

# INSPECTION REPORT

**Coombe Dean School**  
Plymouth

LEA area: Plymouth City Council

Unique Reference Number: 113538

Inspection Number: 184615

Headteacher: Mr P N Reid

Reporting inspector: Mike Young 4345

Dates of inspection: 4 – 8 October 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 708087

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
Type of control:	County
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Charnhill Way Elburton Plymouth PL9 8ES
Telephone number:	01752 406961
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Dr M Bell
Date of previous inspection:	29 January – 2 February 1996

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## MAIN FINDINGS

### What the school does well

- Very good behaviour and relationships.
- Very good social and moral development of the pupils.
- Access to a broad and relevant curriculum, with particularly good Sixth Form and extracurricular provision, as well as for information and communication technology (ICT).
- Highly effective procedures for promoting good attendance and behaviour.
- Very good links with the community.
- A clear direction and ethos from the school's leadership.
- Good quality of teaching.
- Very good progress of pupils with special educational needs.

### Where the school has weaknesses

- I. Standards in religious education.
- II. Provision for spiritual development.

**The school's many strengths clearly outweigh its weaknesses. The governors' action plan will set out how the weaknesses identified during the inspection will be tackled. The plan will be sent to all parents and guardians of pupils at the school.**

### How the school has improved since the last inspection

The school has made good progress since the last inspection. It has maintained standards which compare favourably with schools in similar circumstances. The quality of teaching has improved from an already good base since the last inspection. The school has improved its standards of behaviour and provides an ethos which is conducive to learning. The governors have improved the environment in which children learn and work. Each of the key issues of the previous report has been met, with the exceptions of collective worship and religious education in the Sixth Form. Above all, the school's leadership has continued to build successfully on the cornerstone principle of meeting the needs of each pupil. The school clearly has the capacity to continue to manage its own improvement and has set an appropriate target for 2000.

### Standards in subjects

The following table shows standards achieved by 16 and 18 year olds in GCSE and A/AS-level examinations in 1998 and national tests for 14 year olds in 1999:

Performance in:	Compared with all schools	Compared with similar schools	Key
			<i>well above average</i> A <i>above average</i> B <i>average</i> C <i>below average</i> D <i>well below average</i> E

Key Stage 3 tests	C	B	
GCSE examinations	C	B	
A/AS - levels	D	-	

The majority of pupils on entry to the school have below average attainment. The school has largely maintained its standards as the ability of its intake has declined, pupils' performance comparing well with national averages at GCSE and even more favourably with similar schools at the age of both 14 and 16. Standards at Key Stage 3 in 1999 were close to the national averages for English, mathematics and science. At GCSE, the school has maintained a performance above the national average, though the average points score per pupil has fallen by about 6 points between 1994 and 1998. Good standards by the end of Key Stage 4 are to be found in English, science, history, music and art, while standards in religious education are unsatisfactory. Current standards at A-level are broadly average but results have been consistently a few points behind the national average. In contrast, the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) results exceed the national average. Overall, pupils make good progress and pupils with special needs make very good progress.

### Quality of teaching

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 7-9	Good	English, music, physical education, mathematics, science, art, geography, ICT.	Religious education.
Years 10-11	Good	English, music, physical education, science, art, design technology, geography, history, ICT, business studies.	Religious education.
Sixth form	Good	English, GNVQ, science, geography, mathematics, history, modern languages.	-
English	Good	-	-
Mathematics	Satisfactory	-	-

The overall quality of the teaching is good, making an essential contribution to the good progress of the vast majority of the pupils at the school. Of the lessons observed during the inspection, 92 per cent were judged to be at least satisfactory, 61 per cent to be good and 12 per cent to be very good. These statistics represent a good improvement in the quality of the teaching since the last inspection. Currently, the most consistently effective teaching is in English, music, physical education and in the GNVQ courses. The teaching is least effective in religious education. Clear objectives, clear explanations and very good subject expertise and plenty of encouragement for pupils characterise the best teaching. Conversely, undemanding tasks and unsatisfactory discipline were key features of unsatisfactory teaching.

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



## Other aspects of the school

Aspect	Comment
Behaviour	Behaviour is very good and has improved since the last inspection. Pupils are enthusiastic about learning in most classes.
Attendance Ethos*	Good attendance; most pupils enjoy coming to school. Very good climate for learning and relationships; school committed to high standards for all pupils.
Leadership and management	Clear direction and ethos established; the school's values underpin all its work.
Curriculum	Good breadth and improved balance; good Sixth Form and very good extracurricular provision.
Pupils with special educational needs	Very good provision results in very good progress; well planned individual support.
Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for pupils' social and moral development is very good; cultural development is sound, but spiritual development is unsatisfactory.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	The provision of learning resources is good; the quality of the school environment has improved significantly and the deployment of staff, and their support, is highly effective.
Value for money	The school provides good value for money and financial planning has improved to a good standard.

\* *Ethos is the climate for learning: attitudes to work, relationships and the commitment to high standards.*

## The parents' views of the school

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Parents recognise the school's positive qualities. Though a minority of parents had concerns about homework, generally inspectors found that appropriate amounts of homework were being set and monitoring systems effective. Similarly, the majority of parents found the school responsive to concerns and the parents' involvement in their children's learning was a strength.

## **KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION**

### **1. Improve the standards achieved by pupils in religious education by:**

- ensuring the requirements of the agreed syllabus are met for Key Stage 4;
- providing religious education in the Sixth Form;
- providing more opportunities for reflection in religious education;
- raising expectations of pupils in the subject;
- matching assessment tasks to the requirements of the agreed syllabus.

(See paragraphs 28, 33, 34 and 177 to 183.)

### **1. Improve the provision for spiritual development by:**

- providing opportunities for reflection in assembly;
- building on good examples (such as in music) to provide more opportunities for reflection in the curriculum;
- improving the provision for religious education as explained above.

(See paragraphs 48, 49 and 183.)

The following less important issues should be considered for inclusion in the action plan:

- meeting the requirement for a daily act of collective worship (see paragraphs 48 and 67);
- increasing the monitoring of teaching to complement the school's other quality checks (see paragraphs 69, 129, 135 and 159);
- attending to the health and safety issues in art and design and technology (see paragraphs 58, 116 and 129);
- the annual report to parents should meet requirements (paragraph 60).

## INTRODUCTION

### Characteristics of the school

1. Coombe Dean school is situated in the suburbs to the east of Plymouth city centre. Since the previous inspection report, the school has drawn increasingly on more central wards to maintain its numbers. The socio-economic circumstances of pupils at the school are currently broadly average, but the ability of its intake is below average. There are currently 972 pupils in the school, including a Sixth Form of 116. There is an overall balance between boys and girls at the school, though girls outnumber boys in Year 8 and the reverse is true of Year 11. The proportion of pupils taking free school meals is, at 13 per cent, close to the national average, while there is a low number of pupils for whom English is not their first language. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs has risen to 15 per cent, again broadly in line with the national average for this type of school. The number of pupils with statements is below average, however. Most statements refer to emotional and behavioural difficulties, but there are also specific learning difficulties and hearing impairment. The school's main aim is to provide an education which enables each individual to reach his or her own potential. Current priorities for development include reviews of Sixth Form provision and behaviour policy; improvements to the environment; literacy; enhancement of ICT; collation of assessment information and forms of support from pupils and their parents.

2. The school has close links with the neighbouring Plymstock School and is a member of the Tamar Valley Consortium. The link with Plymstock School enables Sixth Form pupils to take a wider range of A-level subjects than would otherwise be possible. Membership of the consortium enables around 20 pupils for whom advanced courses would not be appropriate to take National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ), for example in motor mechanics, electronics and floristry.

### Key Indicators

#### Attainment at Key Stage 3<sup>1</sup>

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for latest reporting year:

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	92	82	174

National Curriculum (NC) Test Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	46	63	56
	Girls	61	49	47
	Total	107	112	103
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	62 (76)	64 (63)	60 (50)
	National	63 (64)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	17 (44)	35 (35)	16 (19)
	National	28 (34)	38 (36)	23 (27)

<sup>1</sup>

Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

<b>Teacher Assessments</b>		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	50	66	57
	Girls	65	60	61
	Total	115	126	118
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	66 (56)	73 (75)	68 (41)
	National	64 (62)	64 (63)	60 (62)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	32 (21)	35 (40)	21 (14)
	National	31 (31)	37 (36)	28 (31)

#### Attainment at Key Stage 4<sup>2</sup>

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year:

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1998	68	62	130

<b>GCSE Results</b>		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A* to G	1 or more grades A* to G
Number of pupils achieving standard specified	Boys	29	66	67
	Girls	36	55	60
	Total	65	121	127
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	50.4 (45)	93.8 (91.4)	98 (96)
	National	44.6 (43.3)	89.8 (88.5)	96 (94)

Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and percentage of *such pupils* who achieved all those they studied:

	Number	% Success rate
School	-	-
National	-	-

### Attainment in the Sixth Form<sup>3</sup>

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 who were entered for GCE A/AS examinations in the latest reporting year:

Year	Male	Female	Total
1998	37	35	72

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	13.3	18.4	15.6 (14.8)	0.8	2.4	1.8 (2.0)
National	18.2	16.9	17.6 (17.1)	2.7	2.9	2.8 (2.7)

Number entered for the IB Diploma, and percentage of *such students* who achieved this qualification:

	Number	% Success rate
School	-	-
National		-

Number in final year of approved vocational qualifications and percentage of *such students* who achieved these qualifications:

	Number	% Success Rate
School	24	95.8
National		72.5

### Attendance

Percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year :

		%
Authorised Absence	School	6.9
	National comparative data	7.9
Unauthorised Absence	School	0.6
	National comparative data	1.1

### Exclusions

Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school age) during the previous year :

	Number
Fixed period	33
Permanent	1

### Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is :

%
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Very good or better	12
Satisfactory or better	92
Less than satisfactory	8

## **PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL**

### **EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL**

#### **Attainment and progress**

3.The majority of pupils have below average attainment on entry to the school. Most other pupils are average or just above in their attainment, with fewer pupils of the lowest or highest ability. National Federation for Educational Research tests, taken in Year 7, give this profile, which is confirmed by Key Stage 2 results for this year. Evidence from these tests and other evidence collected by the school indicates that the ability of pupils entering the school has declined somewhat over recent years. The school has set an appropriate target for GCSE in 2000 in the light of this information. The school has largely maintained its standards, however, its performance comparing well with both national averages and similar schools. Generally, pupils of different ability all do well at the school.

4.Standards at Key Stage 3 in the 1999 National Curriculum tests were close to the national averages for English, mathematics and science. Taken together, standards in the core subjects have improved in line with the national trend. The performance of boys in English was a little further behind girls than nationally. Current standards in lessons are similar to these results in English and mathematics. In science they have improved to closer to the national average. Performance in the English, mathematics and science tests in 1998 was above average in comparison to schools in similar circumstances.

5.At GCSE, the school has maintained a performance above the national average, though the average points score per pupil has fallen by about six points between 1994 and 1998, while nationally this has risen. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more A\* to C grades in 1998 was 50.4 per cent, as against a national figure of 44.6 per cent. Indications for summer 1999 are that this has gone down by three percentage points though, at the time of writing, national figures with which to make an accurate comparison are not available. The school also had a higher proportion of pupils with five or more A\* to G grades than the national average and only two per cent of pupils left without at least one GCSE. As at Key Stage 3, the school compares well with those in similar circumstances. Performance is well above similar schools for both the higher grades of A\* to C and for those pupils achieving at least one GCSE.

6.Attainment in English at GCSE was above average in 1998, as are current standards of work. Above average standards have been consistently maintained over recent years. The gap between the boys' and girls' performance at GCSE was less than nationally, in contrast to the situation reported previously by OFSTED. Science results were above the national average in 1998, with similar standards in the current Year 11. The 1998 results in mathematics, however, were below average, reflecting progress at this key stage which is only just satisfactory. In line with the overall school pattern, there has been a slight downward trend in the GCSE results in both science and mathematics between 1996 and 1998.

7.Inspectors' examination of current standards broadly confirmed the picture of average attainment at the end of Key Stage 3, above average at Key Stage 4 and average in the Sixth Form. There are exceptions. In information and communication technology pupils' standards were above average in the final year of Key Stage 3, though standards are more average by the end of Key Stage 4. Standards in religious education were below average at both Key Stage 3 and 4. Standards have improved in information and communication technology but not in religious education. A few parents expressed concern at the level of challenge for younger, less able boys, but these anxieties were not borne out in the work seen.

8.Standards are above average at the end of both Key Stage 3 and 4 in art, an improvement over recent GCSE results, while in geography, business studies, physical education and design and technology they

are average at both key stages, though the physical education GCSE group attains above average standards. The standards attained by pupils in history at the end of Key Stage 3 are average, but above at Key Stage 4. In music, standards are average in Year 9 but above average by Year 11. In French standards are below average at the end of Key Stage 3, but closer to average by Year 11, while in German standards are below average at the end of both key stages.

9. Most pupils make good progress. The majority enter the school with standards which are below average, but by Key Stage 3 pupils are achieving standards which are comparable to national averages in the core subjects, or above this in the case of English. By the end of Key Stage 4, the proportion of pupils achieving both the higher grades and at least one GCSE in the school is consistently good. Boys also make good progress in the school, as do pupils of different ability. The vast majority of pupils with special needs make very good progress. Almost all pupils with special needs, including those who have transferred from special schools, achieve at least five GCSEs at grades A\* to G by the end of Key Stage 4.

10. Pupils make good progress at Key Stage 3 in English, mathematics, art, music, physical education and ICT. They make less than expected progress in religious education but average progress in science, history, geography, technology and both the modern languages of French and German. At Key Stage 4, pupils make good progress in English, history geography, art, music, physical education, technology and GNVQ, but expected progress in science, languages, ICT and business studies. Religious education is the only subject in which progress is unsatisfactory.

11. The overall results at A-level in 1998 were below the national average. There is a small improvement in 1999. Subjects in which the pupils performed best in 1998 include English language (well above average), English literature, history and geography. The weakest subjects were biology, chemistry and physics, though results in chemistry and physics improved in 1999. Pupils at the school do not take an 'A' level in general studies. The pupils' results in the Advanced General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) courses were well above average: 50 per cent of the pupils achieved a distinction in 1998 and almost all completed the course. Evidence from the inspection indicates that the current Sixth Formers are achieving broadly average standards in the A-level courses and that standards at GNVQ remain well above average. The majority of the pupils are making good progress at A-level; most make very good progress at GNVQ.

12. Standards of literacy and numeracy are sound. Pupils read and write with confidence in most subjects, though girls demonstrate greater technical accuracy than the boys. Listening is well developed. Spelling is mainly accurate and pupils are increasing their general and specialist vocabulary in mathematics, science, geography, history, technology, ICT, art and music. Spelling and writing are weak, however, in religious education. ICT makes a considerable contribution to literacy across the school. Pupils use computers to draft and edit work, writing for a range of purposes and audiences. Most pupils are competent in their use of number, thanks to the focus this is given by the mathematics department, which improves their mental arithmetic. All pupils can use a calculator correctly. They use number confidently in a range of situations across the subjects of the curriculum.



## **Attitudes, behaviour and personal development**

13.The pupils' attitudes to learning are good and make positive contributions to their attainment and progress. The work ethic of pupils is sometimes very good, for example in physical education and GNVQ health studies. The vast majority are enthusiastic about their work and well motivated. Pupils listen attentively to their teachers and respond well in class discussions.

14.They are able to undertake personal research. For example, Year 10 pupils learned how to use the careers library through collecting and interpreting information from a number of sources including books and computers. Pupils persevere with tasks, and feel confident to ask for help to clarify points they do not understand. They are able to solve problems and generate ideas. Pupils often try hard to improve their work. This was seen in a Year 7 English lesson when pupils took note of the targets set to achieve their goals in their next piece of work. Generally, pupils take pride in their work and presentation is good.

15.The pupils' behaviour is generally very good, and has improved since the last inspection when it was judged to be good. This very good behaviour enables lessons to be taught with the minimum of disruption, which has a beneficial effect on pupils' learning. Pupils behave very well around the school and a bus driver praised pupils' conduct when travelling to and from school. Pupils have a clear understanding of the school's code of conduct, and the vast majority respond well to the system of rewards and sanctions. Pupils are trustworthy, and show respect for the school's and others' property. The few incidents of unsatisfactory behaviour occur when classroom management is inadequate and pupils are not given challenging tasks. The number of fixed term and permanent exclusions was broadly in line with similar schools.

16.Relationships throughout the school are very good and a major strength. Pupils are friendly and relate well to one another. Year 7 pupils who had only been at school for four weeks remarked that they felt happy and safe around the school and whilst travelling on the buses. Older pupils volunteer to support younger pupils; a good number of pupils take part in paired reading and others act as mentors to Year 7 tutor groups. Teachers and support staff are trusted and respected and pupils know that they can ask for help and support. Pupils are helpful and courteous to visitors and enjoy showing them around the school.

17.The personal development of the pupils is very good. At a lunch for members of the community who had links with the school, pupils confidently mingled with guests ensuring that introductions were made and queries answered. In the classroom and around the school, pupils are keen to take responsibility and they show a capacity to use initiative. For example, members of the service teams put forward ideas to improve school life. Pupils volunteer for professional training to become 'peer educators' and offer a confidential counselling service. Year 10 pupils and members of the sports council organise the Plymouth primary schools cross-country event. Pupils participate in a wide range of extracurricular events and enjoy activities week.

18.Many pupils with special needs develop considerable independence as learners with the aid of individualised computer programmes and carefully structured support. A Year 8 pupil improving her spelling and reading with a talking computer programme chose to increase the level of challenge of the activity when she found the work was getting relatively easy.

## **18. Attendance**

19.The pupils' attendance is good, and has improved since the last OFSTED inspection when it was judged to be satisfactory. Parents state that the vast majority of pupils enjoy coming to school. This is

reflected in the attendance rate of 92.6 per cent, which is above the national average, and the unauthorised absence rate of 0.6 per cent, which is below the national average. The vast majority of pupils are punctual, but a significant minority arrive after the start of registration due to the late arrival of some school buses. These pupils are missing an important start to the school day. Lessons generally start and finish on time. The good rate of attendance is maintained as the pupils progress through the school, and this has a beneficial effect on attainment and progress.

## **19. QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED**

### **19. Teaching**

20.The overall quality of the teaching is good. It has been a key factor in the school's maintenance of standards at a time when the pupils' attainment on entry has been declining. It is also making the key contribution to the good progress of the vast majority of the pupils at the school.

21.Of the lessons observed during the inspection, 92 per cent were judged to be at least satisfactory, 61 per cent to be good and 12 per cent to be very good. The teaching is slightly stronger at Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3 though this is largely due to weaknesses in the teaching of religious education to the younger pupils. It is in the Sixth Form that the teaching is most consistently of a good standard; here 97 per cent of the lessons seen were judged to be at least satisfactory; 74 per cent to be good and 15 per cent very good.

22.The statistics above represent good improvement in the quality of the teaching since the last inspection. At that time only 85 per cent of all the lessons seen were judged to be satisfactory; one in five was judged to be less than satisfactory at Key Stage 3. Currently, the most consistently effective teaching is in English, music, physical education and in the GNVQ courses. Teaching is also good in mathematics, science, art and geography at Key Stage 3; in science, art, design and technology, geography, history and business studies at Key Stage 4 and in science, geography, history, modern foreign languages and mathematics in the Sixth Form. The teaching is least effective in religious education. It is sound in modern languages and geography and good in all the other subjects.

23.A key strength in the teaching is the teachers' very good knowledge and understanding of the subject they teach. In almost all cases they have very good knowledge of the requirements of the National Curriculum, of the GCSE and A-level examinations and, where appropriate, of GNVQ. The exceptions to this are in some lessons in history, geography and design and technology at Key Stage 3 where the lack of subject confidence holds back the pupils' progress.

24.Other general strengths in the teaching are the expectations that the teachers have for both the pupils' work and behaviour, the careful planning of lessons and the judicious choice of methods and activities to match the teaching objectives. For example, a key feature of the teaching in English is the high expectation that the teachers have that the pupils will apply their knowledge. They expect the pupils to listen, to think for themselves and to make connections with their previous learning. Almost all teachers use their time well and organise an appropriate balance of whole-class, group and individual work. Their ongoing assessment of the pupils' progress in lessons is satisfactory. It is particularly good in English and in the GNVQ courses. Almost all teachers make good use of homework to extend the pupils' learning. The main exceptions to the above are in religious education and in the less than satisfactory teaching at Key Stage 3 referred to in the preceding paragraph.

25. The key features of the best teaching include:

- clear, well-focused objectives for the lesson;
- very good subject expertise;
- clear explanations or demonstrations;
- the ability to move the pupils' learning on by asking challenging questions;
- brisk but appropriate pace to the lesson;
- the ability to encourage and indeed enthuse the pupils.

1. There were instances of good or very good teaching in all years. For example, in a music lesson at Key Stage 3, the teacher made very effective use of ICT to demonstrate very clearly how melody, harmony, bass and percussion all contribute to calypso. In an English lesson on Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night' in Year 9, taught to less able pupils, the teacher skilfully matched the activities to the pupils' previous understanding in a way that captivated their attention and increased their understanding and enjoyment of a demanding text. In a volleyball lesson in Year 11, the teacher's very good demonstration of the smash and her effective feedback to the pupils helped them improve their footwork in this difficult skill. In a Sixth Form GNVQ lesson, the teacher's lively presentation and use of questions, gesture and tone of voice enabled the pupils to make very good progress in linking theory to good practice in communication.

2. In the less than satisfactory teaching (8%), the key features were:

- undemanding tasks;
- slow pace to the lesson;
- unsatisfactory discipline in several lessons;
- a lack of subject confidence in a small number of lessons in history, geography and physical education.

1. The greatest proportion of unsatisfactory teaching was in religious education in which over half of the lessons seen were judged to have shortcomings. For example, in a Year 8 lesson to a group of more able pupils, the teacher provided very basic resources which were well below the pupils' capacity. As a result, they made insufficient progress.

2. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good. This is a key factor in the very good progress made by most of these pupils. As a rule the teachers are well aware of the pupils' needs and adapt the work appropriately. Where the learning support assistants are deployed they also make a good contribution, as does the specific support provided for some of the pupils within the learning support department. Here too the teaching is good; the two teachers provide a good balance between supporting and challenging the pupils.

## 29. **The curriculum and assessment**

### 29. **Curriculum**

3. The school has a well thought-out and generally well-organised curriculum. It makes a good contribution to the standards achieved and prepares the pupils well for the next stage in their education and for adult life.

4. The breadth of the curriculum is good in all years. At Key Stage 3, drama is taught to all pupils as well as the subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education. In Years 8 and 9 all pupils learn both French and German. At Key Stage 4 the school offers business studies and child

development in addition to the subjects taught at Key Stage 3. A particular strength of the school is the wide choice of courses offered in the Sixth Form. Currently, the pupils study for a total of 17 A-levels in Year 12 and 16 in Year 13. The range that the school can offer is augmented by good collaboration with other institutions. Of the total studied, five are taught at a neighbouring school as part of the Tamar Valley Consortium. Co-operation on the timing of lessons between the two schools enables some pupils to take a combination of A-levels that would not otherwise be possible. In addition to the A-level provision, the school offers three advanced GNVQ courses in art, health and social care and business. For those for whom advanced courses are not appropriate, the school has arranged the provision of around 20 National Vocational Courses (NVQ) from local providers.

5.The balance of the curriculum at Key Stage 3 was criticised in the last inspection. Specifically the report stated that the time for art and music was insufficient. The school looked seriously at this issue, taking advice from external consultants.

6.In the end the governors decided not to change the time allocation, arguing cogently that to do so would simply create similar pressures for other subjects. Planning for the subjects was, however, improved to ensure that all key elements are covered. It is the view of this inspection team that requirements are now met. A further criticism was that the legal requirements for religious education were not being met. Coverage of the content of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education is now adequate in Years 7 to 10. There is still insufficient time in Year 11 though the present arrangements will be phased out at the end of this year. Requirements for religious education in the Sixth Form are still not being met. Both overall and within almost all subjects the balance of the curriculum is now good. Two exceptions are the lack of a local study in history at Key Stage 3 and the overemphasis on factual information to the detriment of ideas in religious education.

7.Within subjects the overall strengths in planning and organisation far outweigh the few weaknesses. Planning for the pupils to do increasingly demanding work is at least satisfactory in almost all subjects and is good in many. Some of the best practice is in English and music. There are, however, weaknesses in this planning in religious education and in both science and design and technology at Key Stage 3. By contrast, provision for ICT at Key Stage 3 is now a strength. Well-organised and planned units of ICT work in Years 7 and 9, together with good opportunities in English, mathematics, science and in design and technology, ensure that all the pupils receive a good foundation in this key skill. A specific weakness in the curriculum at Key Stage 3 is, however, the timetabling of history and geography in Year 7 whereby one teacher teaches both subjects to each group. This leads to some unsatisfactory teaching where the teacher's expertise is less in one of the subjects.

8.In each year up to and including Year 11, the school makes some specific provision of the most able by providing one extension lesson a week in English and mathematics. This works best in English, in which the attainment of the most able is particularly good. In mathematics, the lessons provide challenging work for the pupils. However, the teachers do not build on this sufficiently when the pupils return to their normal class.

9.The school's provision for personal and social education (PSE) is sound at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4. Provision in Key Stage 3 is unusual in that it is concentrated in one extended module in Year 8. Nevertheless, the areas covered, including sex and health education and attention to drugs misuse, are appropriate. At Key Stage 4, PSE has a fixed weekly slot on the timetable. In Year 10 there are modules in careers, health education and citizenship; in Year 11 the main focus is on careers and health education. The Key Stage 4 programme is well planned and makes a good contribution to the pupils' development.

10.Equality of opportunity within the school's curriculum is very good. All courses are genuinely open to all in Key Stages 3 and 4. Only one pupil is disapplied from one subject in Key Stage 4. Access to

Sixth Form courses is also open though this does lead to a sizeable number of pupils dropping out of A-level courses in Year 12.

11. Careers education is very good in both Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form. Particular strengths are familiarisation with the very well stocked careers library, the arrangements for work experience and the support provided for individual pupils. At Key Stage 4 the pupils have two separate work placements, preparation for which is very good. The good partnership with the Cornwall and Devon Careers Service ensures good quality interviews for all pupils in Year 11 and in the Sixth Form.

12. The provision of extracurricular activities is a considerable strength of the school. For example, the English department organises a book club, a book fair, theatre visits and writers 'in residence'. There are daily computer clubs and the ICT facilities are open from 8.00 am to 4.30 pm daily. Approximately 60 pupils are currently rehearsing for a production of 'The Wizard of Oz'.

13. The art department has an artist 'in residence' each year and organises trips to St Ives, London and, last year, to Prague. In physical education the opportunities in traditional games are very good. All the major games are represented and there are regular fixtures against other schools. Participation rates are good. The school has established good links with local football, rugby, volleyball, basketball, table-tennis and hockey clubs, enabling many pupils to extend their experience. Most of the activities are organised and supervised by the four physical education teachers; a further five teachers help.

14. The provision for the pupils with special educational needs is very good. They have access to all elements of the curriculum at both key stages. Organisation of the intensive support for individuals is well planned in relation to the pupils' individual education plans. Good arrangements are made to ensure that crucial work, including homework set, is not missed. The literacy support programme in Key Stage 3 is particularly effective. Many pupils on this programme have raised their spelling and reading ages by up to 30 months within a period of six months and have been able to come off the school's register of special educational needs.

15. Although the school does not currently provide specific vocational courses at Key Stage 4, it is nonetheless making appropriate provision in the Certificate of Achievement courses in English, German, geography and design and technology for those pupils who may find the demands of full GCSE courses beyond them. Care is taken to keep the GCSE "door" open for as long as possible within this provision. Other strengths in the provision for these pupils include the computer club in Year 7 and the homework club for pupils in all years.

#### 42. **Assessment**

16. The school possesses a considerable amount of data on pupils including National Curriculum results, cognitive ability tests and value-added measures. All of this is held centrally and is easily accessible to departments. A great deal of valuable analysis of this data takes place at whole school level and it is used widely for setting purposes. Key Stage 2 data is, however, not widely used. Departmental use of data to monitor performance and to track underperformance varies from being very good in English and science to not being used sufficiently in music, religious education and design and technology.

17. Marking across the key stages is generally sound and good at Key Stage 3 in English, modern foreign languages, ICT, physical education and music. In mathematics and business studies at Key Stage 4 marking is less good and some books were left unmarked for an unacceptable length of time.

18. Assessment at both key stages and post-16 is both appropriate and accurate in all subjects except in religious education. In Key Stage 3 in music and modern foreign languages the levels assigned to

pieces of work are over-generous. However, in many subjects, and especially in English at both Key Stage 3 and 4, the level descriptors are used well to help pupils set targets. Assessment is good at post-16 level and pupils understand the marking criteria used at A-level and GNVQ.

19. Assessment is used to inform curriculum planning at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 in most subjects but it is not used in religious education. Assessment data is put to good use in identifying pupils with special needs and planning their support. The school has a very comprehensive system of checking pupil progress and has maintained the quality of its assessment and recording systems since the last report.

#### 46. **Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

20. The school has clearly defined its intentions for this aspect of the development of its pupils. Some departments, notably art and English, have identified how this is to be achieved within the units of work whilst others have as yet only a statement of general intent.

21. The quality of experience provided by assemblies is good. They are well prepared and make a good contribution to the moral, social and personal development of the pupils. However, in several of the assemblies observed opportunities for the pupils to reflect on the significance of what they had heard were overlooked. Assemblies do not meet statutory requirements as pupils only attend one each week. There has been no improvement in this respect since the previous inspection.

22. Provision for the spiritual development of the pupils is unsatisfactory, as it was at the time of the last inspection. In many subjects and in assemblies opportunities for personal reflection on deeper meaning are missed. In religious education pupils do not consider the spiritual dimension of religion and are not given opportunities for personal reflection. However, an example of what can be achieved was seen and heard in the music written by Key Stage 4 pupils in response to the eclipse.

23. The development of the pupils' understanding of moral values is very good. The clear moral code is based on mutual respect for all members of the school community. This is a strong factor in the trust felt by Year 7 pupils after only a few weeks in the school. The adults in the school set a very good example. There are numerous opportunities for pupils to consider moral and ethical issues and to distinguish right from wrong. In geography they discuss issues relating to population growth and the environment; in religious education they consider euthanasia and animal rights and in economics they explore the morality of monopolies and fair trade.

24. The opportunities provided for the social development of the pupils are very good. They work together in pairs and small groups in many subjects. In others they give serious consideration to social issues such as citizenship and democracy in history and economic growth and poverty in economics. The pupils are encouraged to take responsibility and to be involved in the life of their community in many ways. Years 8 and 9 carry out reception duties; pupils in Years 9 and 10 have received training to enable them to offer advice to other pupils on such matters as bullying. Years 10 and 11 give their time to hear younger pupils read. The school Senate, chaired by the head boy and head girl, provides a forum for pupils to express their views on school life. The energy conservation group keeps a watchful eye on this aspect of school life. The Sixth Form sports council plays a particularly lively role in running sports events for the school and for local primary schools. Social skills are developed by a wide range of extracurricular activities and by the extensive opportunities offered in the activities week in the summer term. Almost all pupils in Year 7 take part in a tutor group residential visit to an activities centre on Dartmoor.

25. Provision for the cultural development of the pupils is sound. There is a range of extracurricular activities including music and drama. There are visits to art galleries and there has been an artist in

residence. Pupils are gaining a sound knowledge of other cultures. In geography they learn about Brazil, Italy and Japan and they experience art, music and dance from other cultures. They have benefited from the presence of a Japanese intern in the school for six of the past seven years.

## **52. Support, guidance and pupils' welfare**

26. The school is very successful in fulfilling its aim to foster a caring community. The staff are approachable, know the pupils well and value them as individuals. The school's pastoral system is very effective in providing a support mechanism for the pupils' personal welfare. Heads of year are very committed in their role of caring for their pupils. Arrangements for the induction of new pupils are good. The deputy head with responsibility for pastoral issues is particularly dedicated to helping those pupils and their families with serious difficulties. Regular multi-agency meetings are held to support these pupils. The continuity of care is enhanced by form tutors and heads of year remaining with their tutor groups from Year 7 to Year 11. Lunchtime supervision is good.

27. The Learning Support department places great emphasis on raising pupils' self-esteem in addition to improving their basic skills. Whilst working with small groups or individuals on spelling and reading, support staff and teachers seize every opportunity to offer pupils guidance on managing all aspects of school life.

28. The school's procedures for monitoring pupils' academic progress are good. Helpful information, in the form of half-termly checks on progress, is prepared by subject teachers and highlights areas for concern. These checks are reviewed by tutors and heads of year and sent to parents. Interim reports are also prepared for those pupils about whom teachers have raised concerns. Staff work with pupils when difficulties have been identified and operate a mentoring scheme for Year 11 pupils.

29. Procedures for monitoring and promoting good attendance in Years 7 to 11 are very good. There is a clear attendance policy, which gives detailed guidance to staff on following up absences. Good attendance is rewarded with commendations and stickers. Tutors identify regular and unauthorised absences and heads of year follow these up. Tight systems are in place which minimise truancy from school and lessons. There are very good links with the Educational Welfare Officer who meets with each head of year and a deputy headteacher each week. The last inspection identified that post-16 registration did not meet requirements. Registers are now completed at the start of the morning and afternoon sessions and at the start of lessons. There are no records of pupils who arrive after and leave before these registrations and this could cause confusion in the event of an emergency evacuation.

30. The measures to promote discipline and good behaviour are very good, and are a major strength of the school. The school operates as an orderly community. The ethos of good behaviour is reinforced in lessons and by the examples of pupils and adults working in the school. This is underpinned by a very clear code of conduct which is signed by pupils and their parents. Sanctions are applied consistently in Years 7 to 11 and heads of year monitor both good and poor behaviour. Pupils value the reward system and all feel that punishments are fair. The school has a clear anti-bullying policy, and the few incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively. Peer educators provide a useful counselling service for pupils.

31. Arrangements to promote pupils' health and general well being are very good, but the inspection team raised serious concerns about aspects of safety. The school has very good links with health professionals, such as the school nurse. A deputy headteacher is the designated member of staff with responsibility for child protection and has received relevant training. The school has a detailed policy and staff, including lunchtime assistants, receive awareness training in child protection. A good number of staff are qualified in first aid. There is a well-equipped medical room with good procedures in place for giving medication and caring for pupils who are ill or injured. The school has undertaken risk assessments and issues of concern were identified, but not all have been addressed. These include

a screen for the kiln and concerns in the design and technology department. These and other more minor concerns were brought the attention of the Health and Safety officer during the inspection.

#### **58. Partnership with parents and the community**

32.The strong links with the community make a very positive contribution to pupils' learning and are a major strength of the school. The life of the school is also enriched by its partnership with parents. These judgements broadly reflect the findings of the last inspection.

33.The quality of information provided to parents is good. Weekly newsletters are of a good standard, and inform parents of future events and celebrate the school's successes. Parents of new pupils are well informed through a useful prospectus, meetings and a personal tour of the school. The annual governors' report does not contain all the information that it should. Parents value the regular and helpful information about their children's progress. 'ABC' progress reports are sent home every half term, and highlight strengths and areas of concern in each subject. Pupils' annual reports are of a good quality. Parents feel able to discuss their concerns with members of staff and value the rapid response from the school. Annual parents' meetings provide useful opportunities for parents and subject teachers to discuss their children's progress and targets. Parents of Year 7 and Year 10 pupils are invited to a helpful consultation with tutors. Parents of Year 9 and Year 11 pupils receive appropriate information about the options available at the next stage of their children's education.

34.The parents' involvement in their children's learning is good. Homework planners are well used by parents, tutors and pupils as an effective means of communication between school and home. Parents made significant contributions to the drafting of the home/school agreement, and have signed the adopted contract. The active parent/teacher association raises funds for the school, organises social events and runs a uniform shop. The school values the help offered by parents to assist at extracurricular activities including transport to sporting events.

35.The learning support department has forged very good links with the parents of pupils with special educational needs. Parents are invited to school on a regular basis to discuss their children's progress. Many take advantage of the opportunity to attend advice sessions on supporting children's learning at home.

36.The school's partnership with the community is very good. These links make a very positive contribution to pupils' attainment and personal development. The school makes very good use of visitors to enrich the curriculum. For example, parents and young children are invited into Child Development lessons, and all Year 10 pupils participate in a 'Save a Life' course run by a member of the Red Cross. There are very good links with local employers and the Careers Advice Service. Pupils are offered good quality guidance and valuable opportunities for work experience, which enable them to prepare for life after school. Local businesses make significant contributions to the life of the school through the Eagle Trust. Links with the community are strengthened by the provision on site for public use of the library, sports hall and business centre.

37.The current Year 7 pupils came from 37 primary schools and the head of year visited each school to talk with pupils and teachers, to ensure the smooth transfer of pupils. The school is a member of the local academic council and regularly discusses curriculum issues with schools in the locality. Through membership of the Tamar Valley Consortium, the school is able to offer a wide range of post-16 courses. There are very good links with external agencies, and the school nurse holds a 'drop-in' clinic each week. The school takes part in a wide range of sporting competitions and the pupils participate enthusiastically in fundraising events for charity.



## **THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL**

### **Leadership and management**

38. The overall quality of management in the school is good, while the leadership of the head teacher and senior team is very good. The headteacher, governors and senior managers of the school are highly effective in creating a very good climate for learning in which the school's aim, to encourage each individual to fulfil their potential, is met for almost everyone. The positive attitude of most pupils to learning is evidence of the realisation of this ethos, as is the overall good quality of teaching. The governors have also been highly effective in improving the learning environment and they have a clear programme of improvement in this regard. Equal opportunities is a strength. All pupils have very good access to the curriculum, which is well matched to their needs, providing the foundation of good progress. Access to Sixth Form courses is also open.

39. The overall direction of the school and what it stands for is therefore very clear, and a clear factor in parents' choice of the school. Staff understand and contribute to this direction and ethos. The school development plan, however, is more of a working list of, for example, aspirations requiring capital, a review of provision in the Sixth Form and improvements to fabric. While all of these contribute to the overall purpose, the sense of direction is less clearly conveyed than by the school's work and other communications. Both governors and staff have a clear role in the process of determining these priorities. Links between this plan and department level plans have improved since the last inspection, as has the overall quality of plans in most cases; though technology and modern languages are exceptions to this.

40. As well as aspects of planning, the role of the governors was criticised in the previous report. This has improved. The governors have taken steps to ensure they are better informed about what is happening in the school, with a monthly report from a visiting governor on a particular aspect of the school's provision, such as special needs. Results are carefully examined by the curriculum committee in September. Statutory requirements are met in most important respects. Exceptions are some health and safety issues in technology, information requirements in the annual report, as well as the continuing failure to provide a daily act of collective worship.

41. Part of the previous criticism referred to the governors' financial planning, and this is also considerably improved, with a three-year projection of the school's budget by the finance committee. While the governors have, therefore, become more involved in policy formation, planning and monitoring, they see the senior team rather than themselves as taking new initiatives. However, the key strategic decision the school has taken recently is to recruit pupils from city areas of Plymouth. The governors' role in making this decision and their continuing support for the school's leadership in managing its consequences are crucial to the continuing success of the school.

42. The previous report recommended that the school extend the process of monitoring, particularly to reduce variations in standards between departments. With the exception of religious education, this has largely been achieved, with consistently good teaching and progress. Action has been taken to improve religious education, including an external consultancy, but standards are still unsatisfactory. Monitoring the quality of provision is well developed in several important respects. For example, the school makes extensive use of data to improve its provision and each member of staff is well supplied with important information on the pupils they teach. The school has also begun to survey the views of pupils, up to now in the Sixth Form, on the quality of teaching they receive. Quality of provision and standards are also monitored through pupils' work. There is less monitoring of the quality of teaching, however, particularly at the level of heads of faculty and department and, while the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching is low, it is not negligible. Learning support is well managed, with a clear commitment to high standards that echoes the direction and ethos of the school.

43. The school has made good progress since its last inspection. It has maintained standards which compare favourably with schools in similar circumstances. The variation in standards between subjects remarked in the previous report has been greatly reduced. The school has maintained its very good standards of behaviour and provides an ethos which is conducive to learning. The governors have improved the environment in which children learn and work. Each of the key issues of the previous report has been met, with the exceptions of collective worship and religious education in the Sixth Form. The school's target for 2000, of 50 per cent A\* to C grades, is reasonably challenging taking into account the declining ability of its intake. Above all, the school's leadership has continued to focus successfully on its own key principle of meeting the needs of each pupil. The school clearly has the capacity to continue to manage its own improvement.

### **Staffing, accommodation and learning resources**

#### **70. Staffing**

44. Staff are suitably qualified and experienced to teach the range of ages and abilities including Sixth Form and vocational courses. Over half the staff have taught in the school for more than ten years. Staff are effectively deployed across the curriculum. The time teachers spend in contact with pupils and the ratio of pupils to teachers are above the national average, but teachers are well supported by an above average number of support staff, to enable them to focus on their teaching.

45. There are effective arrangements for the induction of new staff and newly qualified teachers. There is a very comprehensive staff handbook covering all aspects of school procedures, job descriptions and staff welfare. The overall gender balance at middle management level has improved since the last inspection.

46. Professional development of staff is closely linked to department and individual targets. Teachers and support staff have the opportunity to identify their development needs in an appraisal interview. The school's commitment to staff development has enabled it to achieve re-accreditation in the Investors in People programme. The evaluator for the programme praised 'the purposeful and constructive way all staff work together'. Staff morale is good.

47. Support staff make a valuable contribution to the efficient and effective running of the school. Highly skilled learning support assistants make a significant contribution to the very good progress made by pupils with special educational needs. In conjunction with class teachers they enable pupils with special educational needs to make good progress. A significant contribution is also made by support staff, in the curriculum development office, to the school's improvement.

74. **Accommodation**

74.

75. The accommodation at the school has been improved significantly since the last inspection. Through a successful programme of alterations and refurbishment, the school has systematically improved the quality of opportunities provided for its pupils. The standard of accommodation is now good. Deficiencies in the accommodation for geography, history, art and music identified in the last inspection report have been successfully addressed. Recent improvements also include the refurbishment of toilets, new carpeting in A Block, the creation of an interview room and improved office accommodation. The congestion in the school's narrow corridors and stairways identified in the last report has been greatly alleviated. A new one-way system in E Block, the phasing of pupil movement by the abolition of lesson-change bells and the pupils' considerate behaviour, result in safe and effective circulation. The school has successfully bid for funds to begin a programme to improve wheelchair access across the site. School cleanliness has improved significantly since the school appointed its own caretaker and cleaners. The school is now clean and well presented.

75.

76. High quality display is a feature of the school. It has a very positive impact on the quality of the environment and in stimulating and supporting the pupils' learning. Arrangements for the shared use of the sports hall, business centre and library between the school and the community work well. Both parties make good use of the facilities. The school plans to improve the reception area and in the long term, to provide extra classrooms and an all-weather pitch. A remaining shortcoming in the accommodation is the lack of sufficient rooms for all business studies lessons to take place in specialist accommodation.

76. **Learning Resources**

48. Overall, the provision of learning resources in the school is good. In most subject areas the level of provision of text books means that each pupil has his/her own copy, although there are one or two exceptions. The use of these textbooks and their appropriateness to the pupils' age and ability is good. The standard of worksheets used is high and pupils make good use of this support material.

49. The school possesses a well stocked library which is in constant use by pupils and the public. The Sixth Formers in particular make very good use of the library and its facilities. A good service is provided to both staff and pupils. There is a facility whereby a subject area can request books on a specific topic to be provided for research or support. The library is well stocked with books which supplement the various subject areas.

50. The learning resource centre is a well organised and essential element in the school's organisation of learning. The staff in this area take a pride in their work and offer a very good service to staff and pupils. The standard of work produced is high and this is appreciated by those who request and use the service provided. There is now a colour photocopier which is adding to the high levels of presentation. The centre also houses an impressive collection of audio and visual materials and many subject areas make good use of this resource.

51. The provision for ICT in the school is very good. The ratio of computers to pupils is 6.5:1 – well above the national average. All computers are 2000 compliant and in addition to the three computer rooms, individual machines are available around the school and in the library. There is Internet access and a range of CD ROMs are available. Most subjects make good use of the ICT facilities, but there are significant weaknesses for arts, modern foreign languages and design and technology; particularly in respect of computer-aided design.

52. From a financial aspect, learning resources are well funded by the school. Departments receive a reasonable allocation each year and the money is spent wisely. Good use is made of the Eagle Trust to

support specific financial requests to supplement the school's own financial capitation.

53. The learning support department is very well resourced. The computer facilities are put to very good use and make a significant contribution to the pupils' improvement in spelling and reading.

54. In addition, the community makes a good use of the facilities available. This includes the sports hall, library and the business centre. This use takes place during the working day as well as the evenings, but there is no conflict with the school's needs, thanks to effective management.

### **83. The efficiency of the school**

55. The headteacher and governors have planned effectively for the development of the school, not least by securing the school's base budget and breadth of provision through their successful recruitment strategy. Further good examples of development are the investment in information and communication technology and in administrative staff to ensure teachers can concentrate on teaching. The development of a business centre on the site, with a grant from local industry, is another telling example of planning for the future. Both pupils and the local community have benefited. Across most of the curriculum, teachers are deployed in a highly cost-effective manner.

56. The cost of the Sixth Form is greater than is warranted by the income that it generates. However, careful planning and generally good organisation of the whole curriculum have ensured that there is no obvious adverse impact on the younger pupils. Given the good range of A-levels and vocational provision and the satisfactory standards achieved in most subjects, the Sixth Form is cost-effective.

57. The Standards Fund has been well used to support an extensive programme of staff development, with individual training clearly linked to both departmental and whole-school targets. The learning support department is very well resourced and skilled assistants make a significant contribution to the progress of pupils with special needs. The school has maintained a relatively favourable level of expenditure on learning resources since the last report and, as a consequence, levels of resourcing in departments make a positive contribution to pupil progress. The environment has benefited considerably from the governors' programme of improvements.

58. The school brought forward a surplus of just over two per cent into this financial year. The lion's share of this was unspent subject capitation, amounting to some £30,000. Departments had saved this to spend on 'Curriculum 2000' in the current year, by the end of which the school expects to be in balance. This amounts to reasonable planning for curriculum change.

59. Financial control and administration is very good. A recent review confirmed the March 1998 audit findings of good procedures. Part of the criticism of the governors' role in the previous report referred to their financial planning. This is also considerably improved, with a monthly report in detail to the chairman of the finance committee and a three-year projection of what is likely to happen to the school's budget.

60. The vast majority of pupils make good progress to reach standards which compare favourably with both similar schools and national averages at GCSE, while their behaviour and attitudes are very good. The school provides a good quality of education from a below average base funding. This is good value for money.

## **PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS**

### **ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE**

#### **English**

61.The good features noted in the previous inspection report have not only been maintained, but have been built on and the department continues to be a strength of the school.

62.Standards which are generally below average on entry to the school are in line with the national average by the end of Key Stage 3. In the 1998 National Curriculum tests, attainment was above the national average and that of similar schools. There was, however, a significant difference between boys' and girls' attainment at the higher levels where boys did only half as well as girls. The 1999 test results are close to national averages. Standards of reading and speaking and listening are well developed across the key stage. Pupils read widely and confidently and, by Year 9, have developed skills of critical analysis, being able to comment on character and motive in texts studied. In writing, girls show greater technical accuracy and command of language than boys, although a number of measures to address boys' performance are beginning to bear fruit, e.g. the use of target setting to ensure pupils concentrate on what needs to be improved in their work.

63.By the end of Key Stage 4 attainment is above average. In 1998, the GCSE results, at A\* to C grades, were above the national average and the difference between boys' and girls' performance was less (by almost half) than that found nationally. Above average standards have been attained over recent years and indications for 1999 are that these standards have been maintained. However, the results of 15 of the pupils concerned are the subject of an appeal to the examination board and national averages are not yet available. Inspection evidence, from lesson observation and scrutiny of pupils' work, indicates that the current Year 11 are performing above average overall.

64.Standards of literacy are sound. Pupils read and write with confidence in most subjects, though girls demonstrate greater technical accuracy than the boys. Listening is well developed. Spelling is mainly accurate and pupils are increasing their general and specialist vocabulary in mathematics, science, geography, history, technology, information and communication technology, art and music. Spelling and writing are weak, however, in religious education. Information and communication technology makes a considerable contribution to literacy across the school. Pupils use computers to draft and edit work, writing for a range of purposes and audiences.

65.In the Sixth Form, attainment is in line with the national average and examination expectations, both in language and literature. The work of the highest attainers is of high quality showing a sophisticated awareness of semantic nuances, as well as a strong command of language.

66.Progress is good overall and particularly so in upper sets. Pupils with special educational needs also make good progress. A feature which is accelerating the progress is the use of the 'levels criteria' to enable pupils to assess their own and others' work and to 'target' further improvement. This practice, which is to be found at both key stages, is concentrating pupils' minds, enabling them to feel they not only influence, but determine, their own achievement. At Key Stage 4, progress is increased by an 'examination carousel' arrangement whereby one lesson each week is given to intensive work on the writing styles required for the exam. In the Sixth Form, there is clear progress in the confidence and proficiency with which pupils decode and analyse all kinds of texts, in their abilities to unravel layers of meaning and to debate and justify points of view.

67.Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good throughout. They are well motivated, keen to achieve and to meet the high teacher expectations in most lessons. Higher sets are very focused and intent.

68. Teaching is good overall. Very good specialist knowledge is a strength of the department. So, also, are the generally meticulous planning and assessing of pupils' work and the consequent tracking of progress. In a very good lesson on 'Twelfth Night' in a Year 9 lower set, three well designed activities matched to pupils' understanding and attainment levels wholly engrossed the class, enabling them to increase their confidence and familiarity with a demanding text. Most of the teaching has high expectations of thinking and application. The recently revised scheme of work for Key Stage 3 is well planned to meet the requirements of the national curriculum and pupils' needs. In the Sixth Form, teachers take full advantage of the small group sizes to give a high level of individual attention. There are very occasional shortcomings in the teaching, e.g. where low level tasks, i.e. colouring, cutting and pasting, limit progress or where the activities provided fail to stimulate some reluctant learners in lower sets.

69. There is good attention to reading development, through a range of texts built into the scheme of work at Key Stage 3 and the course requirements at Key Stage 4, and through a clear focus on wider reading throughout. A particularly good feature is the daily paired reading session when considerable numbers of older pupils support younger 'partners' by hearing them read and charting their progress. Marking is very thorough and indicates clearly the 'target' for improvement in the next piece of work. Good use is also made of the detailed performance data provided at a whole school level, to identify underachievers, to adjust planning to meet learning needs and to track individual progress.

70. The leadership of the department is strong. There is a good sense of teamwork in the staff, who are led by a very effective and hardworking head of department. There is a high focus on improvement, and much effective monitoring of the department, via scrutiny of pupils' work and checks of work records and homework set, every half term, as well as annual surveys of pupils. The head of department uses this information to provide a comprehensive annual summary of the quality of the department's work. The only aspect which is not included in the process is the observation of lessons, which would be helpful in eliminating the shortcomings in some of the teaching.

71. A number of effective measures are being taken to address boys' underachievement (e.g. efforts to ensure boys are well represented in higher sets, the target setting which is helping boys to focus on how to improve, the provision of books which appeal to boys, etc). To take this work further, it needs to be prioritised in the department development plan, with an explicit action plan of measures which are monitored for their effectiveness in reducing the gender gap in performance.

72. Attainment in drama at GCSE is just below the national average. In current Year 11 lessons, however, attainment at Key Stage 4 is more in line with the average. In Year 11, pupils can use voice and movement to create an effective improvisation of character and scene. The teaching is at least sound, and sometimes good. Good teaching provides clear expectations of precision in performance and timing. The criteria for judging performance are clear to pupils who use them with increasing confidence in evaluating their own and others' work. Drama makes a good contribution to the development of pupils' speaking and listening skills.

## 101. **Mathematics**

73. The attainment of most pupils by the end of Key Stage 3 is close to the national average in mathematics. In the Key Stage 3 tests in 1999, the percentage of pupils reaching both level 5 and level 6 was close to the national average. As the majority of pupils enter the school with below average standards, this is a measure of the good progress pupils have made. Results at Key Stage 3 are above average in comparison with similar schools and attainment in mathematics has improved, in line with the national improvement. Current work in lessons broadly reflects this standard, but with some higher achievement in number and in handling data.

74. For Key Stage 4, the GCSE results are below the national average. The percentage of pupils achieving Grade C or better in 1998 was below the national average and has decreased in each of the three years 1996 to 1998. The standard of work in the current Year 11 is broadly similar to this, but with work of a higher standard in shape and space. The A-level results are average compared with the national figures, a good result compared to other subjects, but the number of candidates is relatively low.

75. By the end of Key Stage 3, most pupils are competent in their use of number, thanks to the focus this is given by the department, which improves their mental arithmetic. The most able pupils can draw and measure angles accurately, while less able pupils can calculate areas and use a calculator correctly. By Year 11, most pupils understand the basic concept of probability and can transfer fractions to percentages, while more able pupils have a good knowledge of trigonometry. Pupils use number confidently in a range of situations across the subjects of the curriculum. While at Key Stage 3 progress is good, at Key Stage 4 progress being made by the current pupils over time is just satisfactory. There were examples in a minority of lessons where there was good progress, as in a middle ability Year 10 class where pupils were confident about dealing with substitution in algebraic expression.

76. Pupils enjoy mathematics in all stages and all abilities. The feeling of all pupils can be summed up by the comment "he makes us want to learn". Pupil behaviour in lessons is generally very good. Pupils are keen to respond to questions and are eager to show what they know and can do. There is very little questioning by pupils, however, and little evidence was seen of curiosity to find out more.

77. The quality of teaching is good in the Sixth Form and at Key Stage 3, and satisfactory at Key Stage 4. Good pace is a key factor in the majority of good lessons, as is careful preparation. In these lessons, staff have high expectations regarding pupil behaviour and attention. This is understood and accepted by the vast majority of pupils. There are some very innovative ideas to warm up pupils; however, there is sometimes too much reliance on numeracy skills. The use of such exercises at the beginning and end of a lesson does reduce the time spent on formal teaching of the topic in hand, though it obviously has a beneficial impact on numeracy skills.

78. At Key Stage 4, the pace was good in only half of the lessons observed. Staff expectations are still high in respect of behaviour and attention and the majority of pupils respond well to this. There is less intervention by teachers in moving about the room to assist individual pupils than at Key Stage 3. The extraction of the more able pupils works well in isolation, but when the pupils return to their usual lesson, they merely slot back in - and they face no more challenging problems than the rest of the group. Homework is set regularly for pupils of all ages and abilities. It is appropriate work and the pupils complete the homework well. In the Sixth Form the teaching observed was good. The planning was good as was the pace and challenge.

79. There were weaknesses in marking. From the exercise books seen over the period of the inspection there is some unmarked work especially in Key Stage 4. There is also very patchy use of the department's own five point scale to grade work. From the books of just one teacher, there were written comments to point out errors and to help the pupils move forward.

80. The department is generally well run. The department is a very cohesive one, and the individual members support one another very well. The mathematical knowledge of the individual members is very secure, and they all clearly enjoy teaching mathematics.

81. In the Key Stage 3 tests in 1999, the proportion of pupils attaining level 5 or above was above the national average. Pupils' performance in 1996, 1997 and 1998 National Curriculum tests has been consistently just below national average, while being close to the average for schools with similar contexts. The attainment of current pupils matches this improvement, with the majority of pupils currently in line to achieve average results. The school's GCSE science results have been consistently above national averages in recent years, although they do show a decline in the A\* to C grades. The current pupils' attainment in class is, on average, on line to marginally exceed national averages at the end of the key stage. The 1998 A-level science results were disappointing with the average point scores in physics, chemistry and biology well below the national average. These figures significantly improved in 1999. However, current pupil attainment still shows weaknesses, with a number of pupils in Year 12 experiencing considerable problems keeping up with their courses.

82. Pupils achieve similar results across the three attainment targets for knowledge and understanding. Most investigative work matches this though they are still experiencing difficulties with the evaluation strand of Attainment Target 1. This difficulty was mentioned in the last inspection report. It is recognised in the department's current development plan and is being addressed in the teaching. There is little meaningful difference in the results of boys and girls over recent years.

83. Pupils are generally making satisfactory or better progress throughout the school and only occasionally is it unsatisfactory. Progress in Key Stage 3, however, is weaker in Years 7 and 8 and in lower sets in Year 9. The course for these classes is insufficiently challenging and fails to build adequately upon the pupils' previous work in primary school. The upper sets in Year 9 have adopted a more successful approach and the challenge and progress there is good. The progress for pupils of all abilities is good in Key Stage 4.

84. On the whole pupils are well behaved, willing to respond and like and enjoy their science. They are prompt and courteous and there is little graffiti or damage in the department. Practical work is carried out safely and responsibly and most pupils take pride in their written work. Their use of time is good. Pupils attend science clubs and activities with enthusiasm and take responsibility for matters well. They have done well recently with energy conservation work, which has led to national presentations and in being filmed.

85. The quality of teaching is good. It is consistently sound or better across all three key stages and in half the department's lessons it is good. Teachers' subject knowledge, relationships, control and time management are all good and the majority have established a good work ethos with their classes. Teachers' planning and preparation is good at Key Stage 4 and post-16, but planning and expectations at Key Stage 3 are hindered by a poor course which is planned to be replaced in September 2000. Teachers' marking is satisfactory but there are very few targets being set.

86. The school's science courses are undergoing considerable but welcome change. Whilst they currently meet the requirements of the National Curriculum, the recent introduction of two new A-level courses and the proposed introduction of a new Key Stage 3 course and a new A-level biology course in September 2000 are all good and meet well-researched needs. There is a history of a relatively high drop out rate in Year 12 across all three A-level subjects and the department recognises the need to introduce strategies to help the weaker pupils. Good use is made of ICT for data capture throughout the department and the new A-level physics course usefully leans on ICT to promote learning.

87. The department is very well led and managed and its leadership promotes high standards and a secure and enthusiastic ethos for all. The head of faculty is new and positive changes are visibly bringing in positive improvements. Staff are committed and hard working and give of their time well, as in the extra clubs and activities. Statutory requirements are met for the curriculum and its teaching, but not for all health and safety matters.



## 116. OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES

### 116. Art

88.GCSE examination results prior to 1999 show pupils consistently achieved standards significantly below the national average. Indicative results for 1999 are higher with just over half of the pupils gaining an A\* to C pass grade. At A-level, results in recent years have been broadly in line with the national average although the numbers taking the examination have declined.

89.Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are now significantly higher than GCSE results would indicate and are above average. This is because of the appointment of new staff in the past year, the development of a new scheme of work and increased expectations that staff have of pupils. In particular standards of drawing, composition and craftsmanship show very considerable improvement. The pupils now handle colour very well. Some recent work of the most able pupils is of a very high standard, for example their work on portraiture and their sketchbook studies of masks. However, pupils are less adept at selecting information for themselves, making decisions about the quality of their work and developing their own ideas.

90.Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are also above average and in some classes in all years the pupils are producing work of the very highest quality. In particular, a Picasso project undertaken by pupils in Year 7 and colour work based on the study of rope in Year 8, demonstrate the pupils' developing confidence and high level of technical ability.

91.The improvement in standards, so noticeable in other years, has not yet been firmly established amongst the oldest pupils. Standards of pupils post-16 remain average, although there are examples of very high quality work, most noticeably large prints undertaken during a residency by a visiting artist. Standards are, therefore, now higher than at the time of the last inspection at Key Stage 4 and much higher at Key Stage 3. They remain similar post-16. Overall the pupils are making good, and at times very good progress at both Key Stages 3 and 4 and sound progress at GNVQ and A-level.

92.The pupils' attitudes are good. They are attentive and most are interested in their work. They listen to instructions and, when given the opportunity, are keen to engage in conversation about their work. Most show a pride in their achievements. The majority of pupils are conscientious about completing homework and some are prepared to investigate in greater depth than required, for example, researching information on the Internet.

93.The quality of teaching is good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and sound, and at times good, at A-level. However, at all key stages there are significant variations in the quality of teaching, ranging from sound to very good. Primarily, these are the result of differences in the expectations teachers have of pupils, the way they involve the pupils in their learning by asking appropriate and challenging questions and the pace at which lessons are conducted. Where the teacher has very high expectations of the pupils, sets challenging tasks and recaps on the purpose of the lesson at the end, the standard of the pupils' work is higher and they show greater enthusiasm.

94.All teachers are well prepared and make very good use of the start of lessons to introduce the topic. They offer good advice when working with individual pupils. Marking is regularly completed and teachers are effectively tracking pupils' progress. However, there are inconsistencies between teachers as to what constitutes a high standard of work and in the quality of the pupils' work displayed. However, good teamwork is being developed and teachers review progress together and closely follow the newly agreed scheme of work.

95.The department has made rapid progress in a short period of time. The quality of leadership, the tasks set the pupils, the attention to detail when planning and the recently introduced system of tracking the pupils' progress, are all significant factors. Weaknesses not yet addressed include unsatisfactory information and communication technology facilities within the art rooms and the lack of photographic facilities.

#### 124. **Design and Technology**

96.By the time they leave the school, the pupils achieve standards that are just above the national average, both in lessons and in their GCSE examinations. Given the pupils' attainment on entry, these results are good. The standards that the pupils achieved in the 1999 examinations represent a significant improvement over their results in 1998, which were below average. Standards are well above the national average in textiles and graphics for A\* to C grades. The oldest pupils generally make good progress and currently gain slightly higher GCSE grades in design and technology than in most of their other subjects. However, they do less well in systems and control and in food technology. The boys currently achieve standards that are in line with the national average for boys. However, the girls exceed the national average for girls. The difference between the performance of boys and girls at GCSE has narrowed since 1998.

97.By the end of Key Stage 3, the pupils achieve standards that are generally in line with those expected for their age. Their knowledge of materials and manufacturing skills are above average and they make good progress in a wide range of media. However, their design skills are not as well developed. In most instances they are close to national expectations and their progress is sound. However, the pupils' progress is inconsistent and is reduced by insufficient opportunities to build progressively on previous learning throughout the course. In particular, some higher attaining pupils underachieve when designing.

98.The pupils' attitudes to design and technology are good and are often very good at Key Stage 3. They are interested in their work and are keen to succeed. The pupils use tools and equipment safely and with confidence and they often show good levels of independence when making their ideas. The older pupils show initiative in their design work.

99.The teaching is good in almost all lessons at Key Stage 4. It is sound overall at Key Stage 3 (though some good teaching was seen at this key stage). Teaching is unsatisfactory in a small proportion of the lessons at both key stages. At Key Stage 4, the lessons have good pace and teachers generally have high expectations. The pupils' work is regularly assessed and good individual guidance helps the pupils to improve. Lessons are well planned and teachers make good use of opportunities that arise to further extend pupils' learning. For example, in one very good textile lesson, the teacher demonstrated making a dart and also helped pupils understand its uses by investigating their own clothing. Where teaching is less successful, pupils make insufficient progress in the early stages of project work. At Key Stage 3, good teaching is exemplified by challenging tasks, high expectations and lessons that build successfully on previous learning. Where teaching is less successful, lessons are insufficiently challenging and pupils have few opportunities to build on previous learning, or to apply what they have just learned.

100.The department is well led and the recent improvement in standards at GCSE is a significant achievement during a period of high staff illness. However, there is insufficient monitoring of teaching in the classroom. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 is good, yet it has shortcomings at Key Stage 3 which reduce the standards of the pupils' design work and depth of project work in Year 9. There is also a number of safety issues that need urgent attention.

## 129. **Geography**

101. Standards in geography are in line with the national expectations for pupils aged 14. Except for 1999, results at GCSE have been close to the national average for a number of years. A-level results in geography are good and above average for the school. Pupils make sound progress in the first three years and at Key Stage 4 and in A-level courses many pupils make good progress.

102. At A-level and GCSE many pupils are completing good individual coursework enquiries and fieldwork reports. Pupils are developing sound knowledge and understanding of places and themes. For example, Year 12 pupils can describe and explain the causes and effects of natural hazards such as earthquakes. In Year 13 pupils are developing good research skills and using a wide range of statistical techniques. They are able to interpret data successfully and draw their own conclusions. In Years 10 and 11 pupils are making good progress towards their GCSE examination. Year 11 pupils have already completed some good examples of coursework that will make a positive contribution to their overall grade. In one Year 10 lesson lower ability pupils were able to describe the formation of physical features, such as Dartmoor and the weathering processes which created the Tors.

103. Most pupils at Key Stage 3 are making sound progress in knowledge and understanding of countries, and topics such as rivers in Year 8. Year 7 pupils are developing sound mapwork skills. More able pupils in Years 8 and 9 are now being extended by longer pieces of work involving their own research. All pupils are developing sound geographical skills, such as drawing a variety of maps, fieldsketching and presenting data in a variety of ways. Many pupils are now using computers to research and present information. More able pupils are able to write extended reports and write persuasive arguments about environmental issues. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported by teachers and learning support staff and make sound progress.

104. Pupils have a positive attitude to learning in geography. They are well motivated by the nature of the work and the activities undertaken. Many pupils are able to work independently, particularly at GCSE and A-level. Pupils concentrate well and can co-operate successfully in pairs and small groups. In one Year 9 lesson pupils were able to discuss the concept of a stereotype and in another Year 9 lesson pupils were able to use computers independently in the library.

105. Teaching overall is good and sound at Key Stage 3. Only two lessons at Key Stage 3 were unsatisfactory. Specialist teaching at GCSE and A-level is highly skilled and extremely thorough. Great care is taken to ensure that individual pupils receive sufficient attention and support with their classwork, fieldwork and individual coursework. Lessons are invariably well planned and well structured with a wide variety of activities and resources. Teaching is now extending the more able in Key Stage 3 by the use of more open-ended, extended pieces of work. A brisk pace, good questioning and good classroom management of pupils and resources, characterises most lessons. In the two unsatisfactory lessons seen in Key Stage 3, non-specialist teaching meant that there was a lack of pace to the learning and insufficient challenge for the most able pupils.

106. The department is efficiently managed. There are good working relationships and joint planning. Assessment practice, and the match of work to different abilities, is developing at Key Stage 3. Assessment of pupils' work at GCSE and A-level is very good. The use of ICT across year groups, identified as a weakness in the previous report, is still an issue for the department. There is also a need for closer monitoring of teaching in Years 7 and 8.

## 135. **History**

107. By the end of Key Stage 3 most pupils achieve standards in line with national expectations. The pupils' knowledge of the main facts about past centuries and events is good. They describe and analyse reasons for an event and its effects, as well illustrated in a Year 9 lesson on slavery. Pupils read and evaluate historical sources with understanding. The pupils' ability to explain why different sources offer different interpretations is less well developed.

108. GCSE examination results in 1998 were above the national average at grades A\* to C. Most pupils at this level have a good subject knowledge, can explain causes and effect, evaluate historical sources and are able to put together extended written explanations. At A-level, pupils are achieving satisfactory standards. They make judgements, select and prioritise material and produce coherent arguments, as demonstrated by the high standards of the personal study.

109. At Key Stage 3 pupils are making satisfactory or better progress. Progress in lessons is best in terms of the acquisition of historical skills. At Key Stage 4 pupils are making good progress and pupils with special needs make good progress. This was very clear in a Year 11 lesson on the causes and effects of Prohibition in America. In the Sixth Form pupils also make good progress. Year 12 pupils made very good progress in a lesson on Stalin, consolidating their skills and knowledge.

110. The pupils clearly enjoy their history and want to learn. Most listen attentively, ask appropriate questions and especially at Key Stage 3 have a curiosity about the past. They are generally well motivated and co-operate well, sharing resources and listening respectfully to one another's opinions. This was shown clearly in a Key Stage 4 lesson on pre-revolutionary Russia. The pupils' behaviour in lessons is usually good and they appreciate the positive comments of their teachers.

111. The teaching at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory in most lessons observed. The teaching at Key Stage 4 is good. At A-level the teaching is good and sometimes very good. The teachers plan fully using a variety of teaching strategies during lessons. Teacher knowledge of the subject is good and they manage pupils well. The sound procedures for marking where teachers make helpful and positive comments on how pupils can improve their work, has a positive impact. The teachers enjoy good relationships with classes. Where the teaching was less good this was usually because the pupils were given work which did not challenge them sufficiently. There is little use of ICT before Year 9, although it is used after this as an aid to pupils' research.

112. At Key Stage 3 the requirement to teach an aspect of history through a local context is not met and the situation in Year 7, whereby history is being subsumed into humanities and taught by non-specialists, is unsatisfactory. Key Stage 4 work builds on pupils' experiences at Key Stage 3 and in the Sixth Form there is careful planning for continuity and progression. There are effective systems in place for assessing pupils' attainment which are common across the year groups at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4 there is careful moderation of GCSE coursework. In the Sixth Form essays are carefully assessed and targets set for improvement. The head of department manages the department well and supports the other teachers of the subject; good ideas are shared. There are new schemes of work and the development plan is building solid foundations for the future.

#### 141. **Information and Communication Technology (ICT)**

113. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 is now above the national average, a considerable improvement over the previous report. By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is closer to the national average. The Sixth Form pupils are working well at appropriate levels in their ICT key skills course. Computer science A-level is available at another school locally.

114. Attainment in communication skills across the whole school is well above the national average. There are many examples of work well above average standards, some outstanding, where ICT has

enhanced learning. For example, Year 9 pupils using ICT to prepare an advertising campaign for cereals are producing attractive magazine advertisements, logos, and designs for their cereal packets, storyboards for a television advertisement and professional multimedia presentations. They access the Internet to find out facts about cereals and to download graphics. The pupils are proud of their efforts and keen to show their results to others.

115. Progress in lessons and over time is at least satisfactory in all lessons and was good or very good in two-thirds of lessons seen. It is best in Key Stage 3, where there is a strong focus on developing ICT skills across the curriculum. Pupils of all ages and abilities are well motivated, enthusiastic, and sometimes even excited, when learning about ICT or using ICT. Most are confident, independent users of computers, able to produce a variety of professional, well-presented documents. Less able pupils are often motivated to achieve higher standards when using ICT.

116. The quality of teaching of ICT was good, and occasionally very good, in lessons. It was very good when the pace of the lesson was brisk, tasks challenging and expectations high. Teachers know their subject well and build on pupils' skills.

117. Provision for ICT at Key Stage 3 has been carefully revised since the last inspection. The pupils are now taught the full programme of study through ICT lessons in Years 7 and 9 and through delivery within English, mathematics, science and technology. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is a particular strength in laying foundations for ICT throughout the school. Provision at Key Stage 4 is through other subjects rather than discrete lessons. Schemes of work within other subjects at Key Stage 4 have been revised to ensure all aspects of ICT are included and as a result attainment is sound. The planned introduction of a short course, or similar, next year should ensure greater coverage and consolidation, promoting higher standards.

118. There is evidence of good use of ICT within most subjects. Many pupils take advantage of ample opportunities to develop their ICT skills further, using computers available from 8.00 am to 4.30 pm in the library, other computer areas and at lunchtime computer clubs. The school has its own web site, which is being further developed by the pupils.

119. A major strength of ICT management is the support it provides both for teachers and pupils. The area is well led and efficiently organised and the management style promotes good teamwork. The support of the technician is greatly valued by all.

120. Since the last inspection there has been considerable investment in ICT. The school is now extremely well equipped with about 150 computers, including 136 networked workstations, providing a secure, reliable environment for all users. The school has a wide range of equipment including scanners, digital cameras and projectors and networked CD-ROMs. Powerful but easy to use software packages promote high standards of work and access to the Internet is increasingly enthusing members of staff as they realise the wealth of resources available. These improvements are leading to greater use of ICT by pupils and staff throughout the school, enhancing both learning and teaching.

#### 149. **Modern Foreign Languages**

121. All pupils study French in Year 7. All study both French and German in Years 8 and 9. At Key Stage 4 all pupils study either French or German and a small number study both. French and German are offered in the Sixth Form.

122. By the end of Key Stage 3 the pupils' attainment is slightly below the national expectation. Although the majority are achieving level 4, few are securely at level 5. By this age the more able pupils are beginning to talk and write about recent experiences, for example holidays. They have a

good range of vocabulary and expressions and some achieve good accuracy in speech and writing. Very few, however, have a firm grasp of key grammatical structures which they can apply in different situations. Very few speak or write at length. The vast majority of the other pupils can make short, simple responses to questions and understand the main details in short written texts or spoken dialogues. They write mainly in short phrases, their accuracy depending on the extent to which they are writing from a model.

123. The performance of girls is better than that of boys, reflecting the national picture. Taking into account the below average attainment of the pupils on entry, most make satisfactory progress through Key Stage 3 in both French and German. The school's more able pupils are, however, capable of higher performance, especially in extended speaking and writing. In almost all the lessons observed the pupils were making satisfactory progress; they were making good progress in one in four of the lessons seen.

124. By the end of Key Stage 4 the pupils' attainment is average in French and below average in German. In 1998 the GCSE results at grades A\* to C were slightly below average. In 1999, for which there are as yet no national comparative figures, they show some improvement. The results have improved steadily over the last three years but are still below the level reported at the last inspection. There was insufficient evidence available, either during the inspection or from the last report, to explain why the results were so high last time. It is therefore difficult to make a secure judgement on any significant changes since then. The results in German have also shown small year-on-year improvement but remain below average. Taking into account the pupils' overall results in the school, these results are satisfactory in French. They are not as high as they should be in German.

125. The GCSE results are reflected in the standards being achieved by the oldest pupils currently in Key Stage 4. In French the most able use present, future and past tenses and some good idiomatic phrases in their speaking and writing. In German the more able pupils are less confident. Overall, the vast majority of the current pupils are making sound progress, with the exception of the more able in German. In Year 10, however, the more able are making better progress.

126. At A-level, the number of pupils who sit the exam each year is small and the results for any single year are therefore without strong statistical significance. However, taking all the results in French and German over the last three years, standards are broadly average. They have been better in French, particularly in 1998 when both pupils entered achieved A grades. Pupils currently studying French in Year 13 are on target to achieve at least average grades and are making good progress. They write with a good range of vocabulary and some good idiom. However, the structure and rhythm of their writing is still largely influenced by English structure. There is currently no A-level group in German. The pupils in the Year 12 groups are making a sound transition to A-level work.

127. The pupils' attitudes are sound overall at Key Stages 3 and 4 and good in the Sixth Form. The pupils responded particularly well in a third of the lessons seen in Key Stages 3 and 4 and in almost all the Sixth Form lessons. In these lessons they showed a good level of interest; relationships and behaviour were good and they sustained their concentration well in paired, individual and whole-class work. In other lessons, their concentration is broadly satisfactory but not always sustained through the lesson. This is particularly so when the tasks set by the teachers are less demanding. Some unsatisfactory behaviour by a small number of boys was seen in Year 9. One general weakness is that the pupils are reluctant to take the initiative in using French or German in the classroom for real purposes.

128. The teaching is sound overall in Key Stages 3 and 4 and good in the Sixth Form. Overall, 95 per cent of the lessons seen were judged to be at least satisfactory and approximately 40 per cent to be good. The small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was in Year 9. Strengths in the teaching include:

the teachers' competence and fluency in the language they are teaching; their techniques for teaching and practising new language; relationships with the pupils and, in most lessons, good discipline and good use of audio resources. Weaknesses in the teaching include: switching too often from French or German to English when giving instructions and explanations; leaving their pupils too dependent on written prompts in speaking tasks and a lack of strategies to encourage the pupils to take the initiative in speaking.

129. Overall, however, the teaching makes a satisfactory contribution to the standards achieved. At times, the contribution is good. For example, in a Year 8 lesson in German taught to a lower group, the well-planned sequence of activities, the teacher's emphasis on the pupils getting the gender of words correct and her good use of German for almost all instructions and explanations led to the pupils making particularly good progress at the start of a new topic. In a Year 13 lesson the teacher's well thought-out worksheet both supported and challenged the pupils well as they watched a difficult news item in French on the recent earthquake in Turkey. In a Year 12 lesson the combination of the teacher's clear objectives and preparation, together with the stimulus provided by her German visitor, led to a lively exchange between the pupils and the visitor and to good progress in understanding spoken German.

130. Several further factors are not making the contribution they could and therefore require attention. Assessment at Key Stage 3 is too reliant on commercial tests and this is leading to over-optimistic judgements at the end of the key stage. The monitoring of data on pupil performance and the lack of monitoring of the teaching are further weaknesses. A key strength of the department, however, is the fact that almost all pupils in the school achieve a GCSE grade.

#### 159. **Music**

131. By the end of Key Stage 4, overall attainment is above the national average. Recent results show that, for the relatively small numbers involved, the pupils achieve slightly higher GCSE grades for music than for the other subjects they take. Given the pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3, these results are good.

132. The majority are able to talk fluently about the expressive and structural elements of music, and their recent 'Eclipse' compositions showed not only above average skills in information and communication technology, but a real sense of atmosphere as well. The ensemble skills evident in both the expressive class performance of 'Imagine' and in the small orchestra being used to accompany the forthcoming production of 'The Wizard of Oz' were well above average.

133. At Key Stage 3, overall attainment is average. Listening skills are well developed and above average. In one lesson, the majority of pupils were able to identify a number of different guitar styles with considerable accuracy, and many higher attaining pupils were confident in their use of musical terminology to describe and evaluate what they had heard. Although progress is good within lessons, contact time is currently below the national average. This reduces the rate of long-term progress and limits the overall standards of attainment. Thus, whilst in one lesson almost all the pupils were using the time available to practise hard, a significant minority were not able to apply their skills to ensemble work. In consequence, the resulting performances were, for some, unsteady and unmusical.

134. Attitudes towards music are good at both key stages, the majority of pupils being very forthcoming when answering questions or demonstrating work in progress. At Key Stage 4, the pupils are particularly responsive during listening work, especially when the questions being asked are tightly focused. At Key Stage 3, almost all the pupils play their instruments gently enough to enable paired work to take place with the minimum of distraction. The degree of responsibility and general musical awareness exhibited by different pupils as they led and directed the samba band was particularly

noteworthy.

135.The quality of teaching at both key stages is good. Opportunities for the pupils to use skills acquired out of school, or to develop ideas beyond the basic class brief, are all present. Schemes of work are very well planned, the structured listening programme and World Music project being particular strengths. In one lesson, at Key Stage 4, the listening work took the form of challenging questions based on class performances and individual pupil compositions. In another, at Key Stage 3, the teacher made highly effective use of ICT as the class examined the different strands of a calypso – melody, harmony, bass and percussion. By controlling the output channels on the computer, she was able to demonstrate very clearly the contribution each made to the overall effectiveness of the piece. Both class teachers liaise closely over the day-to-day running of the department, although arrangements have yet to be made for monitoring on another's work.

136.Assessment is thorough at both key stages. At Key Stage 4, written assessments of compositions, listening tests and the pupils' performances state, in detail, how improvements could be made on a future occasion. Throughout Key Stage 3, pupils produce sensible written evaluations for many projects, frequently being asked to set themselves achievable targets for the future. In Year 7, a recently introduced system of short, effective comments accompany the pupils' grades giving either an indication of how future work could be improved or why a particular mark was awarded. However, this practical work is assessed against exemplar material compiled by the department where the standard set is over-generous and not in line with the national standard.

137.The main teaching room is bright and spacious and some of the adjoining practice rooms have recently been improved by heavy curtains, thus providing better sound proofing and a much enhanced learning environment. The team of instrumental teachers supports the department very well and a range of extracurricular activities, including performances, are well supported by both boys and girls. Whilst capitation is low, the proceeds of concerts and the support of the Eagle Trust have enabled the department to invest in more resources.

138.Although all pupils are eligible to follow a course in music at Key Stage 4, the revised option system in place for the current Year 10 has had an adverse effect on group size resulting in significantly fewer pupils opting for the subject for GCSE.

#### 167. **Physical Education**

139.Overall, by the end of Key Stage 4 the majority of the pupils attain average standards in physical education. GCSE results, for the past three years, have been above the national average and in 1998 they were well above average with 83 per cent of pupils gaining A\* to C grades. In the core physical education lessons the majority of pupils demonstrate average skills in games and health activities. They can pace themselves appropriately in aerobics and show a good understanding of safe techniques when stretching. In team games pupils can use their skills effectively to attack and defend and the vast majority have a good working knowledge of the rules.

140.By the end of Key Stage 3 most pupils have acquired the skills expected for their age. In dance and gymnastics pupils can link a variety of movements together but still lack fluency. In football, rugby and hockey, most pupils can receive, travel with and pass a ball accurately. They also show tactical awareness in the different games they play. In a very well taught Year 9 boys' table-tennis lesson, many pupils were showing above average skills, being able to effectively use a top spin forehand to win points. In addition, setting in Year 8 and 9 games lessons is beginning to have a positive effect on standards.



141. Pupils of all abilities make good progress in lessons. In a very good gymnastics lesson all the pupils were able to improve their headstands, the least able with the help of partner support and the most able by being challenged to split and rotate their legs. In over a third of lessons progress is very good. This is often due to teachers planning interesting and challenging activities. For example, in a Year 8 rugby lesson, an excellent two on one practice so motivated the pupils that they worked really hard to improve their skills. For most pupils progress over time is also good. Fitness scores show that over 70 per cent of pupils improve their stamina. They also make clear gains in skills, knowledge and understanding. The GCSE pupils make very good progress, particularly in volleyball and table-tennis. The only exception was a Year 11 lesson taught by a non-specialist, where the poor management of a group of non-participants and the very small number of players resulted in unsatisfactory progress being made.

142. The pupils' behaviour in physical education is very good. The teaching staff have high expectations and discipline is excellent. The pupils are prepared to work hard. They listen attentively and respond freely to questions. There are also very good opportunities for personal development.

143. Each tutor group has a sports representative, the Sixth Form runs a sports council and the pupils organise sports day and a variety of sporting competitions for the Plymouth primary schools.

144. Specialist teaching is consistently good and in 38 per cent of all lessons it is very good. Strengths in the teaching include high organisational skills, very good pace, skilful questioning by the teachers to extend pupils' knowledge and understanding and clear task setting. For example, the efficient organisation and carefully structured tasks in a GCSE volleyball lesson meant that pupils quickly made progress in learning how to smash the ball. In addition, games practices are well matched, motivating and put into the context of a game situation. In football, hockey, basketball and rugby lessons, many practices were based upon attacking the goal or try line. Teaching is less successful where activities are over structured or when too much information is given at once. Overall, the good quality of the teaching has a positive impact on the standards achieved.

145. The curriculum has a number of weaknesses. There is an imbalance of activities within Key Stage 3. Also, some inappropriate group sizes and non-specialist staffing in Key Stage 4 have a negative impact on the learning. However, the Sixth Form programme is greatly improved. An attractive range of courses is offered and there are very good opportunities for pupils to gain accreditation in a variety of activities. Other issues raised in the previous OFSTED report have also been fully addressed.

146. Opportunities for extracurricular sporting activities are very good. The very well managed inter-form programme results in most pupils taking part. There is an excellent culture of celebrating success and effort. External coaches increase the range of activities offered and there are many links with local clubs. A well above average number of pupils have achieved notable successes in the past year. Twenty-six pupils have represented Plymouth teams, seven West Devon, seven Devon, four SW England and five have represented England in their sport. In addition, three teams achieved either runner-up or winner places in local leagues and seven of the eight strong Under-15 Plymouth volleyball team who came third at the nationals were Coombe Dean pupils. Overall, this was an outstanding achievement.

147. The physical education department is very well managed. It consists of a hard working and committed team of specialists who work closely together to maintain high standards and a very positive learning ethos.

#### 176. **Religious Education**

148. By the end of Key Stage 3 the attainment of pupils is below the expectations of the Devon Agreed

Syllabus. The attainment of pupils currently at the end of Key Stage 4 is also below the standard expected as the course followed by those in Year 11 does not meet requirements. The introduction of the GCSE short course for all pupils in Year 10 is a significant improvement in provision. However, there is no provision for religious education in the Sixth Form. Consequently there has been no improvement since the previous inspection and statutory requirements are still not met.

149. At Key Stage 3 the pupils have a sound knowledge of the beliefs and practices of the major religions studied. Those in Year 10 are beginning to develop the skill of applying this knowledge to important issues such as euthanasia. At both key stages attainment is weaker in understanding how belief influences a believer's life and community. There are too few opportunities for the pupils to develop their own responses to the topics covered. Consequently their attainment within the reflective elements of the syllabus is unsatisfactory. They do not use religious language with confidence.

150. At both key stages progress is unsatisfactory. Pupils of low ability and with special educational needs make satisfactory progress as they are given effective individual help by their teachers. However, the vast majority of pupils, especially those of high ability, make unsatisfactory progress. There is insufficient challenge to ensure that they take their individual research and thinking to the depth of which they are capable.

151. The pupils' attitudes are satisfactory at both key stages. They approach their work with care and usually behave well despite the lack of appropriate challenge for many. Most have contributions of knowledge, thoughts and feelings that they would contribute if opportunities were given.

152. The low level of attainment and progress is a direct result of unsatisfactory teaching at both key stages. Relationships within the classroom are good and teachers give effective help to low ability pupils. In one lesson carefully prepared materials, including an audio tape of the teacher's own interview with Dr Sheila Cassidy, gave Year 10 pupils a good insight into the philosophy of the hospice movement. However, in the majority of teaching, expectations are too low, leading to insufficient challenge for middle and high ability pupils. The pace of lessons is slow and on several occasions lessons were very late in starting. The use of a limited range of teaching activities results in little opportunity for the pupils to make a personal response or to reflect on the religious dimension of life. There is an emphasis on gathering factual information, often at an inappropriately low level, at the expense of understanding and a challenging exchange of ideas.

153. The teachers have worked hard to create a pleasant environment in the classrooms and to ensure that the scheme of work follows the requirements of the Devon Agreed Syllabus in terms of topics to be studied. However, there is no clear indication of which elements of religious education are to be the focus for each unit nor is there any planned extension material for higher ability pupils. Assessment assignments are not based on the attainment targets of the agreed syllabus. In these respects there has been no improvement since the previous inspection.

154. The department makes a satisfactory contribution to the moral and social development of the pupils in the school, particularly at Key Stage 4 where there are opportunities to consider topics such as euthanasia and animal rights. Since there is insufficient attention to the consideration of the spiritual dimension of religion and there are too few opportunities for personal reflection, religious education does not make the strong contribution to the spiritual development of the pupils that it could. The study of the major world religions does not give sufficient focus to the cultures which have arisen from them. Consequently the department's contribution to the cultural development of the pupils is inadequate.

### 183. **Business Studies**

155. At Key Stage 4, 28 per cent of pupils follow the GCSE course in business studies. In the Sixth

Form the business studies department offers A-level economics/business; group sizes are small with six pupils in Year 12 and five in Year 13.

156.By the end of Key Stage 4 the overall standard is above average. In 1998 the average points score achieved by pupils in the GCSE was in line with the national average and the proportion of A\* to C grades was above the national average. There has been steady improvement in GCSE results over time. Most pupils of all abilities make sound progress through the course. There is a clear difference between the results of boys and girls, with girls performing significantly better than boys.

157.In the Sixth Form, results for the A-level economics/business studies group are below average. However, when the previous GCSE achievement of the pupils is taken into account only one of the group performed below expectation. Sound progress is made throughout the course. Higher achieving pupils demonstrate a sound understanding of business concepts and an increasing ability to bring together and apply ideas. All pupils are willing to become involved in discussion and express opinions. Application and progress in the use of ICT is good in both key stages.

158.Overall the pupils' response to the subject is good. At both key stages the vast majority of pupils show positive attitudes towards their studies, are well motivated and enjoy their work. A very small minority in Key Stage 4 find it difficult to work independently, but this does not impact significantly on the performance of other pupils.

159.In both key stages the overall quality of teaching is good. Teachers are experienced in the courses they are providing, have sound knowledge of the subject and are committed to improving standards. The working relationship with pupils is good, particularly in the Sixth Form. Lessons are well planned, with clear objectives and incorporating a suitable range of teaching approaches. Discussion and questioning are used very effectively.

160.Assessment of course work in both key stages is good, with the use of constructive feedback to inform the learning process. However, marking of GCSE notebooks is too infrequent to maintain an effective check on pupil progress.

161.The department has begun to use data from baseline tests to identify pupils who are potentially under-achieving. Post-16 individual pupil performance is analysed to inform future planning.

162.The learning resources available to the department are satisfactory. Photocopied materials used in the classroom are clear and well structured. A phased programme of investment will ensure all GCSE pupils have their own text books by next year. ICT resources are good and widely used for presenting information, research and communication. Accommodation is satisfactory and improving. The department would benefit from all its lessons being taught in a specialist room.

163.Links are made with real business through work experience and the use of industry-produced resource material. There is scope for the development of further business links to enhance the vocational relevance of the subject.

### **General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ)**

164.In the Sixth Form, the school currently offers three Advanced level GNVQ - art and design, business and health and social care. In the current Year 12 there are twenty two pupils on GNVQ courses and in Year 13, eight. The business and health and social care groups have viable numbers, in art and design group sizes are small.

165.The overall standard of attainment in all the current courses is well above average. In 1998 the

completion rate for the GNVQ courses was above the national average and the average points score achieved by candidates significantly above the national average with a very high proportion of distinctions. These very good results are due to the quality of management, teaching and recruitment procedures. Progress is very good across the courses and the majority of pupils meet the deadlines set for completion of assignments.

166. Portfolio work is very good. Pupils have a good understanding of the subject matter and freely use the appropriate technical language associated with the subject. There is clear evidence of the development of planning, research and evaluation skills through the courses linked to grading. Pupils demonstrate high level ICT skills and the ability to work independently.

167. Attainment in key skills is in line with the requirements of the advanced level course. Assessment opportunities for key skills have been integrated into portfolio work. Achievement is supported by specialist key skills teachers and open access to ICT resources.

168. Generally there are well developed links with local business and the community, particularly in health and social care, and work placements are built into the course plan. In the business course these links could be further exploited to enhance vocational relevance.

169. The pupils' response is very good. Pupils are enthusiastic, well motivated and have a mature attitude towards their study. The effective recruitment procedures and induction process means pupils know why they chose the course, what it involves and the progression opportunities open to them. The combining of Year 12 and 13 pupils in health and social care is well managed and enhances opportunities for achievement.

170. Teaching across the courses is good. The teachers involved are committed to GNVQ, are experienced in the areas they are teaching and have benefited from appropriate staff development opportunities. The quality of teaching and learning is enhanced by the availability of a well equipped base room, open access to ICT facilities and the timetabling of most of the GNVQ in double period blocks of time.

171. Assessment is well planned, with assignments closely linked to the requirements of the course. There is a well-developed system for providing pupils with constructive feedback and identifying issues requiring further development. Specialist teachers verify the key skills, and the department is working towards using only specialist teachers to verify the different vocational areas.

## PART C: INSPECTION DATA

### 200. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

172.A total of some 147 hours was spent observing lessons. In addition, there were planned discussions with all staff with posts of responsibility, teachers and non-teachers, as well as less formal discussions. The headteacher, governors and senior staff were all involved in further discussions with inspectors. Inspectors also took the opportunity to meet members of the local community who work with the school. The work of three pupils, of different abilities, from each year group was examined, together with work from subjects in the Sixth Form. The school provided an extensive range of statistical data as well as relevant documents for the scrutiny of inspectors. Sixty-two parents attended the pre-inspection meeting and 308 returned the inspection survey.

### DATA AND INDICATORS

#### Pupil data

	Number of pupils on roll (full-time equivalent)	Number of pupils with statements of SEN	Number of pupils on school's register of SEN	Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals
Y7 – Y13	972	16	147	122

#### Teachers and classes

##### Qualified teachers (Y7 – Y13)

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent)	54.32
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.8

##### Education support staff (Y7 - Y13)

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked each week	275.5

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:	77.7
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Average teaching group size:	KS3	27.1
	KS4	21.6

## Financial data

Financial year:

1998/99
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	£
Total Income	2,172,757
Total Expenditure	2,124,396
Expenditure per pupil	2,201
Balance brought forward from previous year	7,788
Balance carried forward to next year	56,149

## PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out:	1000
Number of questionnaires returned:	308

### Responses (percentage of answers in each category)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel the school encourages parents to play an active part in the life of the school	23	63	10	5	0
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	44	48	5	3	1
The school handles complaints from parents well	23	55	17	3	2
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	29	55	9	6	1
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	53	39	4	3	1
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	44	49	6	1	0
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	34	52	10	3	1
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	32	52	6	9	2
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	37	49	12	1	0
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	35	53	9	3	0
My child(ren) like(s) school	49	43	6	2	0

### Other issues raised by parents

Parents recognise the school's positive qualities. Though a minority of parents had concerns about the homework set for less able boys at Key Stage 3, generally inspectors found that appropriate amounts of homework were being set and monitoring systems effective. A few parents also raised the school's response to complaints as a concern. However, the majority of parents found the school responsive to any issues raised and the parents' involvement in their children's learning was a strength.