectively. Pupils in higher attaining sets are not provided with sufficiently challenging activities to maintain satisfactory progress in achievement. The setting of short term targets to achieve specific learning goals in a Year 7 chemistry lesson was an example of good practice that should be developed across the key stage.
171. In Year 8, classes are mixed ability and there is great variability in the standards achieved by pupils. Lower attaining pupils are generally well supported and make satisfactory progress. However, middle and higher attaining pupils are often not provided with learning experiences which sufficiently develop their science understanding. Pupils learn well when involved in paced, hands-on activities. Good progress was made in lessons where pupils practically explored the effects of heat radiation by accurately recording thermometer readings from tins of hot water, empirically found the strength of nail-electromagnets with the number of turns of wire, and accurately recorded the time taken for different lengths of magnesium ribbon to dissolve in dilute hydrochloric acid. Pupils with acute special educational needs were involved fully in these activities. Student teachers and learning support assistants were deployed effectively to support the safe practice of pupils with special educational needs. The best practice used differentiated worksheets to effectively support all pupils' learning. A significant number of pupils in Year 8, however, do not learn effectively when classwork is undifferentiated, the activities lack pace and/or require the class to listen or to copy information for extended periods of time.
172. In Year 9, all sets benefit from learning activities which are matched to their prior knowledge and which allow for effective consolidation. Pupils in higher sets demonstrate achievement above national averages. For them to achieve at the highest levels in national tests, teaching needs to develop their higher order problem-solving

skills and provide more opportunities to apply knowledge to novel contexts. Opportunities are often lost for applying knowledge to real-life situations of import and interest. Where pupils are required to spend lengthy periods copying text and diagrams, or listening to teacher exposition, otherwise stimulating and engaging learning activities are undermined.

173. In Years 10 and 11, pupils in higher attaining sets progress very well. Their understanding and practical skills are above national averages at the end of the key stage. A revision programme in the final spring term effectively secures and extends pupils' knowledge and understanding. Pupils in middle and lower attaining sets make less progress overall across the key stage. The revision lessons in biology and chemistry often do not adequately address the needs of lower attaining students. In Year 10 biology, pupils extended their understanding of skin structure and function by copying neat notes and diagrams which would provide a supportive revision resource. However, opportunities were missed to ask a cross-section of pupils to explain their ideas and uncover their misunderstandings. A Year 10 physics lesson exemplified active learning through hands-on activities timed for appropriate pace. These effectively reinforced and extended pupils' understanding of electrical circuits and components, boosted confidence and improved practical skills.
174. A significant number of students study A-level sciences in the sixth form. However, take up across subjects is inconsistent. Additionally, few boys study biology. All students studying physics are challenged to achieve at levels which appropriately stretch and effectively develop their understandings and skills. In chemistry, students demonstrate practical analytical and problem-solving skills at and above national expectation. Students in biology do not sufficiently develop higher order skills and there is an over reliance on memorisation of facts. The range of prior attainment of students embarking on A-level science courses is wide but most students make good progress. Exam results are good, particularly in physics and chemistry.
175. As examples of the standards being reached in chemistry, Year 13 students successfully use their knowledge of rates of reaction and exercise practical skills, to interpret their results from empirical investigations of the reaction of magnesium with hydrochloric acid. Students' skills and understanding of error analysis are promoted through the teacher's probing questioning, and constructive critique of their experimental procedures. In physics, Year 12 students employ radioactive decay principles they learned at a conference they attended some months ago to explain the nature of alpha particle tracks observed in a cloud chamber experiment. Information technology is used effectively to illustrate important aspects of the phenomena under discussion. Year 13 physics students are supported in a seminar in presenting model answers to A-level examination questions. The teacher's use of probing questions and supportive comments maintains a high quality discourse which encourages all students to contribute. This builds students' confidence and extends learning. In biology, Year 13 students give a presentation of exemplar notes to the rest of the group. This consolidates learning of areas of the syllabus that students themselves have identified collectively as needing revision. However, students need a clearer brief to plan their presentations most effectively. They also need support to prepare questions beforehand to improve the interactive nature of the session.



176. Overall, pupils work effectively together and support each other's learning. Most 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. However, there are significant numbers of pupils in Year 8 whose behaviour is detrimental to their own and their peers' learning. These pupils require more support to engage and sustain their interest in science activities. In Key Stage 4, learning is supported by regular end of topic tests which are revised for effectively by higher attaining pupils and coursework which is effectively engaged by higher attaining pupils, especially girls. Learning activities, on-going assessments and targeted support need adjusting, by couching science learning in contexts that all pupils find interesting, for example, to ensure girls' progress equals boys' in Key Stage 3. Good relationships between staff and pupils promote effective learning in most lessons. Pupils, when provided with the opportunity, are willing to share their ideas in class discussions and are supported in doing so through teachers valuing their contributions. Many pupils are willing to talk about what they have done. However, pupils are not able to identify their own particular strengths and weaknesses. Pupils with special educational needs take a full part in lessons and are adroitly supported by learning assistants. Their interventions would be further improved through teachers planning specific support activities related directly to targets in pupils' individual education plans.
177. Teaching is satisfactory overall. It is good in the sixth form and satisfactory in the other two key stages. Lessons are generally well planned and organised. These qualities are reflected in the judgements of the last inspection. Teaching is most effective in the sixth form and to higher attaining sets at Key Stage 4, where lessons have pace and appropriate challenge. They foster skills of attention, perseverance with tasks, and study skills relating to note taking and revision. Teaching across Key Stage 3 and to middle and lower attaining pupils in Key Stage 4, generally requires more planned differentiation and a greater range of learning activities. The teaching of physics often exemplifies the best practice where a greater range of teaching and learning styles are used and pupil motivation and progress are relatively high across all levels of attainment. The department should share good practice to improve teaching standards overall. Good practice with less attaining Year 11 pupils was illustrated in the revision of energy transfer where pupils' imagination and interest were stimulated by couching recall of physics in the simulation of a 'Who wants to be a millionaire' type quiz. The multiple-choice format effectively helped pupils gain in knowledge and in confidence.
178. The display work in many laboratories and corridors is of a high standard and reinforces pupils' understanding of key concepts at Key Stages 3 and 4. Evidence of pupils' information technology skills are present in the quality of word-processed and desktop published materials. Information technology effectively supports the curriculum, especially when it is used to promote reflection and places science in exciting, novel and important contexts. A computer simulation gripped the attention of Year 10 chemistry pupils and effectively reinforced their understanding of alkali metal reactions. Additionally, a video clip from a James Bond film dramatically highlighted the industrial use of lasers. However, information technology resources are insufficient to enrich pupils' learning as effectively as they should. Pupils' literacy and numeracy are not supported in systematic fashion.
179. 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 are well qualified and experienced. They make a valuable contribution to the work in science, as do the learning support staff who work alongside pupils on the register of special educational needs.

180. With the exception of information technology, there are adequate learning resources and sufficient accommodation to meet the demands of the current science curriculum. The science accommodation has been improved in line with recommendations made in the last report. However, the older laboratories require more regular maintenance and areas of the floor where there are missing tiles, and some stool tops, pose health and safety risks and require urgent attention.
181. Steps are being taken to improve schemes of work in Key Stage 3 and to implement a coherent system of tracking pupils' progress, target setting on the basis of national assessment data and involving pupils in actively monitoring their achievements, to identify areas to target for improvement. These developments should support teachers and all pupils in improving their learning.

## **ART**

182. Overall, standards in art are good. Achievement at A-level is at a very high level, with the great majority of students gaining A - C grades and 98 per cent A\* - G grades. Standards are particularly high in painting and drawing from direct experience. Sketch and workbooks are exemplary, and display sophisticated skills in critical studies, research and investigation. Historical and contextual study could be developed at a more rigorous level. Increasing emphasis on the inclusion of three-dimensional course work is helping to raise standards, although a broader range of materials and processes needs to be explored in addition to ceramics. Girls do substantially better than boys, and boys' take up for A-level is low. Standards are also high in the work of sixth-formers following a modular GCSE course. Their course work folders display a rich variety of techniques and processes.
183. Standards of work at Key Stage 4 reflect recent examination results, which are the same as the national average for GCSE. Girls, however, consistently perform at 10 per cent higher than the national average. Boys do substantially less well than girls, their relative achievements reflecting national differences in performance, although at Gosford Hill school, boys' A\* - C pass rates at 42 per cent, are more than 40 per cent lower than that of girls, who are achieving 83 per cent passes at A\* - C. Most pupils do as well in art as their other subjects, although the majority of boys do less well. Fewer boys than girls take the subject at GCSE. Drawing skills are well developed and ceramics skills are good, but skills are weaker in textiles, printmaking and mixed media. Pupils working in three-dimensions need to experiment with other materials in addition to clay. Pupils have many opportunities to be effectively informed by the work of other artists, although influences are largely European in origin. Pupil workbooks are used effectively to experiment with ideas and processes. At both A-level and GCSE, pupils are very good at organising and manipulating visual images from a variety of primary and secondary sources, but are less confident in dealing with abstraction, or responding to personal ideas and contemporary issues.

184. At Key Stage 3, the majority of pupils do well in art in relation to their prior attainment. Most pupils reach the expected levels for their age, and many are working at higher levels. Pupils exhibit good construction skills in ceramics and drawing. Painting from observation is of a high standard. Pupils respond enthusiastically to a thorough and well-structured homework policy and strategy, although set tasks do not always naturally develop from work done in class. Pupils are good at talking about and evaluating work, and are keen to voice an informed opinion about art. Pupils are not confident when working on a large scale, and there is very little evidence of group work. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported and fully integrated in lessons, often achieving high standards in relation to their prior attainment.
185. Overall, pupils progress very well in art, although a substantial group of boys do less well than expected.
186. As in the previous inspection, there is still very little evidence of information technology skills in art activities, although some staff are completing in-service training in related areas. Some good examples of computer based art work are developed in projects at Key Stage 3. The department is poorly resourced in terms of computer hardware and software.
187. Teaching is good overall and some is very good at examination level. The team of well-qualified and experienced teachers cultivates a rigorous collegiate atmosphere. The majority of lessons are well paced, showing good classroom management and efficient deployment of materials. Teaching is generally lively and energetic, and techniques are demonstrated with flair and expertise. A photographed set of archive material of the work of past pupils is used as an effective teaching aid in all key stages. The photographs help pupils to understand what high standards of work look like in practice. Knowing that the work has been produced by pupils like themselves, raises their level of aspiration. Teaching and learning are less effective when the pace relaxes. In some lessons, the learning focus is unclear and much teacher time is spent responding to pupil requests for attention or correcting unsettled behaviour.
188. Pupils' attitudes are generally very good. This has a positive impact on learning and reflects the positive ethos of the department. Many pupils, particularly girls, take advantage of the department's policy for pupils' open access to facilities at lunchtime and after school hours, and this helps them to improve their work. This is particularly the case for pupils in Years 10 and 11, where insufficient curriculum time (8 per cent) is allocated to the GCSE course for effective coverage of syllabus requirements.
189. Methods of assessment are rigorous and effectively deployed throughout the department. This has a positive impact on standards. Particularly good practice is evident of negotiated assessment and comments in workbooks and reports, but pupils' contribution to their own assessment needs to be formalised. The monitoring of pupils' progress is effective, particularly in the transition from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4.
190. The department is increasing links with partner primary schools particularly through shared creative arts events. Display throughout the school is used effectively as a teaching aid and a celebration of pupils' work. Opportunities to develop cross-

curricular partnerships within the school, particularly with the expressive arts and design and technology should be explored to help develop pupils' understanding of the relationships between the different art forms.

191. Leadership is dynamic and visionary, and teachers constantly evaluate their own and each other's work, sharing good practice and team teaching where appropriate. This is good practice, which should be further developed so that teaching within the department is evaluated against agreed criteria. Schemes of work need to be clearer, and set out with long-term aims and plans for coverage of the National Curriculum programmes of study. Opportunities for trips and artists' residencies need a renewed focus in order to expose more pupils to the work of others.
192. The spacious and well-equipped accommodation for art is outstanding and has a positive impact on pupils' learning. Sixth form studio spaces are particularly good.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

193. Standards in design and technology are good overall. Standards of achievement at post-16 are good and although the A-level design and technology groups are small, some pupils achieve the highest grades. Levels of attainment have been maintained since the last inspection. Overall, progress in design and technology is good throughout the school.
194. Standards in design and technology are also good at Key Stage 4. In 1999 when nearly every pupil in Year 11 took a GCSE in design and technology, 57 per cent of these pupils achieved a grade A\* - C, this is 8 per cent above the national average. Of all pupils entered for the examination, 98 per cent gained an A\* - G grade. Pupils generally achieve better results in design and technology, regardless of specialist area, than they do in their other subjects.
195. Standards at Key Stage 3 are also good. In 1999, the Year 9 end-of-key stage teacher assessments of pupils' achievement in design and technology indicate that 75 per cent of pupils achieved Level 5 or above, this is 15 per cent more than the national average.
196. Throughout Key Stage 3, pupils are taught a range of progressively more demanding designing and making skills in resistant materials, food, textiles and graphics and by the end of the key stage, standards seen indicate that they have a good level of competence in the subject. In resistant materials, pupils design their own 'novelty' clocks, choosing from a limited range of materials to produce satisfactory final specifications. Their designs are creative and show some ingenuity and their products are constructed to satisfactory standards. Pupils often demonstrate good problem-solving skills as they overcome unforeseen difficulties. Year 9 pupils in food, produce a range of quality bread-based products and demonstrate high levels of skill and understanding in the preparation of their dough. Pupils produce very good design work in food, often including detailed research, testing and even dimensioned drawings of their ideas. In some areas, pupils are required to design objects with no functional purpose; this limits their designing opportunities.
197. In Key Stage 4, all pupils choose a GCSE course, which specialises in one of the areas

explored at Key Stage 3. Pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, make significant progress when working in one material area with one teacher. In textiles, for instance, one pupil had produced a pair of children's slippers, which were of high quality, attractive and functional, and constructed to very high standards. Pupils on the child development course show high levels of analysis and understanding of consumer issues when they describe the potential design problems associated with a range of toys. Most pupils in Year 11 have a good appreciation of industrial processes although in resistant materials, some pupils' understanding of the basic manufacturing techniques used to produce familiar products is weak.

198. At post-16, students demonstrate very good designing and making skills, often working with challenging materials to produce very attractive and functional designs. A Year 12 student, for instance, produced a high quality wall mirror with tilting panels and a Year 13 student's major project used a high quality engineering solution to the problem of improving mountain bike braking systems.
199. Pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 have few opportunities to develop their designing and making skills with systems and control. Pupils in all areas of design and technology have very little opportunity to use computers as part of their learning and the use of computers in design and technology is often limited to those who have access to one at home.
200. Pupils have good attitudes towards the subject often showing high levels of involvement in lessons, especially when engaged in practical activity such as metal monster making in Year 7 resistant materials, biscuit making in Year 10 food technology or when involved in developing their original design concepts through to realisation in Year 13 design. The behaviour of pupils is almost always good and on the few occasions when it is not, there are sometimes large numbers of pupils who need special attention.
201. The standard of teaching is good overall. It is slightly better at Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. The well-experienced staff prepare lessons that usually show high levels of subject knowledge and are well organised. Where teaching is very good, the aims of the lesson are shared with pupils and there is good variety of teaching styles and pace to lessons with questioning used to involve pupils in the activity. Staff complete assessments of pupils' achievement conscientiously and records of achievement are kept. Insufficient use is made of pupil assessment at Key Stage 3. Learning objectives for lessons are not always shared with the pupils to guide them in improving their work.
202. The department is well organised and very well led with a vision for the future of the subject. Good use is made of resources. There is very good quality technician support in resistant materials but a shortage of technician support time in food and textiles. Significant progress has been made in many areas since the last inspection. The food and textile areas have been re-furnished to high standards, as a result of strenuous efforts, by school staff and parents, to raise funds for the work. The quality of the accommodation for resistant materials was criticised at the time of the last inspection and remains very poor but the school has made efforts to rectify this.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

203. Standards overall are sound with some good features, such as the development of geographical enquiry throughout the school. Achievement and progress are good overall and very good throughout the GCSE course, although inconsistent through Key Stage 3.
204. Examination performance in 1999 in A-level geography is just below national averages at 90 per cent A – E grades. It has been consistent for the last three years, with two or three pupils not attaining a grade. The percentage of the higher grades (A and B) is also below national averages but the results reflect the profile of the pupils entering the course with many B and C grades at GCSE. Geography A-level is one of the most popular choices in the sixth form. Rising numbers are a result of the improved performance at GCSE. Standards have been sustained since the last inspection.
205. Standards observed in lessons in the sixth form and scrutiny of Years 12 and 13 work are in line with national expectations and consistent with the examination performance. There is very good development of the key skills of independent research, oral and written communication throughout the course. In one Year 13 lesson on the impact of tourism across the world, students were able to demonstrate their ability to research using a range of sources, including the Internet, synthesise and distil relevant information and produce a written handout and prepare an oral presentation. Whereas students have a good grasp of key terms and key ideas, extended thinking and reasoning to develop a deeper understanding and analysis of these ideas is not well developed for all students, and for the more able students in particular. For example, in Year 13 lessons on the impact of multi-national companies on less economically developed countries, students were able to define key geographical terms, were able to make general statements about the impact and the benefits and the problems but were struggling to criticise the general statements. Students' graphical analysis is good, but their knowledge and understanding of places studied is underdeveloped, so that when analysing data and other sources, their ability to draw on a sense of the places studied is insufficiently well developed among all students and in particular, the lower attaining students. For example, in a Year 13 practice decision making exercise on the Korup Rainforest, Cameroon, students could analyse complex numerical and mapped data, but were lacking a detailed understanding of the sense of the tropical environment.
206. GCSE results in 1999 were above national and school averages with 62 per cent A\* - C grades and have been rising for three years which represents very good improvement since the last inspection. In the last two years, all pupils entered achieved a grade and all pupils with special educational needs entered for Certificate of Achievement attained distinctions, the highest grade, which should be commended. There is no significant difference in the performance of boys compared with girls. There is a small concern about the low numbers of the highest grade, A\*. Geography is a popular subject with, as a rule, more than half the cohort opting for the subject.
207. Standards in lessons are consistent with this good performance. Pupils' understanding of geographical patterns is very well developed. In one Year 11 lesson on cities, they could interpret the map of Coventry, describing features of different parts of the city and explaining how the pattern had emerged. They could describe clearly the features

of these different parts of the city and where they are located and could assess the quality of life for people who live there. Pupils could also explain in detail the processes that lead to the formation of landscapes and interpret patterns on photographs and maps. For example, in one lesson on coastal erosion in Dorset, they could use the map to describe the landscape and relate it to photographs of coastal erosion features. Pupils' understanding of data and graphs is particularly well developed. In a Year 10 lesson, pupils analysed the relationship between the number of primary schools and population of settlements around Oxford. They were able to show trends and recognise exceptions. Most were able to explain the pattern of the data and some could suggest reasons for the exceptions.

208. Teacher assessments at Key Stage 3 indicate that 58 per cent attained Level 5 or above at the end of Year 9. The proportion of pupils reaching Levels 7 and 8 is higher than national standards, the proportion not reaching Level 5 is higher than average too.
209. Evidence in lessons and pupils' work suggests that there is unequal development in different aspects of geography. From the standards of work seen in books, pupils' ability to carry out geographical enquiry is very good, for example, the Year 9 work on Majorca is well above expectations for many pupils of similar age. Many of the more able pupils are producing work of an exceptional standard. However, geographical skills specifically related to maps and knowledge and understanding of places, especially with the least able pupils, are well below expectation in Year 8 and Year 9. For example, many pupils in a Year 8 class were struggling to describe the distribution of rainforest and specifically name the continents of the world.
210. Attitudes to learning are good and during GCSE and A-level are very good. Pupils are highly motivated and this has a positive impact on standards. Students in the sixth form are motivated further by the fieldwork opportunities locally, to France and to Morocco. Pupils in Key Stage 4 cite effective, encouraging and supportive teaching and interesting subject and learning activities as the main reasons for this largely positive attitude. For example, in one Year 10 lesson on urban-rural migration, pupils were able to play a game to experience the lives of people trying to eke out a living in difficult circumstances. The teacher skilfully asked detailed questions of each pupil in the group so that they could write up an analysis of the experience. Attitudes to geography are occasionally poor at Key Stage 3 when the teaching is poor and insufficiently well planned and directed by the teacher. Despite this poor teaching, the majority of pupils do their best to learn and are unhappy about this disruption.
211. From 20 lessons observed, teaching overall is good, but there is some unsatisfactory teaching at Key Stage 3. Teaching is very good in GCSE lessons and good at A-level. This has been sustained since the last inspection and the impact on learning and examination results has improved.
212. Teaching is good at A-level but there is insufficient emphasis on extending more able students and supporting students with predicted lower grades. Where the teaching is very good it deploys a range of resources and promotes independent research where students present their findings to the class. All students are expected to contribute and they enjoy this approach and learn effectively. For example, in one Year 13 lesson on the impact of tourism, students had prepared a handout for revision for other students

and did an oral presentation that reviewed and evaluated their performance. Where teaching is sound, there is good subject knowledge but insufficient use of extended thinking and reasoning activities to promote sophisticated understanding of geographical phenomena. For example, in one Year 13 lesson on the impact of multi-national companies on less economically developed countries, students were taught about the impact in general terms. However, there was insufficient emphasis on uncertainty, opinion and debate about these issues.

213. GCSE geography teaching is good and often very good throughout Key Stage 4. This enables pupils to make very good progress and achieve well in their GCSE examinations. In particular, there are high expectations of pupils to think and respond to questions and there is encouragement and support to improve with very good specific advice on revision and examination techniques. Throughout, Years 10 and 11, there are regular reviews of performance used by the teachers to feedback and set targets for pupils to improve. Pupils are well aware of the demands of the forthcoming exam and revision strategies are well developed among the pupils. In three Year 11 lessons, pupils were consolidating and revising Year 10 work on cities and a range of good strategies were discussed and used, including key vocabulary testing, revision cards, video based revision using *BBC GCSE Bitesize*, working with a friend and trial questions. All teachers develop these study skills throughout the course, in combination with geographical skills, knowledge and understanding. In one very good lesson, the teacher used skilful questioning to elicit above average standards of reasoning and elaboration of answers about the geographical pattern in cities and the advantages and disadvantages of living in different parts of cities in the United Kingdom.
214. Throughout Key Stage 3, teaching is sound but quality and consistency of the teaching is too variable to promote rapid progress. This variable teaching slows the progress of pupils especially in some lower ability groups. Where the teaching is very good, there are high expectations of pupils regardless of ability, skilful questioning to promote understanding of concepts in geography, and positive and encouraging marking identifying areas for improvement. For example, in a Year 9 lesson on population, the teacher's open ended questions enabled the majority of pupils in the low ability class to propose reasons why some places are densely populated and why some are not. Where teaching is poor, there is little planning and no sharing of the objectives of the lesson, no acknowledgement of prior learning, and little visual stimulus to give pupils a sense of place. For example, in a Year 8 lesson on tropical rainforests, pupils had no sense of place and were merely copying the map from the textbook to their exercise book.
215. Overall, the leadership and management of the subject is sound but there are some weaknesses. The management of GCSE in particular is very good as an experienced team of teachers and effective teamwork have made a concerted effort to raise standards at GCSE. This collegiate process is now being applied to A-level geography and standards are on course to improve. More data analysis and target setting at all levels is necessary to evaluate and improve performance, and to inform the department of the impact of the school on progress in geography. Development planning is insufficiently linked to raising standards of teaching and learning across all key stages and is not informed by sufficient monitoring of teaching and learning.
216. The management and curriculum planning at Key Stage 3 overall is unsatisfactory, as



the curriculum does not provide all pupils with a well-planned consistent progression in all aspects of geography. There is little acknowledgement of prior learning at Key Stage 2. The modules have well planned learning activities, which are designed to develop literacy and numeracy and include geographical enquiries that challenge the more able pupils. These activities, when well taught, contribute to pupils' moral and social education. For example, in a unit on development, there are moral debates about poverty and the role of women. Clear links and progression between some of these modules is lacking. The gaps between modules are too long and restrict pupils' development of geographical skills and knowledge and understanding of places especially among the lower attaining pupils. In each of the three years, there is a different system of grouping of the pupils, which does not enable consistent progress to be made as pupils think of geography as isolated pockets of knowledge. There is insufficient guidance about purpose, development and progress in the subject so non-specialist teachers can support pupils' academic progress. Opportunities for information technology remain restricted at Key Stage 3 and many opportunities to develop spiritual and cultural education are missed. The deployment of staff across Key Stage 3 is unsatisfactory, and there is little monitoring of teaching and learning in the subject.

217. Accommodation is inadequate for teaching geography and this has an adverse impact on standards. In the sixth form block, some small teaching rooms make it difficult to move into discussion groups and look at large maps. In the main teaching classrooms, the damp on the walls damages both displays and resources in the storerooms. The rooms have inadequate blackouts to use visual resources such as video and slides. There is insufficient display board space to display pupils' work and large visual maps and photographs, which are affecting pupils' sense of the places studied and need to be used more regularly for teaching geography.
218. Overall, there has been good improvement since the last inspection. There are much improved examination results at GCSE. Independent enquiry at Key Stage 3 to extend more able pupils is now established. The quality of teaching has been sustained especially at GCSE and A-level and the quality of learning has improved. Assessment procedures are well established at A-level and GCSE and have been established in Key Stage 3 although these need further development linked to more regular reviews of progress by the pupils themselves. Information technology has been introduced into A-level and GCSE but needs to be further embedded into the curriculum. Resources for learning have improved, however, there is a need for the use of more visual stimulus. In order to improve standards further, there is a need to look at ways of improving progress that pupils are making through Key Stage 3 and strategies to improve A-level performance.

## **HISTORY**

219. Overall, standards in history are in line with national expectations. Standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 are above national expectations. At Key Stage 4, they are just below national expectations. Standards in the sixth form are well above national expectations and are significantly improved since the last inspection report.
220. In 1999, by the end of Key Stage 3 the percentage of pupils attaining at or above the

national average is high when compared to national figures.

221. In Key Stage 3, the pupils' standards of attainment in lessons observed, in their exercise books and in discussions indicate that they are attaining in line with national expectations. This variation in standards is explained by the fact that, on occasions, some teachers set work that is not commensurate with the ability of higher attaining pupils. This is illustrated by work of higher attaining Year 8 pupils studying protestant churches of the sixteenth century. The tasks set for the pupils required little more than making simple inferences about these churches from pictorial sources.
222. By the end of Year 9, higher attaining pupils can produce analytical writing that identifies, describes and explains events such as the causes of World War Two. In their studies of events in India in 1857, they demonstrate understanding that events can be presented from different points of view and they can suggest reasons why this can happen. Pupils with below average attainment can sequence main events of the twentieth century on a timeline, can identify causes of World War Two and extract information from historical sources.
223. By the end of Key Stage 4, overall attainment is just below national expectations. In 1999, the percentage of pupils attaining grades A\* - C was just below national figures. However, the percentage of pupils attaining grades A\* - G was just above the national figures. Comparisons between the pupils' final grades and the school's own performance indicators reveal that many pupils achieved higher grades than expected. Boys' attainment at grades A\* - C is higher than girls'. The percentage of boys attaining grades A\* - C was higher than national figures. The percentage of girls attaining grades A\* - C was lower than national figures. However, comparing the average point scores of both boys and girls indicates that, on average, they performed as well in history as in any other subject in the school. Over the past three years the percentage of pupils attaining grades A\* - C has varied from being in line with to just below national expectations.
224. Most pupils have a sound knowledge and understanding of the main periods of history being studied for GCSE and they make satisfactory progress. Year 10 exercise books display growing confidence in developing personalised note making skills that link to issues or questions likely to be assessed in examinations. Coursework assignments display some high standards of work. For example, pupils can study evidence from the locality, interrogate documentary sources and evaluate the significance of a range of evidence when trying to understand what the past may have been like. Through this work pupils also display good understanding of how to question the reliability of historical sources. Through discussion, Year 11 pupils demonstrated a sound knowledge and understanding of the factors that led to the improvement in surgery. However, several lacked the confidence to make links between these factors when analysing their importance.
225. Evidence of standards of attainment observed in lessons and pupil coursework during the inspection week suggest that the department targets for raising attainment are likely to be met.
226. By the end of post-16 courses, attainment is well above national expectation. The

department has achieved a 100 per cent pass rate since 1997. The percentage of students attaining the highest grades is below the national figures. However, comparisons with the school's own performance prediction data indicates that the students' final exam grades are higher than the school had predicted.

227. Standards of attainment observed during the inspection were high. Year 13 students have a sound knowledge and understanding of the causes of the Cold War. In addition, most demonstrate a growing confidence and understanding of historiography related to this period. For example, they can explain and compare Revisionist and Post Revisionist theories relating to the build up of mistrust between Russia and America during this period of the Cold War. These standards are also evident in the students' individual studies submitted as part of their final assessment. The studies indicate that the students can produce balanced arguments supported by accurate use of knowledge and understanding that draws upon individual research. Year 12 students are able to present their understanding through a variety of tasks that include formal debate on whether Germany was a totalitarian state and presentations to their fellow students on topics like Lloyd George and Liberalism. This evidence suggests that the department is likely to meet its performance targets for A-level results.
228. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in both Key Stage 3 and 4.
229. The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. In the sixth form, it is consistently good and sometimes very good. There is greater variation both within and across Key Stages 3 and 4. In these key stages, teaching varies from good to unsatisfactory in a small number of lessons.
230. Effective teaching was exemplified in a Year 12 lesson studying the National Government of the 1930s and the opposition to it. The teacher used good subject knowledge, was very skilful in answering students' questions, providing explanations and in drawing out and expanding on the main points of the lesson. Consequently, all the students were clear about what they had to do and used their time effectively and productively to build up their understanding of the opposition to the National Government. Similar qualities were seen in a Year 9 class of average attaining pupils beginning a study of Colonialism. In this lesson, the teacher made good use of a role play activity designed to examine the inequalities of world trade. In addition, the teacher was well prepared, gave clear explanations and managed whole class questions and answers aimed at drawing out understanding effectively. As a result, the majority of pupils were able to demonstrate understanding of the inequalities within world trade and the factors that help to account for this.
231. Where teaching was less effective, teachers did not manage time effectively. This was evident in a Year 8 mixed ability class undertaking an overview study of British history from 1750 – 1900. Preparation for the small group tasks that the teacher wanted the pupils to undertake took far too long to organise and, as a result, a number of pupils lost interest and began to misbehave. Allied to this, the teacher's management of the pupils was not effective. As a result, the rate at which many pupils learned and made progress was unsatisfactory. Another factor that restricted the quality and effectiveness of some teaching was evident in a Year 10 class studying surgery in the nineteenth century. In this lesson, the teacher made good use of role play to explain

how surgery was undertaken in the nineteenth century. However, the tasks provided did not meet the needs of all the pupils in the class. Some pupils failed to complete the note sheet related to the role play exercise. For higher attaining pupils, neither in the role play nor when the pupils were asked to watch a video were there tasks to challenge and extend their thinking.

232. In all key stages, pupils' attitudes to learning are generally good and this represents good progress since the last inspection report. Pupils behaving well, working well together in pairs or larger groups, sustaining interest and listening attentively are characteristics of lessons where pupils display positive attitudes. A Year 10 class preparing for a balloon debate to assess the importance of people who made contributions to the development of medicine and surgery through out history exemplified these features. In this lesson, following clear teacher explanations and guidance, the pupils sustained high levels of concentration and interest as they organised information and rehearsed their arguments in support of an individual and their contribution to developments in medicine. Occasionally, the same levels of interest and behaviour are less evident. For example, in a Year 8 mixed ability class undertaking an overview study of Britain 1750 – 1900 where the behaviour of some pupils restricted the learning of the class through inattentive and inappropriate behaviour.
233. The department has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection report. Pupils' standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 and post-16 have risen when compared to national figures. Pupil attitudes to learning have also improved in the majority of lessons. The quality of teaching, especially at Key Stage 3, has also improved in the majority of lessons. However, most teachers do not consistently make explicit the learning outcomes of lessons nor do they provide opportunities for the pupils to review their progress in class against clear criteria. Planned and systematic monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning to further raise standards has yet to be established out of the current practice operated by the department.
234. In the lessons observed, information technology was not used to support pupils' learning.

## **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

235. Overall standards in information technology are below national expectations. There has been some improvement in the teaching and learning of information technology since the last inspection, but not enough for it to have made a significant impact on standards, either within information technology lessons or in pupils' use of information technology in other subjects.
236. In Year 7, the school policy is to deliver information technology through national curriculum subjects but there is no agreed programme across departments to enable this policy to be implemented effectively. In addition, there is insufficient curriculum time to ensure that basic skills are introduced and developed coherently across the required range of software. Many subject teachers have had insufficient training in information technology, and subjects have yet to fully take up their responsibility to deliver all the strands required by the National Curriculum. In Years 8 to 11, specialist information technology staff teach a module of information technology within personal, social and

health education lessons but the overall percentage of curriculum time available is only 0.4 per cent and falls well below the national recommendation of five per cent. These factors have a negative impact on standards.

237. At the end of Key Stage 3, teacher assessment shows that almost two-thirds of pupils attain Levels 2 or 3 on the national scale, well below national expectations, with one-third attaining Level 4 and a very small minority of boys attaining Level 5. Attainment is improving; there has been a 10 per cent increase of both boys and girls attaining Level 4 since 1998. Teacher assessments do not cover all aspects of information technology because pupils have an incomplete experience of the subject. There is an emphasis on word processing and pupils have insufficient opportunities to make further progress in data handling, modelling, control and measuring once they have completed their short, specialist module of work.
238. In Key Stage 4, the overall standard of information technology remains below the national average. All pupils continue to have some access to specialist information technology teaching through the short module within the personal, social and health education programme. Some pupils continue to develop elements of information technology through an office applications GCSE course but the school does not yet offer pupils the opportunity to take a separate GCSE in information technology. Attainment in word processing was broadly in line with national expectations in one third of lessons observed during the inspection; in one third of lessons it was well below national expectations.
239. In the sixth form, the key skills of information technology are an integral part of GNVQ, and the majority of students reach the standard required for Advanced level.
240. In Key Stage 3, the information technology specialists offer a basic grounding in the skills of desktop publishing in Year 8 and data handling in Year 9. Desktop publishing is reinforced in Years 10 and 11. Some English lessons provide opportunities for pupils to consolidate their knowledge and skill of desktop publishing, but pupils' further progress is strongly dependent on expertise of non-specialist staff within individual subjects. Year 9 pupils who take one modern foreign language receive an extra lesson of information technology per fortnight and this is starting to have an impact on raising their attainment. These pupils are developing skills as independent learners and take responsibility for using the Internet, printed materials and CD-ROMs. They make satisfactory use of the *Publisher* software to display information, and use pictures effectively to complement their work and attract the reader's attention.
241. Pupils become confident users of desktop publishing programs, and by the end of Key Stage 3, they can combine text and graphics, change fonts and size, and are encouraged to utilise these skills to enhance presentation in other subjects. Year 8 pupils are introduced to *Publisher* in order to compose appropriate material and use a spellchecker to improve spelling and grammar. By the end of the module, pupils select appropriate pictures from *Clipart* and combine these with text to produce an attractive document with the most able pupils including a two-column layout to improve presentation. Year 9 pupils follow a tightly structured course that leads them through the process of setting up a database; they sort the different fields into alphabetical or numerical order, and make simple searches to identify specific requirements. There are

no planned differentiated activities, and the most able pupils in this group are frustrated whilst waiting for slower pupils to complete each step before they can move on. Overall, attainment on data handling is below national expectations.

242. In Key Stage 4, in discrete information technology lessons, boys generally make faster progress than girls because boys are more adventurous than the girls and are more eager to seize the opportunity to work with new computer programs and to try out new ideas. Year 10 boys are working towards Level 6 in the strand of communicating information. They choose *Powerpoint* for their presentations, include research from the internet and CD-ROMs, and combine text, graphics and sound. They explain articulately how this software adds a new dimension to their presentations, creates interest and enables them to better hold their audience's attention. Some are working towards Level 5 by considering ways in which the presentation will meet the needs of their audience. The majority of girls are less adventurous, preferring to use *Publisher* with which they are familiar and comfortable. Pupils make satisfactory use of the Internet for research work. In Year 11, the information technology module of work, taught within personal, social and health education, is based around the needs of their National Record of Achievement and these lessons do not significantly increase pupils' capability in information technology. Pupils complete a curriculum vitae, for inclusion in their National Record of Achievement; they use a word processor to write a letter of application for a job; they discuss key words with their teacher and use them successfully when composing their application. However, pupils' skills of setting out a formal letter using information technology are weak. Pupils taking a GCSE in office applications make some progress in using the generic skills of word processing, spreadsheets and databases in a business context. They are supported by a knowledgeable and experienced teacher of business studies. Many pupils use their home computers to produce their GCSE coursework in a range of subjects.
243. In the sixth form, there is a short course in information technology skill development in Year 12. Many students make effective use of the sixth form information technology area to present coursework for A-level subjects, including physics, English and geography. Students of GNVQ leisure and tourism have produced attractive and informative reports on a sport centre and show ability to combine text, graphics and number with a variety of enhancements to produce work of high standards. A small number of boys with appropriate interest and aptitude are members of the sixth form web publishing group. They have produced, and continue to maintain, a high quality web site which is an effective information and marketing tool for the school. In addition, some students in the sixth form are involved in a number of high profile information technology projects that are supported by local industry and this opportunity has a very positive impact on their attainment. They use the school network, wireless transmissions, and video conferencing to make audio and visual contact with other groups locally and internationally.
244. Pupils' attitudes in information technology lessons are good, the majority of pupils are enthusiastic and motivated, particularly the boys, and this has a positive impact on progress. Those pupils with experience of home computers benefit as a result of this and particularly enjoy the challenge in lessons, when they learn new skills.
245. Teaching is satisfactory overall. In Key Stage 3, teaching was at least satisfactory in

half of lessons observed and good in a further quarter of lessons. In Key Stage 4, teaching in all lessons was at least satisfactory and good in one-third of those seen. These figures represent an improvement in teaching since the last inspection. Where teaching is good, teachers have strong subject knowledge, and prepare well-planned and timed activities with high expectations of pupils. Relationships between teachers and pupils are good. Teachers give effective support to pupils with special educational needs as well as those who are less experienced in using information technology, and these pupils make good progress for their ability. In the small number of lessons where teaching was unsatisfactory, activities were too tightly structured towards the development of a basic skill, and the most able pupils made insufficient progress. Some teachers lacked strategies to enthuse girls who were reluctant to use new software. Formative assessment is through observation of pupils whilst working and this is particularly effective when teachers offer advice and guidance for improvement. The quality of marking is unsatisfactory and fails to indicate what pupils should do to improve their work.

246. Across the curriculum, the amount of time given to developing knowledge, skills and understanding of information technology is still unsatisfactory. Many departments have not yet clarified how pupils' information technology skills will be developed within their subject. Overall, schemes of work and lesson plans do not identify appropriate teaching strategies or learning resources to continue the development of information technology and extend pupils' experience through the subject. There are examples of good practice. Mathematics teachers teach modelling, using logo and spreadsheets; in English and religious education, teachers provide additional opportunities for pupils to develop desktop publishing skills.
247. A co-ordinator of information technology has been appointed since the last inspection. He is starting to develop the potential of information technology, but is hampered in his work by the lack of time for discrete lessons in information technology, and also by the difficulty of scheduling meetings within his team of specialists and other subject departments. He has provided some training for all staff in information technology, but many teachers are still insecure in their ability to use it in their teaching, there are plans to use the New Opportunities Fund for further training over the coming years. The co-ordinator has developed a procedure for assessment of pupils' capabilities in information technology at the end of Key Stage 3, but this is not yet fully understood or utilised by teachers in other subjects across the curriculum, apart from in science, English and mathematics. Currently teacher assessment does not cover all the required strands of the National Curriculum.
248. The information technology technician provides a very good level of technical support for the maintenance of computers, and to inexperienced teachers. A Year 12 student taking part in the school's community service programme works alongside the technician within the classroom and gives valuable support to weaker pupils.
249. The school has recently acquired 16 computers and the network links with the five library computers, and in these areas there is good access to the internet and CD-ROMs. These computers are well used at lunchtimes and this new facility is having a positive impact on standards. Some subjects lack appropriate access to computers, and many of the computers in the departments across the school are ageing and lack

up-to-date software. There is no clear school policy for its ongoing replacement, although there are plans for further purchase of hardware under the National Grid for Learning strategy.

250. Overall, the improvement in information technology since the last inspection has been slight and remains unsatisfactory. Staffing has improved and the co-ordinator, with the support of a team of enthusiastic and confident teachers and the technician, is starting to raise standards. New hardware is to be purchased and networks expanded, and there will be further training for all teachers. The school still lacks a clear, coherent and co-ordinated approach to the development of information technology through the subjects of the curriculum, that will significantly raise the standard of pupils' work.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

251. Overall standards are below national average in both French and German.
252. At A-level in French, standards for 1999 were below the national average both in terms of the pass rate and for the proportion of pupils achieving the higher grades, though the comparison is based on a small number of pupils taking the examination. There is no significant trend in results over the past two years. In 1998, there was better achievement at the higher grades. In 1997, the failure rate was significantly higher.
253. In German, standards at A-level are below the national average for pupils achieving the higher grades, though this is based on an even smaller number of pupils entered. This represents a decline in standards by comparison with the previous two years.
254. At Key Stage 4 in French, standards for pupils achieving Grades A - C were below the national average. Only 39 per cent of pupils achieved the higher grades compared with a national average of 46 per cent. This represents a decline in standards by comparison with the two previous years when the percentage was over 40 per cent. There was above average achievement at the highest grades (A\*, A) particularly by girls. Girls achieved close to the national average (52 per cent against a national average of 54 per cent) but boys were well below the national average (20 per cent as against 37 per cent). The percentage of pupils achieving grades A - G is in line with the national average.
255. In German in GCSE examinations, standards are below the national average. Only 37.5 per cent achieved grades A - C compared with the national average of 52 per cent though this represents an improvement by comparison with the previous two years when the percentage was just over 30 per cent. In this case boys' and girls' achievement was similar (16 per cent and 17 per cent respectively, below the national average).
256. Results were below the average for the rest of the school and do not compare well with similar subjects. For example, English language achieved 51.7 per cent grades A - C, based on a 97 per cent entry for English language and a 90 per cent entry for all modern foreign languages.
257. Standards at GCSE are lower than at the last inspection when they were slightly below



the national average.

258. At Key Stage 3, the standard for modern foreign languages is below the national average. Hardly any pupils achieved the higher levels for teacher assessments and approximately one quarter achieved only Levels 2 and 3. Three times as many girls as boys achieved Level 5.
259. From the evidence of lesson observation and pupils' work, standards of current work are broadly in line with the standard of examination results, except at A-level where standards in lessons for present sixth-formers are well above average.
260. In A-level classes seen, particularly in Year 13, standards were very good in oral skills and good in writing, listening and reading skills. Achievement was good by most pupils with those who had achieved the best grades at GCSE on target to do the same at A-level. Significantly, those who had achieved the lower grades at GCSE had generally made very good progress.
261. At Key Stage 4, the standards of current pupils' work reflects the below-average performance at GCSE, especially in those classes taught in broad ability groups where the standards for both the most and least able are unsatisfactory. In setted groups, the progress made by all pupils was satisfactory, sometimes good, though all pupils lack confidence in speaking French and German. The need to teach many pupils in mixed-ability groups is making it difficult for teachers to raise standards.
262. At Key Stage 3, general levels of language skills are broadly in line with national expectations. Written and listening skills are being satisfactorily developed. As far as speaking skills are concerned, pupils are developing satisfactory pronunciation and intonation but they lack confidence in using oral French and German because the target language is not used by pupils as a means of communication in the classroom.
263. The brighter pupils are not being challenged in Year 9. This is always the case in those groups which, because of the organisation of the curriculum, are taught in mixed-ability sets. While progress in general language skills is in line with national expectations, pupils are not acquiring the breadth of vocabulary and knowledge of grammar which they need at Key Stage 4 in their main language. This is because of the school's policy of devoting equal time to both languages in Years 7 and 8. Pupils need to develop skills in using reference material.
264. The main obstacle to improving standards in modern foreign languages is the way the curriculum is organised. In Years 7 and 8, the fact that equal time is allocated to the two languages means that pupils do not get a solid grounding in the language which they will eventually study at Key Stage 4. The fact that they are allowed to choose which language they want to study at the end of Year 8 is leading to too many broad ability groups from Year 9 onwards. This puts a heavy burden on teachers. Lesson observation indicates that the attitude and performance of pupils in these groups is unsatisfactory.
265. In the sixth form, attitudes are very good. At Key Stage 4, attitudes are satisfactory in all Year 10 groups but unsatisfactory in most Year 11 groups, particularly in mixed-ability groups. At Key Stage 3, attitudes are generally satisfactory though in the

mixed-ability groups in Year 9, attitudes are unsatisfactory in a small minority of cases. Where attitudes are unsatisfactory, this is resulting in insufficient progress being made by some pupils in these groups.

266. Overall the quality of teaching is satisfactory. In the sixth form, it is good, often very good. At Key Stage 4, it is generally satisfactory but occasionally unsatisfactory. At Key Stage 3, it is satisfactory overall.
267. Teaching is best in the sixth form where a combination of the teachers' very good subject knowledge, high expectations and supportive attitudes combine to bring about significant progress for all students.
268. All teachers have a good command of the target language. At Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, they usually use the target language as a means of communication in the classroom. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. The start of the lesson is nearly always lively and challenging to pupils. Their attention is readily engaged and even the least able are doing their best to understand what the teacher is saying. This, in no small measure, has contributed to the improvement in listening skills since the last inspection. Teachers go to great lengths to make the start of the lesson lively and interesting. One teacher brought in models of animals to introduce new vocabulary, another kept the attention of a low ability Year 11 group with an energetic quick-fire question and answer session.
269. There were good examples of the use of a variety of activities, using all four language skills, to consolidate new vocabulary. In one Year 7 lesson, a lively presentation was followed by a game in which pupils had to use mime. This was followed by a listening exercise, a pair-work speaking activity and finally a written exercise. However, after a lively start, the pace of the lesson often flags resulting in pupils losing interest. There is a reluctance to involve pupils in speaking activities which actively involve them in consolidating learning. There is good practice in the department which should be shared.
270. The department needs to develop the use of the target language even further. At the moment, teachers often revert to English for difficult explanations, particularly of grammar. This is the case even in those classes where relationships between teacher and pupils are good and using the target language in this way would not lead to any problems of behaviour management. The target language is not well used by pupils as a means of communication in the classroom. This must be addressed if pupils' confidence in speaking the target language is to be improved.
271. There are examples of good practice in the use of assessment in the department. In Year 9, for example, pupils are given detailed, positive feedback on written assignments with clear targets for what they need to do to improve their performance. There is evidence that most teachers have adopted this good practice. Its use needs to be extended to all year groups. However, there are also weaknesses. There is no evidence that assessment is being used as a basis for differentiation of work and responding to the needs of individual pupils.
272. Most teachers are not good at making the objectives of lessons clear to pupils. There

need to be clearer statements about exactly what teachers expect pupils to have achieved by the end of each lesson. Time ought to be set aside at the end of the lesson for a brief review of progress.

273. The department is well led. Even though the head of department has been in post for less than a year and works part-time, she has managed to build a good team-spirit. The department meets regularly, arrives at decisions by consensus, and is supportive of other colleagues. In its twice-weekly meetings, the department discusses classroom practice. Teaching is regularly monitored by the head of department. As a result of this, good practice is becoming more widespread, though, after only two terms in the job, it is a little early to assess the impact of this on pupils' learning. Teaching would improve further if there was a systematic whole-school approach to raising the standards of teaching. The head of department would then have a supportive framework in which to set objectives, identify training needs that included costings and action plans for individual teachers and to develop procedures for evaluating success.
274. Learning resources are generally good though the department needs to develop more support material for their course books. This might take the form of differentiated exercises to consolidate and extend pupils' understanding and more varied assessment material that is more closely linked to National Curriculum levels.
275. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. The classrooms are too far from each other and some are unpleasant places in which to teach and learn. Display was generally good.
276. Since the last inspection, standards have declined though there is evidence that achievement in the present Year 13 groups is good. Pupils have developed better listening skills though oral confidence has not improved. Teachers make more use of the target language. The next step is to improve its use by pupils. Learning continues to be better at Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4 and remains good in the sixth form. The willingness to share good practice has improved but accommodation remains unsatisfactory. Display work continues to be of good quality.

## MUSIC

277. Overall, standards in music are in line with the national average. Standards in music are unsatisfactory at Key Stage 3, and above national averages in Key Stages 4 and the sixth form.
278. In Year 7, the majority of pupils attain standards at or above national expectations. In Years 8 and 9, standards of attainment are well below those expected. Pupils make unsatisfactory progress over the key stage. There is no noticeable difference between the standards achieved by boys and girls.
279. Numbers taking the optional music courses at GCSE and A-level are very small. Attainment in GCSE music examinations was above that achieved for similar schools in 1998. Out of seven pupils entered, 86 per cent gained A\* - C grades and out of five pupils in 1999, 60 per cent gained A\* - C grades, which is just below the national average of 64.9 per cent. All pupils entered for the examination gained an A\* - G grade. A-level results are variable. Four pupils entered in 1997 and three in 1998.

Two pupils gained A - B grades in 1997 and none in 1998. All pupils gained A - E grades in both years. In 1999, six students took a performing arts A-level course in which one pupil gained A - B and all gained A - E grades.

280. At Key Stage 3, pupils listen carefully, are familiar with a range of music from both present and previous experience, and can recognise instruments and moods. Singing is generally less advanced and lacks vocal skills and confidence. Individual pupils in one class sang with a high level of interpretative ability, but less well advanced voice production. Year 7 pupils are generally confident in their music making, and use appropriate musical vocabulary. In both Year 7 lessons seen, pupils made progress across a range of skills. Although progress was observed within lessons in Key Stage 3 there is insufficient consolidation, over a period of time, of the basic musical skills required to underpin increasingly complex activities. For instance, in a Year 9 class, pupils were unable to keep a regular pulse and therefore experienced difficulty when trying to count a regular metre pattern against another, different one. In a Year 9 keyboard lesson, pupils had not been introduced to the keyboard in different contexts and for different purposes over the previous two years. Many pupils played unmusically and with single finger technique.
281. At Key Stage 4, a relatively small number of pupils were observed, (13 in Year 10 and eight in Year 11). Attainment within these groups is above that expected. Year 10 pupils know a significant amount of repertoire, listening material, and being mostly instrumentalists; they display a good level of understanding of notation, use of expression marks, and concepts. Their listening skills are good. In a listening test in Year 10, pupils showed good aural skills and an understanding of musical structures. Pupils in Year 11 showed a good background of listening, composing and performing skills within a limited range of musical genres and styles. Most pupils possess a good musical vocabulary and talk confidently and knowledgeably about their own achievements.
282. Two pupils are taking the A-level music course in the sixth form. Both are accomplished instrumentalists and display a good knowledge of practical and theoretical music.
283. Overall, standards are unchanged since the last inspection. The evidence of underachievement at Key Stage 3 is still evident in the low standards achieved in Years 8 and 9. There is now evidence that standards deteriorate as pupils move through Key Stage 3. Standards at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form remain in line with students' capabilities, which are above average.
284. Attitudes are generally at least satisfactory and at times very good in all key stages. Where attitudes are satisfactory or good, this has a positive impact on pupils' learning. Attitudes in the Key Stage 3 lessons observed were satisfactory or good, except in one lesson where a lack of progress and sufficient challenge led to off task behaviour and negative attitudes, and in a Year 8 lesson, where poor teaching allowed disruptive behaviour to develop. In other lessons, even when a single activity was set for the whole lesson, and pace was slow, pupils maintained a good to very good attitude, and were co-operative, cheerful, and positive towards their work and each other.

285. At Key Stage 4 and particularly in the sixth form, pupils show a mature and caring attitude towards their work. They are conscientious and keen to make progress, asking appropriate questions and staying at their tasks even when the teacher was engaged in assisting others in the class. In both these key stages and in particular in the sixth form, pupils talk confidently about their musical achievement and abilities.
286. The attitudes and values of pupils have remained substantially the same since the last inspection.
287. Overall, teaching is satisfactory. At Key Stage 3, the quality of teaching ranges from poor to good. It is unsatisfactory across the key stage largely because of the lack of defined targets for pupils' learning and assessment of individual progress. For instance, pupils learning carols for Christmas have no defined target other than learning the songs. Identifiable gains in vocal production, maintaining individual parts, diction etc. are not specified either as targets or in assessment. This results in a lack of musical progress over the key stage.
288. Better teaching is characterised by energetic and interesting introductions, a clear focus for learning, good expectations of achievements and behaviour, and sufficient time allowed to enable pupils to achieve at their own level through individual and group work. In a Year 7 class, time was effectively allocated for pupils to appreciate operatic music and to experiment with their own voices to achieve dramatic effect. During lessons, pupils experiment across a range of skills but their learning is not identified and future progress poorly planned. For instance, pupils in Year 8 were given experience in using their voices and instruments to create a dramatic effect. Although many achieved some good expressive moments, for example, when a pupil played the cello skilfully and expressively, the teacher did not help individual pupils to recognise their achievements, nor how to improve on them.
289. Less effective teaching is characterised by a lack of planning, lack of focus, and single activity lessons. In these lessons there are low expectations of pupils' abilities and potential. Often, whole class activities did not contain adequate differentiation by task or variety of activities. During a composing activity in a Year 8 class, the teacher rehearsed groups without reference to pupils' individual abilities or preferences, and pupils were unable to express themselves or show their own potential. In one Year 9 class, pupils were expected to pursue a single technical activity for the whole lesson.
290. Pupils are neither introduced to nor expected to use, an adequate range of sound sources, including music technology and recording devices. In the same Year 9 keyboard lesson, pupils were not allowed to show their previous knowledge except in the limited technical context, and were not expected to access different styles, rhythm patterns, or sounds.
291. Key Stage 3 teaching was judged as generally sound in the last inspection. It is now unsatisfactory. There was a lack of variety and range in Key Stage 3 lessons and this situation remains.
292. At Key Stage 4, teaching is satisfactory. Carefully planned lessons within a limited area of activity are delivered in a formal and dry style. Pupils were enabled to acquire the relevant skills and experience required. Year 10 pupils who were answering

listening questions using a worksheet were helped to learn about expression marks, instruments and styles. In this lesson, pupils' responsible attitude to their learning and individual motivation alleviated any potential negative attitudes caused by a lack of imaginative stimulus. Good use is made of music technology by a considerable number of pupils. Pupils have completed compositions using notation software, and some have used the computer for original composing tasks, using sequencing techniques.

293. In the sixth form, teaching and learning are good. There is an atmosphere of mutual respect and constructive understanding, allowing good and measurable progress to be made during lessons. The teacher encourages the students to pay meticulous attention to detail, demonstrating a commitment to the subject, and enabling them to refine and improve their work.
294. Insufficient time is spent on music in Key Stage 3 to enable the required range of musical experience to be delivered. Over the past few years, the head of faculty has, with the support of senior management, attempted to provide an integrated Key Stage 3 curriculum that offers pupils imaginative performing arts experiences. The head of faculty now acknowledges that a review of this curriculum and its delivery is necessary, in order to answer the requirements of the National Curriculum for music. Only 3 per cent of curriculum time is allocated to music and actual musical activity takes place for less time than this. This percentage suggests it is unlikely that the department fully answers the requirements of the National Curriculum for music in terms of depth and range of opportunity offered.
295. The provision and use of information technology and music technology are not planned for within schemes of work and are unsatisfactory at Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, good examples were seen of the use of information technology but mainly only for notation. The faculty now offers a music technology A-level course.
296. Assessment is poor. It is a key issue for improvement. The faculty has only recently introduced a scheme of marking which is not yet fully operational. It specifies general performing arts skills, for instance 'creativity', but does not include specific musical skills. It is not made clear in teachers' lesson plans or during the lessons what specific gains in musical learning pupils are intended to make. Consequently, this progress is difficult to identify and assess. Methods of assessing pupils against National Curriculum levels at Key Stage 3 are unclear. Assessment is not used to inform target setting, lesson planning or as an indicator for evaluating the faculty's effectiveness. Marking in all key stages is sparse, and perfunctory. Marking in books is poor at Key Stage 3. In this key stage, no marking was seen which included any encouraging or developmental comments.
297. Since the last inspection, little or no progress has been made in providing for continuity and progression and assessment is still weak.
298. Management of the music department is unsatisfactory. Meetings are not documented, except by a note in the head of faculty's diary. The monitoring of lessons does not take place on a formal and regular basis and work is not sufficiently co-ordinated or planned with consistency of content or quality in mind. The planning of the curriculum in terms of the expected learning outcomes of the pupils has not taken place in a

- consistent and thorough manner.
299. The faculty's development plan for 1999 – 2000 details targets for increased uptake of instrumental lessons, improved assessment, and the introduction of A-level music technology, but does not link these with whole-school developments. Other whole-school issues, including key skills, parent–school communication, attendance and punctuality, are not mentioned in the faculty plan. Development planning is not regularly checked for progress and no definable audit points are established either to ensure that the department is meeting its planned targets, or to ensure that spending is regularly monitored.
300. Senior management has been aware of the need to improve faculty management. Last year a review of the faculty highlighted the need for better basic administration. Despite some improvement, basic administration is still unsatisfactory. The uptake of instrumental tuition is quite low for a large school. Although many pupils speak supportively of music in the school there is a distinct ethos that instrumental playing is for the more able few. Extra-curricular activities are limited in provision and style but the music performed contains a high standard of musical challenge. A few pupils in the school play in rock bands, and these are supported by the faculty although they operate independently. The faculty has a long tradition of production work. Productions are well supported and involve a large number of pupils.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

301. Overall, standards in physical education are above national expectations. Good progress is made in all key stages, by pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs.
302. At the end of Key Stage 3, teachers' assessments show overall standards in physical education to be above the national average, with many pupils achieving standards well above average. Observation of lessons during the inspection confirmed the accuracy of teacher assessments and revealed that pupils frequently achieve high standards as a result of the perseverance and practice of pupils, combined with the skilled, knowledgeable and enthusiastic teaching.
303. By the age of 14, pupils have acquired knowledge, understanding and developed skills in a range of activities. Pupils achieve well in games, dance and swimming. For example, in basketball and netball, pupils' demonstrate that they can effectively transfer skills gained in isolated practices to the game situation. Their strength and perseverance is displayed well in swimming, where pupils are developing good techniques in a variety of strokes and in dance, where simple dance sequences of quality were being created. There is no significant difference in the standards which boys and girls achieve. These standards show an improvement since the last inspection.
304. In 1999, at the end of Key Stage 4, GCSE results in physical education were above the national average; 59 per cent achieved grades A\* - C and 100 per cent achieved grades A\* - G. The department's prediction for 2000 show that pupils' successes should be one grade higher. The uptake of students studying this course has increased, although the course attracts more boys than girls. In GCSE groups, pupils have learned to refine their techniques in selected activities and are beginning to acquire a sound

knowledge of anatomy and physiology. Many opportunities arise for pupils to progress from past practices, through planned and progressive programmes of study. When pupils are encouraged to evaluate, they offer informed opinions of their own and other's work, developing the skills of movement analysis. The achievement of pupils on non-examination courses is good. At the age of 16, pupils have made good progress in a range of activities including badminton, where attacking and defensive shots have been improved and girls' basketball and netball, where a growing tactical awareness has been developed. In cricket practice too, where pupils were showing high quality batting and bowling skills.

305. At post-16, students are engaged in Advanced Level Sports Studies and GNVQ leisure and tourism. The faculty has invested heavily in these courses and the investment is beginning to reap good dividends. Students have further developed movement analysis skills, using their deeper knowledge of anatomy and physiology to identify specific muscle groups used in sporting movement actions. Their progress is very good, leading to high attainment levels. Theory work is supported by work folders, often word processed, beautifully illustrated and of a very high quality. Predictions for this year's examinations are very high, based on teachers' assessments and internal examinations, and current students are likely to reach higher standards than were achieved in 1999. Secure subject knowledge, backed by detailed research, enables students to present, explain and defend their opinions very effectively during discussion. It is in this area of development that most progress has been made since the last inspection. Students not taking examinations in the sixth form are not offered physical education lessons and this limits further progress for the majority of sixth form students.
306. The overall quality of teaching is good in all key stages, with many very good lessons seen and one, excellent. Schemes of work are well structured and show progression lesson to lesson and across the key stages. Individual lessons are effectively planned and objectives are clearly defined and shared with pupils. Teachers leave time for pupils to review their work at the end of the lesson. Pupils reflect on their progress against the lesson objectives so enabling appropriate targets for improvement to be identified for the next lesson by both the teacher and pupils. This is excellent practice. Detailed explanations and clear expectations are a feature of every lesson. This good practice generates pupils' interest in the activity and assists them to learn.
307. Teachers are confident, highly motivated specialists who have secure knowledge and understanding of their subject. In almost all lessons, teachers' knowledge and expertise has a significant positive influence on learning. They are effective in planning and organising tasks that are well paced, match pupils' capabilities and contain appropriate challenges. In one lesson, pupils with limited physical ability, through the expectations and encouragement of a highly motivated teacher, showed real learning and a good level of achievement. All teachers effectively use a variety of styles in the same lesson, ranging from whole class direct tasks, to group work and individual tuition. At Key Stage 4 and post-16, students are given many opportunities for independent learning and for applying their knowledge to new situations. In these key stages, more opportunities for pupils to discuss their work are introduced and teachers contribute well to the development of pupils' literacy skills through their use of technical language in their question and answer sessions. When opportunities arise, pupils enjoy taking



responsibility, for example, through creating dances, evaluating a partner's performance or devising attacking and defensive strategies in basketball or netball. Relationships are of the highest order and are the platform from which high quality teaching and learning spring. Discipline is firm but relaxed, promoting generally high motivation and good order. It offers teachers opportunities to concentrate on certain groups while others remain purposefully engaged. Emphasis on safe practice is a feature of all lessons, though no risk assessment has been taken. Pupils' consistency of uniform dress throughout the school is to be commended and is an outcome of the perseverance of teachers' demands, to retain high quality standards. The number of non-participants is extremely low and they are gainfully employed as coaches, referees or observers.

308. Pupils' attitude to learning is good across the key stages and this has a positive impact on learning. They arrive on time, change quickly and readily engage in the tasks presented. Their interest and enthusiasm is clearly evident across all age groups. In all lessons seen, there is a high degree of co-operation displayed by pupils who are well behaved, motivated and concentrate on the tasks given. Generally pupils are seen to be capable of working hard physically, in all activities where expectations are high, and rise to the challenge presented by tasks. They respond quickly to questions and show confidence in demonstrating to others what they each achieve. If this breaks down, pupils' attention goes and they fall off task preventing good learning from taking place.
309. The department is led by an enthusiastic and effective head of faculty. The team of staff is strong and committed to delivering a balanced curriculum. Substantial documentation has been developed collectively; this provides a very good basis to support teaching and learning. Arrangements for assessment and recording are in place but do not assist future planning. A systematic monitoring of assessment procedures, units of work and programmes of study has not taken place. The time allocation for coverage of National Curriculum programmes of study in Key Stages 3 and 4 are appropriate. Information technology is used extensively, particularly post-16, to enhance learning. The school has good access to the adjacent leisure centre so that indoor facilities are good, though the clay based playing fields and extensive hard courts create slippery conditions when wet. Good liaison takes place with local primary schools and clubs.
310. Since the last inspection, sustained and good progress has been made. Teaching and learning are good and serve the needs of the pupils well. Examination courses have been established in GCSE, Advanced Sports Studies and the faculty makes a substantial input to a GNVQA in leisure and tourism. Planning is detailed, effective and co-ordinated well. Leadership is strong and his expectations of pupils are made very clear.
311. A comprehensive year round programme of extra-curricular activities is a very strong feature of the faculty; this serves to enhance pupils' social development as well as their practical skills. The programme provides open access clubs, team practices and matches. This programme is well supported by boys and girls who have achieved successes in local and county competitions. It represents a sizeable commitment of time by the physical education staff. The variety, regularity and quality of this additional provision have positive effects on pupils' attainment and make a very considerable contribution to the life and ethos of the whole school.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

312. Overall, standards in religious education are satisfactory. Pupils achieve at least in line with, and sometimes beyond, the expectations of the locally Agreed Syllabus in Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4 and post-16, standards are either broadly in line with, or above, national expectations. This is clearly an improvement on the situation at the time of the last report. Strong leadership by the head of department appointed two years ago has had a positive effect on the quality of teaching and learning in the department. Students of all abilities generally make good progress and the status of religious education has been raised within the school. There is good collaboration between the two specialist teachers who share a commitment to raising standards in the subject. Where religious education is taught by non-specialists, they are well supported by appropriate materials and regular opportunities to discuss strategies.
313. At Key Stage 3, religious education is taught in rotation with history and geography as part of a humanities course, and time is sufficient to meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus. At Key Stage 4, all pupils follow a course leading to a GCSE or Certificate of Achievement in religious education. This is an improvement on the situation at the last inspection. However, the school does not meet the statutory requirement to provide adequate time to deliver either the Agreed Syllabus or an appropriate accredited short course in full. Only 50 per cent of the recommended time allocation is available at Key Stage 4. This remains an issue from the last inspection. A small number of students at Key Stage 4 take full course religious studies GCSE through the option system in addition to core religious education. Post-16, the department consistently supports a small group of students studying philosophy and ethics (theology) to A-level, and an AS level has been available as an option in Year 12. Religious education also forms part of the general studies provision for all students in Years 12 and 13. Although this represents an improvement since the last inspection the time allocation is insufficient to deliver the curriculum as laid down in the Agreed Syllabus and therefore does not meet statutory requirements. This also remains an issue from the previous inspection.
314. In recent years A-level results have been consistently above both national and school averages for grades A - E. In the past the department has been less effective in achieving the higher grades, although this was not the case in 1999 where all students attained grades within the A - C range. These achievements show an improvement since the last inspection. Variations can be accounted for by the size of the groups which is too small to offer a representative sample year on year or to indicate significant differences in achievement on a gender basis. The subject attracts boys and girls to the examination group and in particular recently to the AS course.
315. In 1997 and 1999 results in GCSE religious studies (full course) were well above average both for the school and nationally with all six pupils entered gaining an A\* - C grade. There were no entries for this option in 1998. The small number of students entered for the examination means that it is not possible to assess whether there is a gender bias in performance. In 1999, the first cohort of students was entered for short course GCSE religious education. Results were slightly below the national average. In view of the shortage of time at Key Stage 4 and the fact that students begin their

GCSE studies at the end of Key Stage 3 in order to meet the requirements of the syllabus this is a commendable achievement. Certificate of Achievement was also offered to students in 1999. All students entered achieved at least a pass, and 50 per cent of those entered gained a merit. Specialist teachers have worked hard to achieve these results and to establish positive attitudes towards the subject with all students. This is reflected in the fact that, unusually for religious education, there are more boys than girls in the current Year 11 full course group.

316. Only one A-level lesson was seen during the inspection, but standards of work were good. Students had a positive attitude to their studies. They were able to talk with confidence about key concepts such as utilitarianism. In a discussion about crime and punishment they quickly absorbed the essence of new ideas, for example rehabilitation, and were able to apply these in discussion. They offered arguments in support of a point of view, but were less able to sustain their perspective systematically with examples and justification. The teaching style observed provided a secure base for learning but allowed less scope for developing study skills and independent thinking. It was not possible to observe any religious education in the general studies course during the inspection week.
317. At Key Stage 4, the standard of pupils' work is satisfactory and sometimes good. In Year 11, members of the option group were able to talk about key concepts of Christianity and Buddhism and share their views on the relevance of these faiths to their own lives. They were less secure on the detail of Christian belief, for example, the significance of the crucifixion, or the importance of Easter. In core religious education, pupils' attitudes were positive. In a Year 10 lesson, pupils were obviously challenged and moved by work on forgiveness involving case studies from topical news items. They demonstrated the ability to empathise with others whose views they did not share, and listened to each other with interest and respect. Written activities did not always offer pupils the same level of challenge. For example, a basic comprehension task on the work of the Corymeela community did not stimulate pupils to reflect or develop their skills. Opportunities are sometimes missed to exploit the interest and enthusiasm of the pupils to raise standards still further through tasks which require them to use and apply their knowledge and skills.
318. At Key Stage 3, the standard of pupils' work in lessons was satisfactory and sometimes good. The quality of discussion is a developing strength. Pupils debated difficult concepts such as the comparative value of water, happiness and life with skill and maturity. They showed skills of co-operation and independent learning through the use of an appropriate and stimulating game. In a special educational needs group, pupils were able to use technical language with confidence and accuracy and to recall the outline of the Passover story. A scrutiny of exercise books shows that a range of strategies is employed in written work, for example, comprehension, note making, construction of charts and imaginative work, such as the story of the sacrifice of Isaac written from Abraham's perspective. Some high quality work was seen but presentation is not always of a standard comparable with that expected in classwork.
319. There are good relationships between staff and pupils, engendering an atmosphere of mutual respect. This supports a safe learning atmosphere and promotes positive attitudes towards the subject. The department makes a strong contribution to the

pupils' moral and social development setting high standards in relationships, co-operative activities, group and paired work. Pupils are encouraged to listen to the views of others and to share their own ideas in a secure environment. A significant contribution is made to pupils' spiritual development, for example, a conscious effort is made to create time for reflection and to develop spiritual awareness through the consideration of difficult issues such as suffering and grief. Cultural development is supported through the study of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism at different stages in the pupils' experience.

320. In general, pupils with special educational needs make good progress against the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus, as do pupils with special linguistic needs. Expectations are high and materials are age appropriate enabling pupils to achieve in a mutually respectful atmosphere. All pupils in Year 7 have a timetabled opportunity to develop information technology skills through religious education and the scrutiny of work produced evidence of some word processing tasks having been set. A planned opportunity to use information technology to produce a revision leaflet illustrating the key aspects of Christianity and Buddhism was seen in Key Stage 4. The department makes frequent contribution to the development of literacy skills, particularly through its use of speaking and listening in discussion. Pupils use a range of writing skills, including comprehension, writing for a particular audience and imaginative tasks. Some basic numeracy was seen in a session calculating the relative worth of goods and qualities in Year 9.
321. Overall, the teaching of religious education throughout the school is good. This is a considerable improvement on the situation at the last inspection. Specialist teachers with good subject knowledge are eager to share enthusiasm for the subject with their pupils. Long term planning has recently been reviewed and meets the requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus. There is consistency of approach and much collaboration between the two members of the department. Lesson plans incorporate aims but these are not yet explicitly shared with pupils as learning objectives. In-class tasks are generally interesting, varied and challenging, making good use of a range of resources such as video, reference books, poetry, game simulations and music. Planning also indicates that appropriate use is made of visits and visitors. Teaching concentrates on developing understanding of the important concepts such as values, relationships and forgiveness, illustrating these with appropriate examples from more than one faith. Work is pitched at an appropriate level in accordance with the Agreed Syllabus.
322. Pupils often work beyond average levels although some low level tasks such as colouring or copying were seen. Discussions challenge pupils to relate learning to their own experiences and to share their ideas, for example, in a debate on forgiveness in Year 10. Shortage of curriculum time means that opportunities to extend and deepen debate cannot always be exploited. Homework which extends and develops classwork is set on a regular basis except in core religious education at Key Stage 4. There is a departmental marking policy. This is not yet being applied consistently and a scrutiny of work revealed that some pupils' work is not marked for considerable periods of time. Pupils understand the marking system, and have a basic awareness of how to improve their work in terms of detail and neatness, but are less clear on how to set targets specific to their learning in religious education. Good progress has been made towards the implementation of the Quality and Curriculum Authority's framework for

the assessment of religious education. This is an improvement on the situation at the last inspection and an area for development in the department.

323. Specialist teachers are conscientious and committed to the work of the department and this is already paying off in terms of examination results, improved attitudes and enhanced status. There is strong leadership with a vision for the future and a determination to raise standards in religious education. A well-chosen range of resources promotes the quality of learning. Accommodation, however, is an issue. Teaching rooms are currently physically separated. This has made it difficult for teachers to share good practice and develop strong approaches. Curriculum arrangements in Key Stage 3 mean that continuity and progression are adversely affected by the gaps between religious education modules. Pupils commented that they had difficulty recalling what they had learned in previous modules. At Key Stage 4, satisfactory results are gained in spite of the lack of time.
324. This is a strong department which has made good progress since the last inspection and has the potential, with continued support, to raise standards in the subject still further.