

INSPECTION REPORT

STOWMARKET HIGH SCHOOL

Stowmarket

LEA area: Suffolk

Unique reference number: 124818

Headteacher: Mr D H Oliver

Reporting inspector: D Klemm
2049

Dates of inspection: 22 – 26 May 2000

Inspection number: 186870

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of students:	13 - 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Onehouse Road Stowmarket Suffolk
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr B Hagger
Date of previous inspection:	5 February 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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			Teaching and learning
			Curriculum
			Management
S Gurney	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development
			Care for students
			Partnership with parents
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J N Hedge	Team inspector	English	
		Special educational needs (SEN)	
J Seed	Team inspector	Science	
J Hardy	Team inspector	Design and technology (DT)	
D Harris	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
D H Turton	Team inspector	History	
		Religious education (RE)	
J Webster	Team inspector	Geography	
P Wall	Team Inspector	Physical education (PE)	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Stowmarket High School is a 13 - 18 comprehensive school with 979 boys and girls on roll. The students are from a variety of backgrounds reflecting the social composition of the town and its surrounding villages. The number of socially advantaged students is around the national average and although only 5.1% of students are known to be entitled to free school meals, which is below the national average, the school believes there is a larger number of students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. There are 2.9% of statemented students and 9.4% on the SEN register. The number of students from ethnic minority backgrounds is very low.

Attainment on entry to the school is around the national average. School data indicates some variations in attainment from year to year. The school has submitted recently a bid for Technology College status and is awaiting the outcome. In 1999 86% of Year 11 students chose to continue their education at the school or a neighbouring school or college. Fifty five per cent of Year 13 students in 1999 continued with their studies in higher education.

During the inspection week it was only possible for the team to observe lessons in Years 9, 10 and 13 and some GNVQ work in Year 12 because of external and internal examinations.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school provides a satisfactory education for its students. Teaching is generally good and the headteacher provides excellent leadership. Students achieve satisfactory results in examinations and are well cared for. The school's sixth form is generally cost effective although it does receive a very small subsidy from the rest of the school's income. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- The good quality teaching in history, geography, music, art and physical education.
- The excellent leadership of the headteacher supported by the governing body.
- The quality of support for students with SEN incorporating the Inclusion Unit.
- Students are well cared for and behaviour is generally good.
- Links with the community and feeder schools are excellent.
- The quality of the work related curriculum and extra curricular activities enhance provision.
- The school is a friendly and civilized learning environment.

What could be improved

- Monitoring the effectiveness of teaching and developing assessment and target setting.
- Standards at Key Stage 4 in mathematics, science and modern foreign languages.
- Some unsatisfactory teaching in a small number of lessons.
- The quality and quantity of resources for ICT and mathematics.
- More support for students with learning difficulties.
- Provision of RE at post 16 and a daily act of collective worship.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in February 1996. Since then there have been significant changes in staffing including a new headteacher. Standards of attainment have been maintained and teaching has improved. There have been improvements in the behaviour of students and the school now has a very positive image in the community. The governing body play an important part in shaping the direction of the school and there have been improvements in accommodation and maintenance of the building. The school still does not meet legal requirements with regard to a daily act of collective worship and is not monitoring fully the effectiveness of teaching. There has been some progress in raising standards of middle attaining students which needs to be developed.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with			
	All schools			Similar* schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	C	C	C	E
A-levels/AS-levels	C	D	C	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

*It is the view of the inspection team based on assessment information, scrutiny of work and observation of lessons that on entry to school students' standards of attainment are in line with the national average. The similar schools' comparison is based on eligibility for free school meals and does not take other social factors into account.

Standards in the national tests for 14 year olds are comparable with the national average but are below average for similar schools. In 1999 results were better in mathematics and science than in English. Boys' attainment is weaker than girls.

At GCSE standards are around the national average and well below average for similar schools. Boys' attainment has improved and in 1999 was just above the national average. In 1999 results were good in history, English literature, drama, physical education, music and geography but were weaker in science, mathematics, French and German.

At post 16 students taking A Level courses achieve standards in line with the national average. In 1999 standards were good in English literature, history, physics, geography and design technology but were relatively weaker in chemistry, mathematics, French, German and art.

Attainment overall is satisfactory and the school sets realistic if somewhat cautious targets for individual students and overall school examination results.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Most students enjoy school and work hard. The large number of students who take part in extra curricular activities indicates their positive attitudes to school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour in lessons is usually good although in a small number of unsatisfactory lessons some students were disruptive. There is a civilised atmosphere around the school and students use the building carefully although there continues to be a problem in the amount of litter in some parts of the school site.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships amongst students and with staff are good and often very good. Students show respect and concern for others, work well together and develop mature and responsible attitudes. Bullying is not a major issue and is dealt with quickly when it occurs.
Attendance	Attendance is satisfactory and is just above the national average

Most students enjoy school and develop mature attitudes. They relate well to each other and to staff.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good	Very good

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

Teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection with only 5% of lessons now considered unsatisfactory. At least 73% were good or better and 30% very good or excellent. At post 16 teaching is very good. There are no subjects where teaching is weak overall but there are weaknesses in a small number of science and modern foreign languages lessons. In science and mathematics teaching throughout the school is good and in English it is satisfactory at Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good at post 16. Teaching in other subject areas is at least satisfactory and generally good and is especially strong in history, geography and music where students work hard and receive detailed feedback about their progress. Students' learning would be enhanced if in all lessons they received more detailed information about their progress and the amount and quality of homework was improved in mathematics and science. Students at all levels of attainment respond well when teachers have high expectations and lessons are carefully planned with clear learning objectives.

Students develop their literacy and numeracy skills satisfactorily in English and mathematics but these skills could be developed more across the curriculum. The school has started to work hard to ensure that all students achieve their potential in academic subjects.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum at Key Stage 3 and a good choice of subjects at Key Stage 4. The amount of teaching time for English and mathematics is low at Key Stage 4. At post 16 there is an extensive range of A Level courses and some good quality GNVQ courses although there is no provision for RE. The quality of provision is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4 and post 16. Good quality extra curricular provision enhances students' academic and personal development.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Provision for students with special needs is satisfactory. The Inclusion Unit is a particular strength and is well staffed. There is not enough individual support for students with very weak literacy skills although the support that is in place is good.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	There is good provision for students' social and cultural development. Spiritual and moral education is satisfactory but less well developed.
How well the school cares for its students	Pastoral support for students is good and often very good and students feel that they are well cared for and staff will do their best to solve any problems they have. Monitoring of students' progress and detailed information on how they can improve their learning and attainment need further development.

The school works well with parents who feel welcome in the school and are confident that their children are well cared for by staff. Parents feel that there have been significant improvements in the school since the last inspection. The school provides a good range of extra curricular activities and a broad curriculum.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The leadership of the headteacher is excellent. He sets the ethos of the school and has a clear vision for its future which is shared by most staff. Other senior staff work well on specific tasks and middle managers ensure that the school runs effectively on a day to day basis. There now needs to be a more detailed strategy for improving standards of attainment led by the senior team and supported by middle managers.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body makes a major contribution in shaping the future direction of the school and is involved actively in monitoring its work. They need to reconsider their policy on collective worship and provision of RE at post 16.

The school's evaluation of its performance	The school analyses carefully its examination results and is starting to address issues of how, as a school, standards can be improved.
The strategic use of resources	Resources have been managed effectively over the last few years. There is a pressing need, however, to improve resources for ICT and mathematics.

The school has sufficient teaching spaces to meet present needs although some classrooms are in need of refurbishment. There are weaknesses in learning resources for ICT and mathematics. Staffing is sufficient to meet curricular needs although more support for students with special educational needs would help to improve standards.

The school works hard at trying to ensure that it gets the best value it can from the monies which are available.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 'open door' policy of the school • The leadership of the headteacher • The progress students make academically and personally • The generally good quality of teaching • The positive image of the school in the community • The excellent provision of musical education • The quality of support for statemented students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of homework. • The behaviour of a small number of students. • Teaching in modern languages and in some science lessons. • More parents' evenings to discuss students' progress. • More support for students with learning difficulties. • Resources for ICT. • Improvements in accommodation.

The inspection team agrees with parents that the school has improved since the last inspection but much work still needs to be done to improve standards of attainment. This report confirms the views of parents about the school's strengths and weaknesses but emphasises that only a small number of students behave inappropriately. The number of parents' questionnaires returned to the Registered Inspector was 268 and 19 parents attended the consultation evening.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. On entry to the school students' standards of attainment are around the national average. After two terms in the school results in the national tests for 14 year olds have been in line with the national average for the last three years and below average for schools with a similar number of students entitled to free school meals. In 1999 results in mathematics and science were stronger than in English. In English girls do better than boys in line with the national trend and results have remained stable over the last three years but are better than at the last inspection.

2. In mathematics results have improved in line with the national trend although there have been variations in performance over the last three years. In 1999 results were above the national average but below average for similar schools. Boys have achieved a little better than girls and progress overall has been maintained since the last inspection. In science results have been in line with the national average but are below average for similar schools. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls. Attainment has improved since the last inspection in line with national trends. In other curriculum subjects standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are in line with national averages although standards in history are above average. In 1999 standards in geography were also above the national average.

3. In 1999 49.4% of students achieved at least five GCSE passes at A* to C. This was above the national average but well below average for similar schools. The average points score was in line with the national average and well below the average for similar schools. Since the last inspection boys' attainment has improved and in 1999 was just above the national average. Girls' attainment has been close to the national average but there has been no overall improvement over the last three years. Last year, results were good in history, English literature, drama, physical education, and geography but were weaker in science, mathematics, and in French and German. The school has set a target of 52% of students gaining five GCSE grades A* to C and an average points score of 40 for 2000. This target is realistic if somewhat cautious and a more challenging target should be set for 2001.

4. At post 16 A level students achieve results which are close to the national average. In most subjects standards are around the national average although in 1999 they were relatively weak in chemistry, mathematics, French, German and art. Standards were good in English literature, history, physics, geography and DT. At GNVQ all students passed the advanced business programme and all the small group who completed the advanced science course gained a merit or distinction mark.

5. Results in tests, teacher assessments and examinations indicate that most students make steady progress at all key stages. On entry attainment as measured by reading test scores and tests is around the national average and the majority of students achieve at least in line with prior attainment. At GCSE boys achieve better than girls in mathematics but girls' attainment is stronger in English. Overall there has been improvement in boys' attainment which is not reflected by that of girls.

6. Standards of work observed in lessons during the inspection week indicate improvements in standards in Years 10 and 13. In English some high attaining students produce outstanding written work at Key Stage 4 but although the writing of many students at Key Stage 3 is technically accurate there are few students who reach high standards. At A Level students develop good analytical skills in both language and literature courses. In mathematics standards are stronger at Key Stage 3 and A Level than at Key Stage 4 where middle attaining students are not achieving as well as they might. At Key Stages 3 and 4 the progress of most students in science lessons is at least satisfactory and sometimes good but there are some lessons where there is a lack of challenge and progress is weak. At A Level standards are very good in physics and above average in biology but are weaker in chemistry.

7. In art students develop good observational skills at Key Stage 4 and at A Level develop a good knowledge of artists and their work. In DT standards are satisfactory at Key Stages 3 and 4 and at A Level standards are higher with girls achieving especially well. Standards in geography and history are well above average at Key Stage 4 and A Level and students do better in these subjects than in other areas of the curriculum. In both subjects students develop good research skills. In modern foreign languages high attaining students achieve average standards and lower attaining students do not achieve as well as they might. Students achieve good standards in GCSE physical education especially in ball skills and there has been some improvement in RE where students now understand the basic facts about world faiths. In music standards are very good at GCSE and A Level with students developing good skills in composition. In ICT standards are satisfactory but are less well developed across the curriculum due to limited resources.

8. Students with special educational needs make good progress when they receive in class support but their progress is weaker when support is unavailable. They do well at GCSE in mathematics and science when they receive good in class support. Gifted and talented students make good progress throughout the school and reach appropriate standards of attainment. In English Year 11 students produce outstanding writing, standards of musical performances are high and students do well in the UK Maths Challenge. The school has a good number of students who are involved in sports teams at district and county level.

9. At A Level students reach standards in line with national averages in business, media, sociology and performing arts. Standards at GNVQ are good. Support for students with special educational needs is excellent.

10. The school is now starting to develop a whole school literacy policy. Standards of literacy across the curriculum are variable. In history and geography students are encouraged to read aloud and write using their own words. In drama students develop their oral skills and in mathematics students are taught specialist words. In most other subjects the promotion of literacy has not been seen as a priority. Standards of literacy in English are satisfactory overall. Standards in numeracy are satisfactory in mathematics lessons. Across the curriculum they are good in some lessons in science at Key Stage 4 and A Level and very good in ICT at Key Stage 3.

11. Since the last inspection standards in external examinations and tests have improved in line with the national trend and have been at least maintained in most subject areas. Standards are still weak in languages and are not as strong in mathematics and science at GCSE as in other subject areas. Standards have improved in ICT and are now good in music. Geography and history continue to achieve high standards.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

12. Most students have positive attitudes to their work and they enjoy school. Where the teaching is good, students of all abilities show enthusiasm, concentration, are attentive and work hard. A few students lack motivation, can be disruptive and show a lack of respect for the teachers. Apart from the very few students with particular behavioural difficulties, poor attitudes in lessons are generally the result of unsatisfactory or unchallenging teaching. The large number of students involved in extra curricular activities, for example the concerts and plays, gives a good indication of students' eagerness to benefit from the many opportunities the school offers.

13. Behaviour in class is usually good although there are occasions when a few disruptive students adversely affect the learning of others. Behaviour around the school is mainly good. Most students are polite and friendly and there is a civilized atmosphere in the dining room where students readily chat to visitors. Students do not complain of bullying and the school makes considerable efforts to ensure any incidents are dealt with quickly. Bullying is not a major issue in the school. The substantial decrease in the rate of fixed period exclusions since the last inspection is a clear indication that attitudes and behaviour have improved, although there remain a few weaknesses. There is some disregard of the school rules by a few students and there is evidence of smoking in the toilets. As indicated at the time of the last inspection, litter remains a problem particularly in common rooms following breaks and lunchtimes.

14. Relationships amongst students and with their teachers are good and often very good. They are supportive of each other. They show respect and concern for the feelings of others, for example by raising money for a range of different charities. In lessons students were observed working together and collaborating well. Although there are few opportunities for students to take on formal responsibilities, the curriculum encourages personal as well as academic development. Year 11 students learn responsibility through the practical citizenship course. The Junior Sports Leaders' Award includes helping to provide sporting opportunities for people with disabilities. Some very good examples of students taking responsibility for their own learning were observed in the sixth form. A number of students have shown immense courage in overcoming huge personal problems and yet diligently continue with their studies. By the time they reach the sixth form the vast majority of Stowmarket students are very mature and responsible young people.

15. Attendance for 1998/99 was satisfactory. It was just above the national average and there was a further improvement in autumn 1999. Punctuality at lessons is generally good. The school has at least maintained its good work in this area since the last inspection

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

16. Teaching during the inspection week was good. In 95% of lessons it was at least satisfactory, was very good or excellent in 30% and was good in a further 43%. At the last inspection one in four lessons were judged unsatisfactory and this report indicates the progress the school has made. There are no departments where teaching is unsatisfactory overall but there are weaknesses in some science and modern foreign language lessons.

Teaching is very good at post 16 and is particularly strong in history, geography and music throughout the school. Since the last inspection almost half of the staff including the headteacher are new to the school. Good teaching is starting to have an impact on the quality of students' learning.

17. In many lessons teachers demonstrate very good subject knowledge and lessons are well planned. Teaching is particularly strong at post 16 Level where English staff present lessons in thoughtful and creative ways and in history where there are precise learning objectives. Learning is most effective when teachers use a range of strategies as in a Year 9 mathematics lesson where students used computers to solve graphical puzzles and in a Year 10 geography class where collaborative group work was well planned and intellectually challenging. In the best science lessons the content of lessons is matched to the attainment levels of the students and in art good resources are used to extend students' learning. A Year 9 music lesson on Indian music was effective because good planning enabled the teacher to develop individual students' skills. Students respond well when teacher expectations are high and lessons have pace and challenge. In a food technology lesson in Year 10 on nutrition students developed well their independent learning skills in addition to improving their knowledge about the topic.

18. Classroom management is good in the majority of lessons. In physical education lessons students work hard in response to clear instructions and in Year 9 ICT lessons develop good skills as a result of well prepared lessons. There are a small number of lessons in science where tasks are not sufficiently challenging and students do not learn effectively and in drama at Key Stage 3 where boys lose interest and do not listen attentively. In some RE lessons students became bored and restless because of the use of a narrow range of teaching strategies. There is a need in modern languages lessons to ensure that staff use consistent approaches to classroom discipline.

19. Students with learning difficulties receive very good support from the Learning Support team although there are insufficient staffing resources to meet all their needs. Although the initial assessment of students is good progress needs to be monitored more carefully and the number of targets should be reduced and made clearer. Liaison with departmental staff is effective although more support is needed in humanities and ICT lessons. In history and geography there were examples of the use of individualised learning resources to meet learning needs and support from classroom teachers across the curriculum is often good. In some modern languages lessons these students are not given opportunities for oral work. In mathematics and science they make good progress and do well at GCSE. When students receive in class support their progress is enhanced although the very weakest students require more specialist support. The quality of support for gifted and talented students is good.

20. Homework is set regularly by most staff and is generally good. However, not enough work is set in mathematics and the quality of work set in science is inconsistent. Marking of work is variable across the school and although there is good practice in geography and history there is some weakness in science and modern foreign languages. The regular use of assessment information to assist students to improve their work is an area that needs to be developed across the school and is a particular weakness in mathematics where students do not receive information about their progress from the end of Year 9 to the end of the summer term in Year 10. In history, geography and in some DT lessons very good assessment feedback enhances students' learning. Assessment is generally good at post 16. The teaching of subject specific skills is good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good at post 16. Literacy and numeracy skills are taught satisfactorily in English and mathematics but these skills could be developed more across the curriculum.

21. Learning was unsatisfactory in fewer than 4% of lessons and was good or better in more than seven out of ten lessons. In the best lessons observed students worked hard and responded well to the high expectations of their teachers and the challenges presented in lessons. This was the case in many lessons across the curriculum particularly in history, geography, music and art. In the small number of unsatisfactory lessons where expectations were low, students were not challenged, they lost attention and concentration, became disruptive and learning was unsatisfactory. However, the overall improvement in teaching and learning since the last inspection should begin to have an impact on improving standards in examinations.

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

22. The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum for all its students at Key Stage 3. All National Curriculum requirements are met and provision is enhanced through drama, personal, social and health education, ICT and the opportunity for all students to study a second language. The limited time allocation for RE creates some problems in covering the agreed syllabus. Strategies for improving literacy skills need to be developed.

23. At Key Stage 4 all students follow a core curriculum which complies with legal requirements. The timetable is written to enable students to take a varying number of GCSE subjects and there are a wide range of options including GNVQ business studies, non-examination courses in home economics and communications and opportunities for gifted students to study up to three languages. Low attaining students study a range of subjects and are expected to be entered for GCSE examinations wherever possible. The recently established Inclusion Unit is providing excellent support for those students who have found it difficult to make progress in the mainstream curriculum. Teaching time for mathematics and English is below that in most schools nationally and practical subjects are limited by the relative shortness of individual lessons. The school's policy on equal opportunities promotes equal access and opportunity for all students. It could be usefully extended to encourage staff to monitor carefully teaching materials in order to develop further students' attitudes to the values and beliefs of others.

24. The school provides an extensive range of A Level subjects including sociology, performing arts, media and business. There is a developing GNVQ programme which includes business and science and these courses are well taught and students make good progress. There are opportunities for students to retake GCSE English and mathematics and there is a good quality PSHE course in Year 12 which some students are unable to access. There is no provision for post 16 RE and the school is not meeting legal requirements in this respect.

25. The school's provision for extra curricular activities is good. There is a wide range of activities in sport, drama and music. Sports activities include clubs as well as team games and a late bus provided by the school on Wednesdays enables students to attend and is well used. There are several school concerts and a play in the year and a musical is performed annually by post 16 students. These events are so well supported by parents and the community that the school has to use a local theatre to accommodate the large audiences for the concerts. There is an active astronomy club and students make use of the design facilities during lunch and breaks. Several students were awarded Gold Certificates in the Maths Challenge 2000 and one student went on to achieve a certificate

of distinction in the European Challenge. Many subjects offer extension and enrichment work to supplement classwork. School trips and visits are well supported by students and many are involved in regular foreign trips including a visit to Denmark by post 16 students to teach English and visits to the First World War battlefields in France organised jointly by the English and history departments. A post 16 Berlin visit is organised by the modern foreign languages and history departments. The school has received a Curriculum Award for its work in developing extra curricular activities. Links with the community are very strong. Pastoral links with feeder schools are well established and strong curriculum links have been well developed in most subject areas. The contribution of local businesses to the work related curriculum is especially noteworthy. The school also works hard to make students aware of the wider needs of the community and the Sports Leader Award courses bring together Key Stage 4 students with students from primary schools and students with physical disabilities. The learning opportunities for all concerned are invaluable.

26. Personal, social and health education is taught to all students in Key Stages 3 and 4. The well-written programme includes the provision of careers education and gives proper and sensitive attention to drugs and sex education. The quality of teaching is never less than satisfactory and is often good with teachers making effective use of a wide range of stimulating resource materials. The overall quality of this provision is good. Careers education and the work related curriculum are particular strengths. The teaching programme is relevant and interesting and students are offered a two week period of Work Experience in Year 10 and receive regular counselling and support from Suffolk Careers Ltd. There are successful and well established initiatives designed to foster an awareness of the world of work typified by Year 9's Insight into Industry and Stowmarket into Europe days which succeed because of the strength of links between the school and local business.

27. Whilst such strategies are embedded in post 16 GNVQ courses, A Level students are focused in the Year 12 PSHE programme more on Higher Education than future employment. Although there are opportunities for work sharing and visits, careers education provision is not as comprehensive as at Key Stages 3 and 4.

28. The provision made by the school to support students' personal development is satisfactory with respect to spiritual and moral understanding and is good in the areas of social and cultural development. This reflects the findings at the last inspection. Opportunities for students to consider a range of values and beliefs, to reflect on the spiritual aspects of life and develop spiritual awareness are somewhat limited across the curriculum. In some lessons at post 16 in English, performing arts and the Junior Sports Award in physical education, students engaged well in discussions about spiritual values. There are end of term assemblies for the whole school to celebrate achievement but restricted accommodation limits assemblies to two a week for each year group. The assemblies observed were well organised, encouraged reflection on current issues and closed with a prayer. Guidance is provided for form tutors on how to develop assembly themes on the days when there are no assemblies but no such activities were observed. The school does not comply with requirements to provide a daily act of collective worship.

29. A moral dimension is implicit in the school's aims and code of conduct and pervades much of the PSHE programme, the module on crime and punishment and the delivery of sex education for example. Students generally know right from wrong and satisfactory provision in this area of students' personal development is reflected in the success of the school's anti-bullying strategy.

30. Social development is promoted through collaborative group work in many lessons and is a core activity within GNVQ and Key Stage 4 life skills courses. It is fostered through the school's extensive charity work, its extra curricular activities especially in music and drama and from participation in field work and school visits. It is enhanced by community involvement as in the two week work experience, the 'Insight into Industry Day', the 'Stowmarket into Europe' event and the Friday morning session of the practical citizenship group in Year 11. Provision for social development is good but, apart from membership of year and school councils and at post 16 the prefect system, few opportunities currently exist for students to take and to accept responsibility.

31. The school also makes good provision for students' cultural development. Students gain an awareness of their own cultural traditions in music, art and English lessons especially at post 16, and through extra curricular theatre visits and workshops. They learn of the richness and diversity of other cultures in geography, modern foreign languages, art and in many other areas of the curriculum. Students also have the opportunity to experience ways of life in other European countries through trips in Year 9 to Belgium and Boulogne, the two modern foreign language exchanges and the post 16 links with a Danish school. Overall the school has made good progress since the last inspection in developing both curricular and extra-curricular opportunities for students.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

32. The school has good procedures for ensuring students' welfare and adheres sensitively to the child protection policy. Effective systems are in place to monitor health and safety and there is on going risk assessment.

33. The personal support and guidance given by heads of year and form tutors is good and often very good. They know their students well and demonstrate high standards of care and concern. Students are confident that they will always find a sympathetic ear and their problems will be resolved. There is good help and guidance for sixth formers and for students with special needs. Parents agree their children like school and they are very pleased with the pastoral provision.

34. The behaviour policy which includes dealing with bullying, is clear to all staff and aims to promote a consistent approach. Attendance is rigorously monitored. Holidays in term time are discouraged and conditions for judging unauthorised absence are very strictly applied. Where no valid reason is known for a student's absence, parents are immediately contacted. Parents are made aware of these clear policies but in practice not all teachers adhere to them fully. School rules are not always rigidly enforced. Very occasionally registers are inaccurately completed and the twenty minute registration periods are often not well used.

35. The school has a satisfactory policy statement on assessment and recording which sets out procedures for assessment, marking and recording progress and attainment. Departments are expected to implement these procedures.

36. Liaison with feeder middle schools is good. The middle schools provide reading scores for each pupil at the age of 12+, and also make available details of attainment in the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science. They make more detailed information available in relation to students who have special needs. They also provide

information to help with the formation of teaching groups in subjects where this is requested.

37. The school makes good arrangements for the conduct of national testing throughout the school and ongoing assessment for GNVQ is very good. The school sets its own examinations for students in the summer of Years 10 and 12, and mock examinations in December for students in Years 11 and 13. This amounts to a generally satisfactory programme of formal assessment of students' attainment, except that in Years 9 and 10 students work for most of the year with no formal testing unless faculties take steps to arrange this. There are examples of assessment information being used well by individual teachers and departments such as in history and geography to assist in lesson planning and provide students with specific learning targets but this is an area which needs to be developed across the whole school.

38. The school arranges frequent communication with parents. In Years 9 and 12 there are two reports a year and in Year 12 there are three. In Years 11 and 13 full reports are sent to parents early in the spring term, following the mock examinations in December. At Key Stages 3 and 4 full reports do not usually contain any information in relation to the courses studied by students and are often rather general, focusing on attitude and effort rather than strengths and weaknesses in the subject and areas for improvement. Post 16 reports are good and encourage parents and students to set targets for improvement.

39. Effort checks are followed up in school by heads of year for students whose effort is very good or giving cause for concern. In Year 11 all students have two interviews with senior members of staff which relate to the choice of courses for post 16 studies and the results of mock examinations. There is subject mentoring for Year 11 students by teachers who volunteer for this work. The PSHE programme includes time for compiling progress files and is taught by a team of specialist teachers. The quality of this support for students is good.

40. Since the last inspection the quality of pastoral support has improved although monitoring and support of students' academic development still needs further consolidation in order to raise standards of attainment.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

41. The school recognises the key role of parents in ensuring that students make the most of the academic and extra curricular opportunities it provides. This partnership is reinforced through the prospectus, the good response to the home/school agreement, homework planners and the Friends of Stowmarket High association. Parents feel the school has improved enormously since the last inspection and they are very supportive of the headteacher. There has been a big improvement in the way the school is perceived locally. Parents appreciate the pastoral support and the commitment of the staff. They feel comfortable approaching the school with problems and like the 'open door' policy. They feel their children are encouraged to work hard. Parents of students with special educational needs are thoroughly involved in their education and appreciate the informal evenings devoted to discussing their progress. The school works well with the parents of students who experience problems.

42. The Friends of Stowmarket has a strong committee which includes seven members of staff. The craft fair, which is the main fund-raising event, is very well supported both by

parents and the local community. When needed parents readily offer their help, for example last year a small working party painted the gymnasium during a half-term break.

43. The quality of information provided for parents about students' progress varies. Parents find students' reports informative although inspectors found their value varied considerably according to the individual teacher. The progress reports in addition to the main annual report are appreciated by parents. Reports provided for sixth formers are very good. However, apart from special needs, there is only one consultation evening per year for parents to discuss progress and this takes place before the annual reports. Parents find this unsatisfactory both with regard to the dates of these meetings and the limited time available for consultation with staff. The prospectus is informative and well produced but neither it nor the governors' annual report to parents fully meets statutory requirements. The Stowmarket High Flyer is an interesting newsletter which celebrates successes and gives useful diary dates.

44. Most parents give good support to their children at home and take a keen interest in their education. Homework planners are regularly signed by parents of Year 9 and 10 students. Some are able to help with homework and have bought computers to enhance their children's learning. They are very supportive of school productions many of which now have to be held off site because audiences are too large to be accommodated in the school hall. Extra curricular activities which need parental funding are also well supported. Most parents are keen to work in partnership with the school and this has a positive effect on students' learning. They feel that the school has improved its links with parents since the last inspection.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

45. The leadership, vision and the excellent inter personal skills of the headteacher are major factors in the school's improvement since the last inspection. Parents and the local community view the school positively and are confident that the school is well managed. There is a clear sense of direction which has contributed to improvements in teaching and staff morale. The senior management team work well on specific tasks but need to focus their energies on improving standards of attainment across the school. The school produces detailed assessment data which is not always used well by departments to improve curriculum planning. Effective target setting is not well developed and whole school approaches to improving standards are in their infancy. There are no formal systems for monitoring teaching and disseminating good practice and this is a weakness across the school. The school development plan is not sufficiently focused on specific issues which will improve standards. The school operates well on a day to day basis and the ethos set by the senior management team in their relationships with staff, parents and students help to create a civilised learning environment.

46. The governing body now makes a major contribution in shaping the direction of the school and through its sub-committees monitors carefully the progress the school is making. They provide positive yet critical support to the headteacher and assist teachers to reflect on their work. Statutory obligations are fulfilled with the exception of a daily act of worship and provision for RE at post 16.

47. Heads of department, year heads and other middle managers ensure that the school operates smoothly on a day to day basis. The management of pastoral systems and support for form tutors is good. At post 16 management and leadership are good and there is a clear plan for future developments. Heads of department offer constructive

support to colleagues, their departmental documentation is sound and schemes of work are in place. Assessment information is not used effectively by many departments to monitor students' progress and to inform lesson planning. Where it is used well by departments standards of attainment are high. There are inconsistencies across the school in implementing whole school policies and no systematic monitoring of teaching by heads of department which would facilitate the dissemination of good practice.

48. The school maintains satisfactory systems for financial control of budgetary expenditure. Information technology is used effectively to keep financial records, produce budget summaries, and enhance communication. This technology is being used to remove time consuming routine tasks for recording attendance and tracking absence. The school benefits from specialist accountancy expertise within the governing body. All heads of department are budget holders and deploy the delegated funds in accordance with published routines. There are good procedures to encourage value for money when negotiating contracts and checking the effectiveness of the delivery of services with many instances of best value principles being consistently applied. All privately raised funds for short-term projects, student visits and extra curricular events are processed through the school fund account. Deposits in this fund should be systematically checked against receipts issued to students and the accounts kept by event organisers. The LEA audit officers evaluated school procedures in 1998 and gave a satisfactory report. Most of their recommendations have been implemented.

49. The strategic management of resources is good although staffing costs are relatively high. Expenditure is prudently managed and the governors exercise careful oversight. There is long term planning in an effort to meet school objectives. The carefully produced and costed bid for technology status is a good example. The budgeted, phased improvement of the school building is well managed. The new library is a welcome asset and a source of pride. The current small deficit on the overall budget is well within the tolerance limits set by the LEA. Governors regularly monitor the deficit and a reduction strategy is in place. Specific grants are spent on their designated purposes. The funds available for the support of students with SEN are supplemented from the main budget and the limited resources are efficiently deployed. The present practice of delegating in-service training funds to departments creates a large number of very small grants. Some grants are too small to have impact. The system should be reviewed to ensure more effective targeting of prioritised school and subject development objectives.

50. The age related income for students is allocated appropriately although there is a very small subsidy to the post 16 curriculum. The available accommodation is used efficiently although some large classes are taught in rooms that are not suitable for the subject. This is particularly the case with RE. Staffing levels are sufficient to meet the needs of the curriculum. Teachers are, in the main, well qualified. The weakness at the time of the last inspection of non-specialist teachers has been addressed although there is still a problem in modern foreign languages which has been resolved for the new academic year.

51. In-service provision for staff development is limited by lack of funding although the school spends more money than its notional allowance. Staff training days are planned to support whole school developments and other funds are devolved to departments who make their decisions on allocations. This policy needs to be reconsidered in order to target support on implementing the school's development plan. The school makes some provision for the professional development of teachers to study for diplomas and higher degrees. The induction of teachers, including newly qualified teachers (NQT's), is good. The support provided by the school is very good and is appreciated by the present NQT's;

they have all been observed teaching and have been provided with constructive feedback. One NQT has observed other teachers and all will be provided with this opportunity during the second half of the summer term.

52. There is no system for teacher appraisal although a new system is planned for September 2000. The governors conduct a review of all teaching and non-teaching staff during the year. Non-teaching staff reviews have just been completed and each has received a full one and a half-hour review. A review of teachers will be conducted during the second half of the summer term. Support staff provision was a reported weakness at the previous inspection, it is now sufficient to meet the needs of school administration, the library and science department. Provision is less satisfactory in DT where the technician time is shared with art and mathematics. It is good in ICT, where the technician supports classes. Support staff are an efficient and capable team. The librarian provides good curriculum support for all departments. There is a limited amount of time for SEN support although the quality of provision is very good.

53. The previous report highlighted the poor condition of much of the school accommodation. This has been largely addressed through a five year contract with the LEA. There are sufficient teaching spaces to meet existing needs and many areas of the school have been refurbished, such as the library, which is now an attractive, well equipped and well used resource within the school. Some areas have yet to be re-furbished, such as the modern foreign languages department and some of the English department. A number of departments have been responsible for the decoration of their own departments and a self-help project has resulted in the removal of old and unsightly bicycle sheds. The site is pleasant, trees and shrubs have been provided to provide shade in recreational spaces and to improve the aesthetics of the school. The school is mainly clean and tidy, although litter in some areas spoils its overall appearance. Display within the school is of a very high standard and the new picture frames allows students' work to be displayed throughout all the main corridors.

54. The weaknesses in accommodation are in textiles where there is no specialist accommodation and RE which has to share music and drama rooms. The untidiness in some of the DT rooms and the lack of organisation of clay storage in art, constitute potential health hazards. Old and unsuitable furniture limits some aspects of work in ICT and DT. PE changing rooms are a long way from activity areas and students may be vulnerable because they are close to public areas. The computer rooms are small and do not have sufficient ventilation causing them to become excessively hot and oppressive during warm weather. Excessive heat is also a problem in one of the DT rooms.

55. Resources were considered satisfactory at the last inspection, although financial constraints over a period of two or three years have resulted in a significant reduction in spending. This situation has not improved and some areas have deteriorated. ICT provision is poor because there are too few computers to meet fully the needs of the curriculum and most are not powerful enough. The computers used mainly by upper school GNVQ courses are insufficiently powerful and do not have Internet access. They are unsuitable for whole class projects using computer graphics. There is too little ICT available in the library. There is no computerised control, design or manufacturing equipment in DT. The provision of learning resources in mathematics is unsatisfactory. Classes do not have graphical calculators and the department cannot provide textbooks for home use. There is also a textbook deficiency in English and in RE, where extra resources are necessary in order to set up the new course.

56. Since the last inspection staff morale and the quality of accommodation has improved. However, there is still no systematic evaluation of teaching.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

57. The school should now seek to raise standards further and improve the quality of provision by:

- (1) Implementing systems for monitoring the effectiveness of teaching and developing assessment and target setting. This should involve all the senior management team working with heads of department; (paragraphs 20, 45, 47, 52, 74 and 76)
- (2) Focusing on improving standards at Key Stage 4 in mathematics, science and modern foreign languages; (paragraphs 3, 6, 11, 84, 94, 97 and 136)
- (3) Improving the quality of teaching in the small number of unsatisfactory lessons; (paragraphs 16, 101 and 137)
- (4) Improving the quality of resources for ICT and mathematics; (paragraphs 55, 95 and 132)
- (5) Providing more support for students with learning difficulties; (paragraphs 19, 52, 125, and 131)
- (6) Meeting legal requirements with regard to a daily act of collective worship and making provision for RE at post 16. (paragraphs 24, 28, 46 and 155)

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

Sixth Form

58. As well as advanced courses directly linked to GCSE subjects, the school offers A Level studies in business, sociology, media and performing arts. These courses are popular and standards in the lessons observed were high. In 1999 examination results for these subjects were in line with national averages with a pass rate at well above ninety percent - well over half of those entered achieved grades A, B or C.

59. In addition to the A Level business studies course there are work related options leading to a double award in GNVQ advanced business, or, for students with more modest results at GCSE, an intermediate one year GNVQ programme. The quality of teaching is at least sound or better and teachers have a strong command of the subject matter and offer good support and careful monitoring. Students are well motivated, debate sensibly, show initiative and reveal a good understanding of business theory. All students on the advanced GNVQ business programme achieved a pass in 1999.

60. For students wanting to follow technical courses the A Level in DT is a popular course and there are good opportunities for students to advance their skills in ICT. Those who studied child development or textiles at GCSE, however, currently have no opportunities to progress with these courses post 16.

61. Students feel well supported and guided by their tutors and the sixth form head and deputy offer regular opportunities for individual consultation and discussion about progress. Students are given constructive guidance about their academic studies by the pastoral team. Assessment systems work well and students know how well they are doing on their respective programmes. Parents and students receive good progress reports which encourage students to comment on their own progress and specify any targets for improving performance.

62. There is a varied programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) in Year 12, taught by the head of sixth form. This has a strong element of advice on careers and higher education and on effective study skills. Students following this course speak very highly of it and of the opportunities they are given to explore and discuss important contemporary issues. However, those who are studying four A Levels or following a GNVQ programme are not able to attend this valuable course. There is no provision for the teaching of religious education post 16 and in this respect the school does not meet its statutory obligations.

63. There is no further provision on the timetable for additional studies after the PSHE course has finished at the end of Year 12. Some Year 13 students are encouraged to take an AS Level in general studies, and, in spite of the absence of formal lessons in this area, more than half of the twenty three candidates in 1999 achieved grade C or above, with five gaining grade A.

64. The school offers a variety of opportunities for personal development beyond the taught curriculum for students who are keen to take additional responsibility and enrich their experience. Most notable among these are the annual sixth form musical performance, involving a high proportion of post 16 students, and the well established visit of between twenty and thirty Year 12 students to a Danish school to assist in teaching English to young Danish students. Many students at the start of Year 12 opt to undertake some community service instead of regular games, and good numbers studying languages, history and art join exchanges and trips to Germany and France. Leadership of the sixth form is strong and far sighted with a clear vision for the future expressed through a good development plan.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	165
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	54

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3	27	43	23	4	1	0

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

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	759	220
Number of full-time students eligible for free school meals	52	2

Special educational needs	Y9– Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	27	1
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	82	1

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	13
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	12

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.9
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.9
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	1999	130	134	264

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	67	91	81
	Girls	96	86	81
	Total	163	177	162
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	[65] 62	[64] 66	[65] 61
	National	[63] 65	[60] 62	[56] 55
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	[25] 23	[35] 38	[28] 23
	National	[35] 28	[36] 38	[27] 23

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	79	89	89
	Girls	115	91	87
	Total	194	180	176
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	[64] 73	[80] 66	[78] 66
	National	[61] 64	[64] 64	[61] 60
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	[25] 25	[44] 35	[42] 26
	National	[30] 31	[37] 27	[30] 28

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	1999	131	128	259

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	59	119	126
	Girls	69	123	123
	Total	128	242	251
Percentage of students achieving The standard specified	School	[49.1] 49.4	[94.4] 93.4	[98] 97
	National	[44.6] 46.3	[89.8] 90.7	[95.2] 95.7

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	[37.7] 38.5
	National	[36.8] 38.0

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

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	1999	26	56	82

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	16.6	16.9	[16.2] 16.8	2.0	2.0	[2.2] 2.0
National	17.7	18.1	[17.6] 17.9	2.7	2.8	[2.8] 2.8

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	School	12	100
	National		N/A

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	5
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	1
Indian	2
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	1
White	968
Any other minority ethnic group	2

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	31	2
Other minority ethnic groups		

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

Teachers and classes**Qualified teachers and classes: Y9 – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	59.9
Number of students per qualified teacher	16.3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y9 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	4
Total aggregate hours worked per week	99

Deployment of teachers: Y9-13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	80.3
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Average teaching group size: Y9 – Y11

Key Stage 3	24.2
Key Stage 4	21.2

Financial information

Financial year	1998/99
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	£
Total income	2,486,331
Total expenditure	2,520,434
Expenditure per pupil	2,574
Balance brought forward from previous year	-10,712
Balance carried forward to next year	-44,815

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	979
Number of questionnaires returned	268

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	31	57	10	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	43	50	6	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	18	59	8	3	12
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	21	58	13	4	3
The teaching is good.	24	68	4	1	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	32	51	12	3	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	60	38	1	0	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	57	40	2	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	32	52	11	3	3
The school is well led and managed	47	44	3	0	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	39	51	6	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	31	46	6	2	15

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

ENGLISH

65. When students enter the school at the beginning of Year 9 the profile of attainment is broadly average. By the end of the year attainment was still in line with the national picture in last year's national tests for 14 year olds, but fewer students than nationally attained the higher levels. Girls do better than boys in line with the national trend. Test results have remained constant over the last 3 years although they are better than at the time of the last inspection. When compared with students in similar schools results are below average.

66. There has been some improvement in GCSE results in both English and English literature in the last three years. Last year results at the end of Year 11 were slightly better than the national average in English. Girls did better than boys and better than girls did nationally whereas boys were in line with boys nationally in English but did better than average for boys in literature. Performance at A* and A grades is not as high as might be expected for English. Students do better in English literature than in language and here attainment at the highest grades is in line with national figures. The department enters above average proportions of students for both examinations.

67. Last year students did well in English literature at A Level. Results were above average and five students attained grade A. The department also offers English language and last year most students attained middle grades. There is considerable fluctuation from year to year in the A Level results.

68. By the end of Year 9 students have made satisfactory progress reaching standards which are broadly average. Low attaining students are able to sustain their ideas quite well when writing for a variety of purposes although the content and style of their work is often immature. They are able to use the library sensibly and find information from a range of different sources including, for example, press cuttings and the Internet as well as books. Higher attaining students examining the language used in a tourist brochure were able to explain their ideas fluently using a wide range of vocabulary. They have a good grasp of spelling, punctuation and grammar. By the end of the year they have learned to consider and write in a range of styles including newspaper reports, letters both formal and informal and some, but fewer, examples of personal writing. They are able to make good notes, write fluently and at length. Standards attained by these students are above average but there are few students whose writing reaches the very highest levels for their age.

69. Students at Key Stage 4 generally work hard to meet the requirements of the GCSE course in language and literature. Progress is at least satisfactory and standards are slightly above average. Higher attaining students have learned to support their ideas about literature by drawing on quotations from the text. They are able to make comparisons between, for example, the writing of Dickens and George Orwell. Knowledge of the texts they have read is good. They are able to consider theme and style in some depth. Work is generally fluent, technically accurate and well presented. There is some really outstanding writing in Year 11 but overall fewer students attain the highest grades. Students have good oral skills but there are too few opportunities for them to express their ideas in a lively and thoughtful way. Some low attaining students make very good progress in lessons and work hard over the course. Most read aloud reasonably fluently and with evident understanding.

In a Year 10 lesson students were examining a fact sheet about the life cycle of a flea. They simply expressed but perceptive responses about the language used in the leaflet and made connections with knowledge gained from other subjects demonstrating a good level of understanding. Some detailed and thoughtful writing was seen in which students made comparisons between two productions of 'Macbeth' although the standard of spelling and punctuation was below average. Students at all levels of attainment have experience of word processing their work. Fewer examples of students' personal and creative writing were seen than is usual. There are some students in Year 10 with very weak literacy skills. Students with special needs generally make satisfactory progress in lessons and where there is sufficient assistance from learning support staff they make very good progress.

70. Standards at post 16 are higher than at Key Stages 3 and 4. By the end of Year 13 students are attaining standards which are above average. Language students in Year 13 have excellent knowledge of technical terms such as phonology and morphology. They have made good progress over the course, demonstrate high order analytical skills and are particularly strong in textual analysis. In the literature class students revising 'A Room with a View' for the examination demonstrated very good knowledge of the text and made perceptive responses to the novel. Skills in close analysis of text are well established. They express themselves articulately and with confidence.

71. The school is just beginning to work on developing a whole school literacy strategy and so far practice across departments is variable. In history and geography it is very strong. In these subjects students are given opportunities for research and when lessons require reading aloud students are asked to do it. There are departmental policies on literacy and students are encouraged to write using their own words rather than others. Tasks are set which demand a creative response from students. In mathematics attention is given to vocabulary in lessons. In a Year 13 GNVQ group students were making progress in writing more sustained and accurate essays. In most other subjects, however, literacy is not currently a priority nor is it evident in planning.

72. Overall the teaching of English is satisfactory in both Key Stage 3 and 4. There is some teaching at both stages which is good and some which is very good. Post 16 teaching is very good. The department has had to cope with various staffing difficulties recently. In the main, arrangements have worked fairly well but at the time of the inspection some classes were unsettled and some were new to the teacher.

73. In the best lessons teachers have established excellent relationships, in some cases with potentially difficult classes. Frequent praise and encouragement are given so that students feel that their efforts are valued. There is good use of humour and teachers know the students as individuals. The choice of material is interesting, relevant to the students and questioning is open ended and probing. Lessons are challenging, with a range of activities to keep students on task. They feel that they are making progress. In these lessons teachers extend students' vocabulary and understanding by their own choice of language. Planning is carefully done so that learning is progressive although teachers are sensitive to students and flexible enough to adapt if they are not ready to move on. Learning objectives are made explicit at the start of the lesson and are reviewed at the end. Students are given very good oral feedback and the comments on work are analytical and constructive. Tasks are broken down or adapted to match students' needs. There is some good use of writing frames. The learning support assistants are both proactive and unobtrusive in the classroom. They provide well-informed and effective support for students with special needs.

74. There are, however, some lessons where there is little rapport with the students and the teacher forges ahead with the task without recognising their difficulties. Too little explanation or preparation time is given so that students do not understand what is being asked of them. Sometimes teachers do not insist that students listen and some behaviour is tolerated which makes learning difficult for others. Quite challenging and potentially creative tasks are presented in rather dull ways, which do not allow for maximum active participation and some high attaining students lose interest when teaching is not pitched appropriately or tasks are not interestingly presented. Students in Year 9 are not always clear about the standard they are attaining. Grading is not consistently used across the department and comments written on work are sometimes very brief and unhelpful. Some marking is of very good quality although there is too little opportunity for students to participate in self-evaluation and target setting. However, most students respond well in English lessons at both Key Stages 3 and 4. Some are very keen, speak very highly of their lessons and feel that they are making good progress. Most behave well, listen carefully and respond thoughtfully. Students relate well to each other although boys and girls often work separately. Students are less enthusiastic and motivated when teaching offers few opportunities for taking responsibility or expressing ideas and opinions in discussion. Some students have a short attention span and have difficulty in settling to a task for a sustained period of time.

75. Teaching at post 16 is very good. In both literature and language lessons teachers demonstrate very good knowledge of the subject and present lessons in thoughtful and creative ways. Marking is mainly of good quality and relationships are very good. Teachers are sensitive to the needs of their students. At post 16 students respond very well. They are interested, well motivated and work hard.

76. In recent months the department has experienced some staffing difficulties. On the whole management of the department through this period has worked well and staffing should now be more stable. Relationships are positive and the quality of documentation is good. Development planning is thorough and the head of department has an accurate and realistic knowledge of the direction the department should now take, for example in focusing on initiatives to improve the performance of boys and ensuring the accuracy of teacher assessments. There is some monitoring of performance in the subject through the analysis of examination results and the scrutiny of students' exercise books but as yet there is no monitoring of teaching which would enable the department to share its expertise and build on strengths. There is too little teaching time to cover both English and English literature examination requirements adequately at Key Stage 4. The time allocated is below the national average for the subject. There is too little specialist support for literacy to enable the weakest students to make really good progress. Accommodation for the subject is poor and although resources for teaching literature are generally adequate the department is not well resourced for language work.

77. There has been some improvement in standards since the last inspection. The performance of boys is better than before. A Level results are better and post 16 students are given greater responsibility for their learning. The quality of teaching remains broadly similar. There has been improvement in the use of ICT in English. The department has made efforts to address the inflexible setting arrangements reported last time although the system of offering a carousel of graded courses at Key Stage 4 is cumbersome and does not work well.

Drama

78. Drama is taught to all students at Key Stage 3 and is an option subject at GCSE. Performing Arts is offered as an A Level course.

79. Teaching in drama is good overall and teachers have a good command of the subject. They give clear instructions and explanations and present ideas in a clear logical way. When the teaching is enthusiastic it has a demonstrable effect on the students who respond with greater interest and commitment. In these lessons questions are well focused and challenging, different methods are used appropriately and quick changes of task are accompanied by questions to ensure all students have understood their prior learning. The pace of lessons is generally brisk particularly at Key Stage 4. When the pace slackens, as in one Year 9 lesson, students lose concentration. Teachers assess their students in lessons and give them regular feedback and advice providing opportunities for students to reflect on their own work. Teachers manage their students well but there are some inconsistencies. In a Year 9 lesson students' attention was not engaged. In a Year 10 lesson, however, where students were working with freeze-frame class management was handled with confidence, changes of speed and pace in instruction were appropriate and countdown was used as an effective means of ensuring that students responded efficiently.

80. Students are enthusiastic about the subject particularly at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Interest in the subject at Key Stage 3 is very mixed. Boys are often embarrassed at performing in front of others. They are sometimes poor listeners and lower attaining students find it difficult to concentrate.

81. Attainment in the subject at Key Stage 3 is average. Students working in groups are able to create tableaux. They have some understanding of how to plan for these and their oral skills are average. Attainment in the subject in Year 10 is also average and students are able to present freeze-frames on given subjects quite effectively. Some of these are expressive but attainment is inconsistent. Responses to questions show a reasonable command of specific terminology. In 1999 GCSE results in drama were above average when compared to national figures with 76% of students achieving A* to C grades compared with the national average of 67%. Girls' results were 11% above the national average and boys 10% with a high proportion of students gaining the higher grades in an unusually large entry of students. Consistently above average results at this stage and the levels of attainment observed in A Level work suggest that good progress is made in Year 11.

82. Post 16 drama is part of an A Level Performing Arts course. Teaching is good and often very good on this well established course. Drama is a main component of a curriculum which offers a wide range of experiences to students and opportunities to examine the links between music, dance and drama. Work on Year 13 monologues is good and students explore emotional, social and moral issues sensitively and with some eloquence. They show considerable commitment and enthusiasm for the course and develop a great deal of confidence and independence as a result. Results in 1999 were very good. Fifty six per cent of students achieved A and B grades and all students achieved a grade between A and D.

MATHEMATICS

83. Overall standards of attainment in mathematics are average. On entry to the school standards are no better than average. Students make good progress during the remainder of Key Stage 3 so that at the end of Year 9 standards of attainment have

improved. In 1999 at Key Stage 3 standards were above the national average. Over the four year period from 1996 to 1999 standards have varied, but overall improvement has been in line with the national trend.

84. Students are in a good position to begin work at Key Stage 4. However, their rate of progress through this key stage is less secure and their attainment by the end of Year 11 is only average. GCSE results were close to the national average for both A* to G and A* to C grades but were weaker than the average for all other subjects in the school. The attainment of girls was below that of boys in 1998 and 1999 and middle attaining students did not do as well as other groups of students. Students who need to do so have the opportunity of re-taking GCSE examinations in the sixth form.

85. Students who choose to study Advanced Level mathematics in the sixth form are offered a modular course in pure mathematics, mechanics and statistics. This leads to one Advanced Level qualification in mathematics, or two in mathematics and further mathematics, according to the number of modules studied. Students can also study AS mathematics or further mathematics with fewer modules. Students make good progress and reach good standards by the end of these courses. Results gained by students at Advanced Level have improved over the last three years and in 1999 approached the national average for all students. Over this three year period girls' results have been consistently better than those of boys, and in 1997 and 1999 were above the national average.

86. Across the curriculum standards of numeracy are satisfactory. In geography students' mathematical skills are average. In ICT they are very good at Key Stage 3, and in science are above average at Key Stage 4 and post 16. Students taking the intermediate GNVQ in business studies in the sixth form make satisfactory progress in improving their skills. In GNVQ science in Year 13 students are working well and achieving satisfactory levels of attainment in numeracy.

87. There have been noteworthy achievements by students in mathematics in addition to those in public examinations. Students entered for the UK Maths Challenge at the intermediate level have done particularly well. Forty seven were awarded certificates for their efforts, an increase of 34% over the previous year. Two students from Year 10 were awarded gold certificates and one pupil from Year 9 also reached this standard. In 1999 a team of Year 9 students came second in the Millenium Challenge.

88. The attitude of students to their learning is generally good at all three key stages. Students listen well to their teachers and pay attention to the work on the board. They respond to direct questions politely and usually accurately, and are willing to speak at greater length if invited to do so. They apply themselves well to written work and sustain concentration. They show interest and enjoyment in games and undertake practical work with care and accuracy. They co-operate well in pairs when appropriate. Behaviour was good in almost all the lessons seen, although there was a tendency for Year 10 students to take more time to settle down to their work than other year groups.

89. The quality of teaching is also generally good. It was at least satisfactory in all the lessons seen, good in half of all lessons and very good in some. Teachers' knowledge and understanding are good and for the very demanding Advanced Level work very good. All lessons are carefully prepared in accordance with the scheme of work and the degree of challenge for all students is appropriate. Teachers know their students well and relationships between students and teachers are usually very good.

90. A very good lesson with a group of lower attaining students at Key Stage 4 was observed. Students were making an open box to achieve the greatest possible volume with the materials available. They had done the preparatory thinking and preparation of materials and were engaged in its manufacture. Some very interesting shapes were made including prisms on a kite shaped base and on a decagon as base. As part of this activity students had to use a wide range of vocabulary associated with shapes, and to undertake calculations involving both areas and volumes. All these concepts were revised in preparation for Year 10 examinations as a single interesting and absorbing activity.

91. At post 16 a very good lesson was seen with students in Year 13. This was the final formal lesson for further mathematics students before their Advanced Level examinations. It took the form of a very careful rehearsal of the requirements of the examination followed by very good advice on examination technique. Students were then given individual tutorial support as they practised examination questions. The attitudes of students to their mathematics and to their studies in general are very good. They produce work of a very high standard as they progress through the course.

92. A very good lesson was seen with a group of students in a second set in Year 9. They were working singly and in pairs using computers to solve a variety of graphical puzzles. Resources for this activity were good. Capable and well-organised teaching led to a positive experience of computers for students, and their understanding of the relationship of the graph to the equation was enhanced.

93. In general teachers succeed well in meeting the needs of students at all three key stages and across the whole spectrum of attainment. Students with SEN are well known to their teachers and appropriate targets are set for them. More support was available for them in class than is commonly seen for students of this age range. Teachers also use a very good range of activities in the course of their teaching, including games, puzzles, practical and investigative work as well as the more usual exposition, question and answer, and practice. They have succeeded in integrating the use and application of mathematics with the other attainment targets for the subject. In this respect, and in the overall standards of teaching and learning in the classroom their work has shown considerable improvement since the last inspection.

94. The standards achieved in public examinations have also improved over the last three years at all three key stages. Over the longer period of seven years, however, standards at Key Stage 4 have shown significant decline, and over five years no improvement. In part this is due to two weaknesses in teaching. Homework is only set on one evening each week instead of on two as is more usual at this key stage, and some teachers do not set homework every week. A further weakness is in the testing of progress particularly in Year 10. There are no significant tests between the national testing at the end of Year 9 and school examinations in the summer term of Year 10. It is more usual for mathematics to be tested once each half term to provide an ongoing check on what students know and understand and the department is now working on this issue.

95. Resources for learning are also a cause for concern in mathematics, particularly at Key Stage 4. The time allocated for the subject at this key stage is below the national norm which means that over the whole key stage students have 34 lessons fewer than in schools allocating an average amount of time. This is very significant, particularly for students of average attainment who need more teacher support if they are to attain the standards of which they are capable. Students have weekly lessons in ICT at Key Stage 3, but at Key Stage 4 there are difficulties of access to computers. The faculty has no graphical calculators for students, although this would go some way to making up for the deficiency

of computers and was mentioned at the last inspection. There is also some shortage of textbooks which restricts opportunities for homework.

96. Accommodation for mathematics is satisfactory. Teachers work well as a team and the leadership of the faculty is good overall. Since the last inspection there has been some monitoring of lessons and there has been improvement in standards particularly at Key Stage 4. In order to improve standards the department should now focus on developing assessment practices and setting more homework.

SCIENCE

97. Standards achieved by the end of each of Key Stages 3 and 4 are in line with national expectations and are above average at post 16. The results of the 1999 National Curriculum tests for all 14 year olds were above the national average for those gaining level 5 and above and close to the national average for level 6 and above. They were below average for schools with similar proportions of students eligible for free school meals. There has been no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls over the last four years. The proportion of students gaining A* to C grades in the 1999 GCSE examinations was in line with the national average with boys achieving a little better than girls. The proportion gaining the highest grades A* and A are below national averages. The results were below the average of those schools having similar proportions of students eligible for free school meals and below those which had students who performed similarly in the National Curriculum tests two years previously. Students made better progress in their other subjects, in comparison with national norms, than they did in science. Recent improvement in the quality of teaching should begin to have an impact on raising standards of attainment.

98. The GCE A Level results were well above average in physics, above in biology and below in chemistry. Since 1997 the results in biology and physics have improved and in chemistry they have remained below average. The first group of a small number of students who completed the GNVQ advanced science course in 1999 did particularly well with all gaining merit or distinction awards. One student had special educational needs. All students apart from two gained at least pass awards on the certificate of achievement in electronics and two thirds gained merit or distinction. A different examination syllabus which is considered to be more suitable is to be introduced for A Level chemistry. Performance so far on the modular A level courses suggests that Year 13 students will obtain similar results in biology and physics as in 1999 and there will be some improvement in chemistry.

99. Students enter the school with attainment levels close to the national average. The effective liaison with feeder schools promotes continuity and ease of transition mid key stage. By the end of Year 9 students have a sound knowledge and a secure understanding of the subject matter in each of the attainment targets. They know about separation techniques and many apply their knowledge to suggest how mixtures may be separated. Higher attainers can identify differences in structures between plant and animal cells while lower attainers can name different forces and describe the effects of them on the motion of an object. During Key Stage 4 and post 16 they continue to make progress which is at least satisfactory and often good in lessons and most Year 11 students know factors affecting rates of chemical reactions and some of them can explain them in terms of particle theory. Higher attainers apply simple inheritance rules and understand how some diseases are inherited and lower attainers confidently suggest explanations for electrostatic

phenomena. A Level biology students have a good knowledge and understanding of protein structure while those studying chemistry apply redox potentials to predict chemical reactions. In one lesson with Year 13 physics students the teacher used a video to consolidate understanding of relativity very effectively. In another lesson GNVQ students competently set up experiments to determine the effects of penicillin on bacteria.

100. Since the last inspection more demanding investigative work is now provided and students in Key Stage 4 and post 16 produce high quality, detailed interpretations and evaluations of their work. They have the numeracy skills they require and their graphical skills are well developed. Post 16 students use ICT competently but some skills are less well developed with younger students because there is not enough equipment to provide 'hands on' experience. Standards of presentation of written work vary according to the demands of individual teachers.

101. The quality of teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection. Over half of the staff are new and in 1999 GCSE students experienced changes of staff during their course. There are a small number of unsatisfactory lessons which have an impact on learning and attainment but teaching is now good or better in three quarters of lessons and very good or excellent in one third. It is consistently good post 16. All the lessons observed with Year 13 students involved active revision and preparation for imminent examinations. Teachers knew where further consolidation was required and used a range of strategies to assist students such as demonstrations, group practical work, videos and careful exposition and questioning. Students benefited from the teachers' very good knowledge of examination requirements to develop techniques in answering questions. Most of the lessons in Years 9 and 10 were well planned with content appropriate for the attainment levels of students. In the unsatisfactory lessons, however, students were offered little challenge and spent valuable time copying directly from the board. Many lost interest and became restless and the quality of learning was weak. In most lessons teachers skilfully question and involve students. They target individual students to draw out information, and to check their understanding. In a few lessons, particularly the unsatisfactory ones, teachers did not use their knowledge of students when questioning them and allowed a few to dominate while others remained passive. Most teachers adopt a lively and enthusiastic approach and use their good subject knowledge effectively to promote learning often by including everyday phenomena in their teaching. Lessons often have a good variety of activities which maintain interest and motivation. In some very good lessons students were fully engaged, working safely and productively in groups to complete a series of short practical investigations. In other lessons, however, where the students were in groups of three or four not all individuals were fully involved throughout. Class management is usually very good and students are kept busy and practical work is managed in a safe, orderly manner. In class support is used very effectively but in one lesson where there were many students with special educational needs, the teacher and the support assistant were unable to meet the immediate demands of all these students needing help. Most students with special needs make good progress because they are taught well in smaller groups and provided with suitable tasks. The quality of homework and marking varies. The best homework provides opportunities for students to show initiative and develop research skills. Students respond positively to the informative feedback given frequently by some teachers.

102. Students' behaviour has improved since the last inspection. No poor behaviour was seen. Most students have positive attitudes to learning which improve as they get older. They co-operate well in groups and in practical work they handle equipment carefully, and work safely and productively without constant close supervision. A Year 10 class of lower attainers thoroughly enjoyed group discussion about the treatment of kidney diseases.

Each individual took on a different role within the group and made sensible contributions. GNVQ students have a very mature attitude and take increasing responsibility for their own learning.

103. The curriculum has more added breadth with the post 16 GNVQ course and electronics at Key Stage 4. It is enhanced by extra curricular activities such as the astronomy club. Assessment procedures are thorough and good use is made of the information in setting targets for students at post 16 but this is less well developed for younger students. Teachers are appropriately qualified and there is a good balance of experience. They are deployed effectively making good use of specialisms. Technicians are well organised and provide good support. The department is well led and managed by a competent and enthusiastic head of department supported by two very able subject heads. Team spirit is very much in evidence with a commitment by all to further improvement. The department should continue to provide more opportunities for development of ICT skills and to make more use of assessment data. Teaching should be monitored in order to disseminate good practice and to ensure that all teaching is satisfactory. Good quality homework is set regularly and marking is useful and constructive. Other issues raised in the last inspection report have been successfully addressed and the department is now in a stronger position to improve further.

ART

104. At the end of Year 9 standards of attainment are broadly in line with the national average. At GCSE results are above average with girls' achieving significantly higher grade passes than the national average. Although boys do not attain as well as girls, they achieve above average results at the higher grades. A Level results have been around the national average for the last three years.

105. In lessons, Year 9 students demonstrate good technical skills and sound knowledge of artists' work. Schemes of work are well considered and help to develop observational and imaginative skills. Work on three-dimensional ceramics is of a good standard. Good observational techniques were observed in a self-portrait project where students were capable of analysing shape, line and tonal variations. Students use a range of media in their work, for example, charcoal, pastel and paint. Over the year, they research the work of a number of artists using CD ROM and the Internet and record their work in folders. At Key Stage 4, standards of attainment are very good. Students' folders and sketchbooks contain evidence of well-developed observational skills and independent learning. They have a good knowledge of artists and various periods of art history. In Year 10 students study the work of various artists and cultures. One student investigated African masks, another studied the work of Escher. Post 16 students achieve good standards of attainment. The work collected for the A Level exhibition is varied and of a very good standard. It includes two and three-dimensional outcomes, including a metal sculpture based on natural forms which shows how sketchbook studies are developed by stages into large scale works. Another sculptural work includes suspended Koi carp developed from a student's earlier observational paintings. Students have a very thorough knowledge of artists, observed, for example, in a Year 13 discussion about the work of Naum Gabo, a constructivist.

106. Standards of attainment have improved since the last inspection. They are satisfactory at Key Stage 3, and have improved significantly at Key Stage 4. Numbers taking A Level have doubled in the past year and standards at post 16 are now good.

Sketchbooks have been introduced for all students and make a major contribution to the raising of standards. Knowledge and understanding of art, its periods and cultural differences have improved since the last inspection, when they were considered superficial. Students demonstrate very good knowledge of art, as in a Year 13 essay which compares the work of Ben Nicholson with Barbara Hepworth. Students are more independent now and there is evidence of individual initiative in homework. A major improvement lies in the leadership and direction provided by the head of department. This has revitalised the work of the department and established a strong post 16 group.

107. Teaching overall is very good. Teachers are well qualified and have a good knowledge of the subject which is effectively used when introducing new skills. In Year 9 class, for example, the teacher demonstrated the techniques of using water colour pencils. Oral assessment during lessons is constructive and supports good progress. This is followed by very good written assessment and students assess their own work using clear criteria. Good quality assessment procedures have a significant effect upon students' learning. Lessons are well planned and teachers use resources appropriately. In a Year 9 class digital photographs are imported into the computer and then distorted to look like the work of Francis Bacon. Special needs students are well integrated and make good progress. Teachers are fully aware of each student's needs. The restrictions imposed by the fifty minute lesson and below average curriculum time have a marked effect on standards at Key Stage 3. There is too little time for teachers to fully address the needs of individual students and encourage them to be reflective. At Key Stage 4, the overall time allocation for art is good and although progress is sometimes constrained by the relatively short periods there are more opportunities for students to develop a project through to its final conclusion. This is encouraged by teachers throughout GCSE and A Level coursework. Good ideas and insights are evident in students' sketchbooks. In a Year 11 project based on the evolution of the horse a student researched work that featured horses, such as in the work of Leonardo De Vinci, George Stubbs and Franz Marc. Good use is made of the art department's computer but this is a limited resource and does not provide for whole class computer based art exploration.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY (DT)

108. The majority of students at the age of fourteen achieve standards that are broadly in line with those seen nationally. Attainment on entry at the age of thirteen, matches the national norm despite the differences in the range of materials used in the feeder middle schools. Attainment is equally sound in both designing and making. Students' knowledge and understanding, combined with practical skills, ensures that products represent well their design work. As a result of close liaison with feeder schools practical skills are developed well with students continuing to show improvement through to the end of Year Nine. All students, in addition to resistant materials, experience either food or textiles and are able to apply designing and making skills which are comparable with students nationally. Students with special educational needs attain in line with their abilities and in some instances make products of a quality exceeding that expected for their age. Higher attainers in all materials areas achieve standards just above the national average.

109. Attainment at Key Stage 4 is broadly in line with the national average and although in most areas the number of students achieving grades A* to C is marginally above average there are fewer who attain the higher grades. Students taking food technology match national expectation overall, however, a higher proportion of girls than boys achieve the higher grades. Students taking the textiles option attain less well although their prior attainment in practical subjects is below average. Those taking resistant materials or

graphic products attain equally well and broadly in line with national levels. The difference between attainment of boys and girls is also evident in these areas with girls once again out performing boys.

110. Students following the A Level design course attain standards above schools nationally. Over the past three years the numbers of students taking the course have been high. In particular the number of girls taking design is extremely high in comparison with other schools. The number of students achieving grades A to C is almost double that for the county and well over twice that achieved across the country. The quality of work produced by students is high.

111. At Key Stage 3 students gain experience in the areas of resistant materials. Some students have experience in food and some in textiles but not both. They develop their knowledge of the design and make process through focused tasks and assignments. Students are able to explain the purpose of simple design drawings, for example, key holders. Those students taking textiles as part of the Year 9 programme were able to describe the design process making use of technical language and describing the consideration given in design to the final user. The majority of students in resistant materials are competent in using basic hand tools, for example hand drills whilst making a key holder and are confident in the use of machine tools, for example the pillar drill. Most students produce adequate design drawings, which clearly represent the intended final product. Students with special needs make good progress, particularly where support is provided, and in many instances perform above the level expected.

112. Key Stage 4 students, including those with special needs, achieve appropriately and in line with their prior attainment. Students taking food technology are able to consider the bread making process, producing a flowchart with multiple decisions represented. They show good knowledge of the properties of ingredients used in the production of bread, for example gluten and yeast. In non-examination home economics classes well motivated students developed their practical skills when preparing and cooking a fruit jalousie. All were aware of the need for safe and hygienic practice. Those taking resistant materials manage to achieve design and make products of reasonable quality despite the limitations placed on them in terms of ICT and availability of basic tools. Most students complete portfolios that show competence in design and a knowledge of methods of construction.

113. Observation of teaching was limited to Years 9 and 10. In nine lessons out of ten teaching is at least sound, in four out of ten it is good or very good. All teachers have good command of the subject and are able to demonstrate competently the skills and processes related to the topic, for example, printing, planing and injection moulding. Preparation and planning, including that for students with special needs, is effective and ensures that progress meets or exceeds expectation. Where teaching is particularly effective expectations are high and students are challenged by appropriate work. In a food technology lesson about the importance of fibre in the diet students working in groups had to assess the characteristics of different types of commercially produced bread. The teacher had planned the lesson carefully and expected students to produce good work which they did. In the best lessons a range of strategies are used to meet the needs of students and monitoring effectively ensures progress and pace. These lessons are taught with enthusiasm, making reference to current and innovative examples of existing products to enhance learning and retain the interest of students. In a Year 10 lesson, for example, the teacher presented a range of bubble packs to illustrate the process and prompt students to apply their previous knowledge and experience. Where teaching is least effective pace is not maintained and the absence of monitoring provides little sense of urgency. There is a lack of clarity about what is expected and by when. Some incorrect

and unsafe practices were observed, for example, students were using machinery without safety goggles, jewellery was not removed and protective clothing, if worn, was not securely fastened. The least effective lessons lacked adequate structure to ensure that learning objectives were met.

114. Learning is satisfactory or better in the majority of lessons. In some lessons good planning enhanced the learning of students with special educational needs. Higher attainers followed the teaching attentively and were able to respond accurately to specific questions. Relationships between students and teachers are good. Teachers understand the needs of students and provide frequent support and encouragement. Students respond positively and the majority display a maturity and application which is reflected in their work.

115. The faculty has made improvements in a number of areas since the last inspection. Teaching is now more consistent in quality. Behaviour overall, and especially amongst boys, has improved as has support and planning for students with special needs. Monitoring of Year 9 and the introduction of target setting are beginning to help students understand how they learn and what they need to do to improve their performance. Standards of attainment are the same as at the last inspection. The under-achievement of boys in comparison with girls is still significant. Some improvements have been achieved in accommodation for food technology through the refurbishment of a room, an increase in storage areas and general decoration. Accommodation and the quantity and quality of equipment still require attention and the storage areas in resistant materials are untidy. The textile room remains inadequate in terms of the range of facilities which are available.

116. Overall management of the faculty is sound. There are a number of experienced and new staff who complement each other well through the expertise they bring to the faculty. Commitment is evident through the considerable work that has been carried out by teachers to improve the quality of accommodation in textiles, food and resistant materials. Technician support for areas within the faculty is inadequate and results in unnecessary pressure on teachers attempting to manage preparation for practical sessions in 50 minute periods. ICT provision is poor and restricts opportunities for students to meet fully the requirements of examination courses.

Child Development

117. Child development is a popular option which is taught by the design and technology faculty at Key Stage 4. Attainment is broadly average and students display an interest and levels of commitment to the subject which are indicative of the skill with which the subject is taught. Teaching in the subject is well planned and resourced. Lessons are structured tightly, using a good range of strategies that are matched appropriately to students' needs. Students relate well to each other and to the teacher who has very good subject knowledge which is imparted with obvious enthusiasm.

GEOGRAPHY

118. Mechanisms are in place to ease the transition for students who enter the school part way through Key Stage 3. Any discrepancies in knowledge and skills are dealt with quickly and students make good progress so that standards by the end of the Key Stage 3 are at least in line with, and in 1999 were above, national expectations. Geography is a

popular option subject in Key Stage 4 and GCSE results in the last two years have been very good. In 1999, 70.1% achieved grades A* to C against a national average of 53.1% and the number of high grades was also above national and school averages. There was no particular discrepancy between the performance of boys and girls and students typically achieved significantly higher grades in geography than in the other subjects for which they were entered. GCSE coursework shows sustained concentration, familiarity with terminology, high levels of understanding and competence both in using geographical skills and in applying representational and mapping techniques. Some students follow a short GCSE course in geography, others include geography in a certificated basic skills course enabling the department to offer comprehensive provision in Key Stage 4. Two sets continue the subject post 16. Very good levels of learning are sustained and, in recent years, the A Level grades have been high. A Level coursework is especially good with in depth and precise individual studies revealing very effective application of geographical knowledge and skills. Standards overall are high.

119. Most students, including some who need and get firm management, clearly enjoy the subject and reward their teachers with willing participation in lessons and through commitment to written work. Geography makes a deliberate and significant contribution to standards of reading and writing, oracy and numeracy. Teachers know their students well and student teacher relationships, especially post 16, are positive and productive.

120. The quality of teaching is generally good, often very good. One lesson which had a great impact on the quality of learning involved a Year 10 class in collaborative group working, sifting through carefully compiled data to decide which of six dairy farms to buy and then, for homework, justifying their choice in a letter to their bank seeking a loan. Much was achieved in a single period - application of geographical knowledge acquired earlier, new ideas about variations in the length of growing season, distribution of precipitation and market factors. There was decision making and creative writing in a well planned, well paced exercise which challenged, involved and interested every member of the class. When the lesson was repeated with a lower attaining group, there were appropriate adaptations - the assessment matrix was partially completed, there was extra instruction - but the lesson was equally well received, equally appropriate and equally valuable and there were few concessions in terms of the requirement for depth, use of appropriate terminology and rapid thinking. A well managed low attaining Year 9 class recapitulated work on rural life in Bangladesh through skilful question and answering before starting an exercise on life for migrants in Dacca. For those who finished, there was extension material, again in the form of creative writing. Such use of case studies, many at local level, typifies and enlivens teaching which has high expectations of students, is well planned, deploys a great variety of teaching strategies, requires precision and so captures and holds students' interest. The quality of teaching in geography is a strength.

121. The department is ably managed and enjoys the benefits of effective teamwork, much as it did in the previous report. Learning resources have improved although progress in the use of ICT in geography is restricted by the limited availability of hardware. A progressive curriculum provides wide coverage and is well planned. Schemes of work take account of students' levels of attainment and there are appropriate and developing strategies for meeting special educational needs and for extending high attainers. There is regular review both of the department's and the students' performance and the quality of marking and assessment is very good. Such monitoring of standards might usefully be extended to the monitoring of teaching so that good practice can be recognised, developed and shared with other staff.

HISTORY

122. This is a well managed and successful department. Effective liaison with feeder schools ensures good continuity within Key Stage 3 and increasing co-operation on the assessment of students' progress. The department has coped reasonably well with a long term absence but there has been a loss of momentum in some classes as a result. In Key Stage 4, the combination of GCSE history and the carefully designed combined humanities entry level course, provides a comprehensive curriculum.

123. The quality of teaching is nearly always good or very good. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed but some non-specialists were less confident when teaching the specific skills of the subject. Post 16 teaching is very good where both teachers are subject specialists. All teachers prepare their lessons well. Lessons have precise objectives, which focus on the knowledge and skills of history. Specialists have very good command of the subject matter. Throughout the key stages students are taught to interpret a range of contemporary sources. They do this in a balanced way using a range of techniques, including judicious use of video material. Teachers challenge students to interpret critically what they see and read. Assessment techniques are well developed and monitoring of students' progress is a strength. Common assessment tasks provide an effective way of reaching realistic end of key stage judgements about what students know and can do. Work is marked carefully. Students have clear, published definitions of what attainment and effort marks mean. They know how well they are doing from detailed written comment on their work which explains what they have to do to improve. Post 16 assessment is particularly thorough and the teacher comments sheets provide students with detailed analysis of strengths and weaknesses for each essay. Specialist teachers rarely miss an opportunity to challenge students. There is effective, targeted questioning to encourage participation. Planned homework tasks grow naturally out of classroom activities. Non-specialists do not always exploit the prepared material so fully and are less secure when teaching students to look critically at sources. All teachers give individual help to lower attainers and know what their needs are which goes some way to compensate for the insufficient level of additional classroom support available for special need students.

124. Students' attitudes are usually very good. Sometimes response is muted and there are instances of disruptive behaviour, which diverts the teacher and inhibits learning generally. Such situations are rare, however and are contained in a calm and patient way. Most students are co-operative and get on well with their teachers. They work effectively on their own, in pairs or small groups. They sustain concentration and respond positively to the care and concern shown by teachers. Most enjoy the subject and expect to work hard. The subject always recruits well in Key Stage 4, against strong competition.

125. The combination of good teaching and co-operative attitudes results in a good level of learning. It is good in Key Stage 3 and even stronger in Key Stage 4, where students make very good progress in relation to the objectives of the GCSE examination. Post 16 students also make good progress. In Year 9 students, at all levels of attainment, learn facts reasonably well and develop good historical skills. Their work indicates that they acquire a sound understanding of time and sequence of events. They learn to appreciate that all sources are important to the historian but that some are more reliable. In a Year 9 lesson about the evacuation at Dunkirk, students became more aware of the context of some of the newspaper reports, cartoons and political speeches and so their perception of bias and the use of propaganda increased significantly. Research skills develop well although the lack of easy access to ICT makes classroom use of CD-ROM material difficult. Essay writing techniques improve, helped by the structured guidance provided by teachers

which is particularly effective with post 16 students who produce well argued essays and detailed investigative studies. Some higher attainers produce fluent, extended written work in the Year 9 common assessment tasks, demonstrating a good grasp of the essential skills of historical writing. Lower attainers manage shorter accounts with simple explanations of cause and effect and reference to evidence sources. Students with special needs make sound progress and when there is a classroom assistant present, they make good progress. Increased individual attention helps them to read the material and complete the tasks. The department uses well this additional but limited support time. There are task sheets catering for different levels of attainment, as well as texts that are more accessible to those with limited reading skills. In the combined humanities course in Key Stage 4, extra in class support is not available in most lessons. The range of special needs and class size creates a demanding teaching situation. Class learning is sometimes hindered by a few attention seeking students and teachers have difficulties in providing the amount of individual support required.

126. Attainment by the end of Year 9 is above average when judged against national expectations and is confirmed by the very reliable teacher assessments at the end of the key stage. In Key Stage 4, attainment is well above the national and local averages. The department has consistently improved on Key Stage 3 levels of attainment. Over the past three years, results have been very good, with two thirds of students securing the higher A* to C grades and all gaining certification across the A* to G range. Although girls do better than the boys both are above national averages. The difference between boy and girl attainment is not as great as that nationally. In 1999 students achieved higher grades in history than in other subjects they studied. Post 16 attainment has improved over the past three years so that in 1999, the average point score was well above the national average for advanced level history. There has been an upward trend in the higher grades. Current student work is at least in line with advanced examination expectations, with some students producing very high quality research work in their personal studies.

127. The department has made good progress since the last report. Teachers have addressed vigorously all of the identified areas for development. There is no complacency and the head of department has set very ambitious GCSE attainment targets for next year. With double the number of students, there are resource issues to be solved for the new advanced schemes of work. Leadership is thoughtful, positive, sensitive and active and every effort is made to develop a team approach. The drive to improve attainment and progress is strong but realistic. Teachers are enthusiastic about the subject and convey this through their teaching and the quality of their departmental planning.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

128. On entry to the school, standards of attainment are below the national average. At the end of Year 9, students achieve national curriculum levels that are broadly in line with the national average. Girls' performance is slightly above boys, but the difference is insignificant. There are no discrete courses during Key Stage 4 and students are taught ICT through subjects. Standards at the end of Year 11 remain broadly satisfactory. Post 16 students achieve good passes in the separate modules of RSA CLAIT and in GNVQ intermediate and advanced key skills.

129. The Year 9 course is thorough and provides a broad range of tasks and opportunities. Students develop good keyboard skills and are confident when using computers, they are accurate and apply good punctuation skills in their work. In a set task,

where they copied a Roger McGough poem, they used good word processing skills to compose their page layouts. Tasks are challenging and high attaining students are fully extended, as in a mathematics related lesson, where students used Logo to demonstrate developing angles and geometrical shapes. Where ICT is taught within subjects students develop a good understanding of its use. In mathematics they competently use Excel spreadsheets to test predictions and discover patterns and relationships. Special needs students achieve satisfactory standards and are supported in lessons by the ICT technician. At Key Stage 4 there is a broad range of ICT coverage. Word processing, desk top publishing, graphics, CD ROM and Internet research skills are used regularly in work with many students using their own computers, scanners and colour printers. Students achieve satisfactory standards of attainment at the end of the key stage. Curriculum use is restricted by limited subject access to the computer suites. There are no facilities for computer aided design, manufacturing processes, or control applications in DT. Where opportunities do exist students achieve good standards, as in Year 11 graphic products where students designed board games using CorelDRAW. Post 16 standards of attainment are good. The majority of students have a good knowledge of a broad range of ICT applications and use this knowledge effectively in their work. In business studies, Year 12 students used 'Publisher' to create a page layout for a wine brochure. They arranged text into columns and imported illustrations accurately.

130. Standards of attainment have improved from below average at the last inspection to satisfactory in both Key Stages 3 and 4. Post 16 attainment is above average. Coverage of ICT has been extended, although there are still weaknesses in computer control applications. Liaison with feeder schools is now well established and meetings are held regularly. The co-ordinator has developed good schemes of work and assessment practices for Key Stage 3. Assessment is less satisfactory across the curriculum during Key Stage 4. Assessment procedures in all post 16 courses are very good.

131. In the lessons observed, teaching was mainly very good. The co-ordinator and his staff work hard to provide a broad and demanding ICT curriculum. Discrete courses are well taught and teachers have a good command of the subject and make effective use of their skills to improve students' learning at all levels. In a mathematics related course using Omnigraph, the teacher provided well constructed worksheets for Year 9 students to explore graphical puzzles. Students are individually supported throughout all lessons which are taught at a brisk pace. Standards of work are good and most students make good progress although the lack of specialist support for special needs students affects their progress. At Key Stage 4, the limitations imposed by the lack of adequate resourcing reduces opportunities for cross curricular applications of ICT and assessment within foundation subjects is weak. The ICT department is well managed and teachers employ good strategies to develop students' learning, as in GNVQ advanced science, where students were questioned about previous work before being set a task that required them to employ different software applications. They used CorelDRAW, Excel and Publisher in a key skills lesson. Relationships within the department are very good and are a strength. A large majority of students enjoy ICT and make full use of the provision offered by teachers, for example the lunchtime website club. Year 9 students have been taught how to construct website pages using Publisher and are developing a school website. In another lunchtime activity, Year 9 students have been taught research skills using the Internet. They have used these skills to write an illustrated account of their trip to the battlefields of Normandy. Their completed work showed they are able to import digital images and download graphics into text.

132. A serious lack of resources limits the extent to which ICT can be used during lessons. The ratio of students to computers is low in comparison to the national average.

The lack of provision is compounded by the quality of most computers which are insufficiently powerful to meet the needs of the curriculum. This seriously restricts students' opportunities to extend their skills and fully develop ideas and investigations using ICT. The ICT rooms are small, badly ventilated and become excessively hot during warm weather. Computer provision has deteriorated since the last inspection.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

133. After a long period of unstable and sometimes inadequate staffing, the modern languages faculty has benefited recently from appointments which have greatly strengthened the quality of teaching and brought in new ideas and energies. As a result the faculty is already more united in its thinking and determined to introduce some of the initiatives which have been laid aside over the past few years in favour of more pressing matters. The faculty is now in a much stronger position to move forward and make further improvements.

134. Examination results in the full GCSE course since the last inspection have remained broadly in line with national averages in both French and German. Consistent with the national picture, girls' results have been significantly better than those of boys. In the past three years around seventy percent of the year group have been entered for the full courses, the remainder following programmes with a reduced content. Students taking a language at A Level in past years have been too few to compare usefully with national figures and results have fluctuated considerably. However, most students capable of a good grade have achieved one, although in most years a few have been ungraded. This was reported at the time of the last inspection and, as a matter of priority, the faculty will need to review the types of courses which it offers to students for whom A Level is unsuitable.

135. By the time students reach the end of Year 9 the attainment of many of them, particularly those in higher sets, is well in line with national expectations. Where the teaching is strong attainment is often better than expected. For example, by the end of a Year 9 lesson students spoke in confident well pronounced French about the things they can do in a town. Thorough teaching using a variety of engaging methods and materials gave everyone a chance to practise the new language. Students were highly motivated, clearly enjoyed learning French and as a result made strong progress. By contrast, however, standards in some lower attaining sets are below expected levels, due to a combination of the poor attitudes of students and some teaching that lacks appropriate challenge.

136. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 follows a similar pattern to that in Year 9. Motivated students, taught rigorously in a calm learning atmosphere, are well on track for higher grades at GCSE. The written work of current Year 11 students, for example, shows a good understanding of the use of different tenses in French and the subtleties of word order in German. Many lower attaining students, however, have lost their motivation through frequent changes of teacher and, in spite of appropriate teaching in most cases, have major gaps in their knowledge and understanding. In some sets, too, there is a very wide range of attainment and attitude among the students. This provides an obstacle to achieving high standards especially where the teaching is not strong enough to engage the interest and command the attention of all students. This is true of the Year 10 Spanish set where attainment is below expectations. Of the four recognised language skills, reading is the one that is least well developed in many students.

137. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection to the point where it is now predominantly sound with a significant proportion of lessons that are good or very good. In a very small number of cases unqualified or inappropriate teaching fails to promote good learning. Teachers are proficient speakers of their languages. When they use the foreign language consistently students show understanding and often have good pronunciation. However, as at the time of the last inspection, teachers do not use the language enough as the principal means of communication in the classroom; nor do they insist enough that students use the language to make simple requests. Much of the teaching is challenging and well suited to the needs of individuals, especially those of higher attainment. Students with special needs and those of lower attainment, many of them boys, are not always given enough opportunity to speak in the language and listen to native speakers on tape for fear that discipline might suffer as a result. ICT is used imaginatively by post 16 students through foreign websites on the Internet. Apart from this, however, the faculty makes little systematic use of new technology for enhancing language learning

138. In the strongest lessons, where students learn quickly, behave well and have positive attitudes, teaching is well planned to give them ample opportunity to rehearse new language and uses a wide variety of methods, such as role play and sentence building. Good learning also depends on a rigorous but civilised management of students, insisting on complete attention and quelling incipient restlessness before it becomes disruptive. Most teachers manage this well, but where there are lapses in rigour or lack of clarity students make less progress and learn little.

139. The effectiveness of teaching, and students' learning, would be enhanced if all members of the faculty had a similar approach to certain items of good practice: more orderly starts and ends to lessons with a brief statement of objectives; more opportunity for students to read freely in the foreign language; a fuller use of listening texts for teaching as well as testing comprehension; a greater awareness of the particular needs of boys in language learning; more opportunities to practise language in pairs and small groups.

140. Good standards are enhanced by the faculty's spacious accommodation located on one corridor and allowing each full time teacher an individual teaching base. The quality of these rooms would be further improved, however, through redecoration and, when funding allows, carpeting to create better acoustic reproduction.

141. The faculty is efficiently managed and its procedures are very well documented. Liaison with the feeder middle schools is very effective. Teachers have supported each other throughout the long run of staffing difficulties and are now a united and industrious team of professionals, sharing ideas, taking on extra tasks and running the visits and exchanges to Germany and France. As a result the faculty is now better placed to take a fresh look at some important issues that have been neglected in the past. These include the policy on marking, assessment and setting of targets for individual students; the monitoring of teaching and ensuring that it is effective in all cases; the training of staff in the use and application of ICT and, most importantly, disseminating the methods that are used in some classrooms for promoting good learning.

MUSIC

142. Music continues to make a very significant contribution to the life of the school and the wider community. The excellent leadership of the department commented on in the last inspection report continues to provide a clear vision and responds dynamically to the changing needs and interests of the students.

143. The quality of teaching in music is very good. It is particularly good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Lessons are based on clear and well organised schemes of work which are imaginatively constructed, rigorously reviewed, and match the requirements of the National Curriculum and examination syllabuses. Teachers have an excellent command of their subject, including a strong working knowledge of a range of instruments and technology resources. Lessons are planned very effectively and the objectives are clearly stated at the outset of the lessons. Teachers demand a high standard of work, particularly at Key Stage 4 and post 16 and students respond by working hard in lessons. GCSE students in Year 10 make considerable mental and creative efforts in their composition work. Group work is productive and the interaction amongst students is very positive. Achievements in lessons would be greatly enhanced if students could work together for a double period instead of the present single periods. Teachers use very appropriate teaching methods for different learning activities. The best lessons are those where the teacher targets individual students, supporting with appropriate advice, demonstration and encouragement and injects suitable pace, as in a Year 9 lesson on Indian music. Teachers give very good feedback to students about their work at Key Stage 3. There are opportunities for reflection and for students to assess their own work at the end of each project. Assessment and monitoring of progress is very strong at Key Stage 4 and post 16 and this enables good but realistic target setting in GCSE listening. Such target setting would be a beneficial feature to adopt at Key Stage 3. Written feedback on compositions and essay work at A Level is detailed, commends strengths and identifies areas where there could be improvement. As a result students have a strong sense of their strengths and weaknesses. Revision lessons at A Level focus on the essential features of essay answers as in a Year 13 lesson on Brahms' orchestral style.

144. Students' attitudes to music are very good, particularly at Key Stage 4, post 16 and in their involvement in the wealth of extra curricular activities. Teachers' interest in and dedication to all aspects of the subject generates a very enthusiastic response from students. This enthusiasm is particularly evident in the wide range of bands and groups initiated and organised by students themselves, such as 'Tributes' and the excellent sixth form Steel Pans Band. Students' enthusiasm for music is also shown in the number who choose the subject as a GCSE option. Students behave responsibly when using school instruments and equipment. They listen to each other respectfully during performances as in a Year 9 lesson on Indian music. These attitudes reflect the high standards of behaviour demanded by their teachers.

145. In the main concentration is good at Key Stage 3 but lower attaining students find it more difficult to concentrate particularly when working without the support of a teacher. Concentration at Key Stage 4 and post 16 is very good. A Level students show a very commendable level of maturity, not only in their work but in all other aspects of the subject.

146. Attainment is average at Key Stage 3. It is above average at GCSE and at A Level, with several aspects well above average. Students join the school in Year 9 with varying experiences of music and make good progress during the year. They play instruments well and confidently. Many can maintain a good pulse and sense of ensemble with other performers, although this is not consistent across the year. At their best, performers listen carefully to each other as in the class performance of 'Krishna and the King of Snakes' where students demonstrated a strong feel for the style of Indian music and one or two

improvisations were very adventurous and imaginative. Students with special needs work well contributing effectively to the overall performance.

147. The standard of attainment in Year 10 is above average. Students working on the Programme Music project show a good grasp of compositional techniques such as use of 'motif' and its development. Some groups are already using these techniques within an effectively atmospheric framework. Musical knowledge is sound and students use terminology correctly. All students achieved a grade in the full or the short GCSE in music in 1999. Sixty nine per cent of students on the full course achieved grades A* to C in line with the national average of 71% for all schools. In addition 70% of students taking the short GCSE course achieved grades A* to C. There is no national data for the short course at present. All students achieved a grade generally in line with their prior attainment. Attainment at A Level is above average and well above in composition. Students' listening skills are well developed and essays show a good analytical approach, a good grasp of music history and style and a high standard of literacy. Compositions are sophisticated with a very well established sense of style and confidence, and good appreciation of timbre and tone-colour. Numbers taking the subject at this level are too few to make meaningful comparison with national figures but the majority of students score highly in the examination and the average point score is well above the national average.

148. Since the last inspection the department has maintained the high standards which are well established in the subject. Accommodation has been upgraded and provides good and flexible spaces for students and teachers to work. Plans have been made to convert a small adjacent room into a technology and recording control room which will enhance the ICT provision in the subject. Teachers and students are mindful of safe working practice with electronic instruments.

149. The subject is well supported by the school management, parents, community and the local education authority. Instrumental lessons are of very good quality. Extra-curricular provision in the subject, including the orchestra, jazz band, choir and windband is of a high standard. Concerts in and out of school and workshops by professional musicians continue to provide excellent enrichment for students.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION (PE)

150. Overall standards of attainment are in line with national expectations. By the end of Key Stage 3 the level of skill in most athletics activities is broadly average although boys achieve higher standards than girls. Levels of physical fitness are good and most students have a clear understanding of the principles of physical fitness. The best standards are seen in lessons where improvements in knowledge, understanding and skill are used to make progress in lessons. For example, in the 'triple jump' in Year 9 boys know the difference between the component steps, understand how to combine them and succeed in raising their standards of performance. Within Key Stage 4 attainment levels are broadly average. In examination groups standards are better with both boys and girls demonstrating abilities in throwing and catching skills. Results in the latest GCSE examinations are above the national average for higher grades. There have been inconsistencies in the performance of girls and boys over the last few years although the overall trend has been upwards. Most post 16 students are making progress at the expected rate and at A Level all students gained a pass grade in 1999. The school produces teams and individual high attainers who are very successful in representative competitions at district and county level.

151. Most students enjoy their PE lessons in school and respond positively to their teachers. Lessons begin with clear explanations or demonstrations that set the objectives for the lesson. Teachers plan lessons well and devise challenging and vigorous activities with realistically high expectations for all students. Questions are expertly posed in order to check on learning and skills are broken down into smaller units enabling students to recognise the components of more complex activities, for example in triple jumping and discus throwing. By setting learning targets in this way, students gain a clear understanding of exactly what to do in order to improve and consequently what progress they are making. Most teaching is positive and encouraging and engages most students well in lessons. It provides a strong framework for raising standards. The overall quality of teaching is good, sometimes very good and occasionally outstanding and as a result learning is also good. Most students behave maturely and work well in pairs and groups. Most work safely in response to the emphasis placed on this by all teachers.

152. The requirements of the National Curriculum are fully met at both key stages. The department works hard to ensure continuity and completion of work at Key Stage 3 taking into account some variations in student experiences prior to entry. Good progress has been made recently in continuing efforts to ensure common learning experiences and assessment targets in partnership with middle schools. The curriculum is reasonably well balanced and is now becoming broader with the introduction of A Level and the new vocationally based courses. The current arrangements for assessment meet requirements. On going developments will ensure that students and parents are given greater detail about attainment and progress and the department will have data on which to base decisions for future planning. The department meets well the needs of all students including those with special educational needs. The programme arranged for one individual student is most responsive and uses sensitively the expertise and resources available. A good range of extra-curricular sports and games enhances the teaching programme with specialist and non-specialist teachers making a valuable contribution in time and expertise. The Junior Sports Leader Award in Years 10 and 11 provides valuable experiences for students in teaching primary age pupils and working with the 'Re-think Disability' group.

153. The PE department is efficiently and effectively managed. Day-to-day activities run smoothly and reflect accurately the well-documented policies and procedures. The head of department has worked hard to make improvements and has a clear understanding of further development needs. In order to sustain and improve standards the head of department needs to be more involved in the deployment of specialist staff than is presently the case. All students will benefit from being taught by the same teacher in both PE lessons. Specialist accommodation is good and resources for learning are in good supply and of good quality. The school should consider access to the changing rooms. At present easy public access puts the safety and well being of students at risk.

154. Since the last inspection the department has worked hard to make improvements. Higher standards are reached in examinations, the overall quality of teaching is much improved and the curriculum currently offered is accompanied by a sound assessment procedure. The department should continue to develop ways of evaluating effectiveness and disseminating good practice. It is now well placed to move forward and consolidate these changes.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (RE)

155. The curriculum for religious education is now in line with the Suffolk agreed syllabus in Key Stages 3 and 4. Although the time allocated to the subject has improved since the last inspection report, it still does not quite meet the syllabus recommendations. The GCSE short course programme beginning in Year 9 is an innovative feature which compensates for shortage of time. The assessment objectives are demanding for many Year 9 students but all will have the choice of taking the examination at the end of Year 11. There is no RE provision for post 16 students. In this respect, the school does not meet legal requirements.

156. The quality of teaching is usually satisfactory in both key stages. Some of the teaching is carried out by non-specialists who, although committed, occasionally feel insecure about some aspects of the courses. Reducing the size of the teaching team from nine to four teachers has laid the foundation for improved consistency. Lessons are well prepared. Teachers generally show care and concern in dealings with students and welcome student responses. Teachers follow new schemes of work which provide a weekly description of content. Some approaches adopted by teachers are more successful than others and this is an area which needs to be developed. In the best lessons students know what they are trying to achieve because the aims of the lesson are written on the board. These lessons provide a range of activities and provide opportunities for involvement and contributions from all students. They are encouraged to give their views and reflect on what they learn. The effective balance between teacher explanation, good oral questioning and sensible classroom tasks help students not only to acquire facts but to learn from religion as well. Some lessons, however, do not provide this degree of stimulus and interest. The emphasis is more on definitions and note making rather than discussion, reflection and the development of a considered personal response to social and moral issues. When there is too little challenge students become listless, bored and fail to appreciate the relevance of the topic. Most books are marked up to date but without much written comment to guide improvement. There is a need to develop existing systems for evaluating and tracking student progress and attainment.

157. Students' attitudes vary considerably. Most behave well, responding to the courtesy of the teachers. Many sustain concentration and show a willingness to learn and the majority have a positive attitude towards the subject. Much depends on the interest and challenge provided by the lesson. A few students do not settle to classroom tasks and cause disruption by calling out and chatting to friends. This diverts teacher attention, slows the pace of lessons and affects the learning of the majority. When given the opportunity to do so, nearly all students work well together in pairs or small groups. They discuss issues sensibly and make appropriate contributions. Some are very perceptive and present their views fluently and at some length.

158. The quality of learning varies according to the style of lesson and the interest generated by the sequence and nature of classroom tasks. It is usually sound and in line with expectations for the age and ability of students in both key stages. Some enjoy the opportunity to discuss and share views. Written work shows appropriate growth in understanding of the main features of Islam, Judaism and Christianity with emphasis on moral and social issues. Students demonstrate a developing appreciation of the common elements across these faiths, particularly moral codes and the importance of relationships. During lessons on prejudice and discrimination, most quickly grasp the key aspects and begin to consider the influences leading to prejudice. They begin to understand the types of discrimination which people face. Some students are sufficiently confident to illustrate this by drawing on the experience of family and friends. In one Year 10 lesson, there was

lively and perceptive discussion about moral and ethical issues surrounding euthanasia and the sanctity of life. Many students show that they are willing to adjust their initial views in the light of telling arguments advanced by others.

159. Most students achieve a sound grasp of religious facts and understand the basic significance of the main signs and symbols of the world faiths they study. They appreciate that despite the diversity of forms of worship, there are some common elements of belief. In their written work and classroom comment, many students show awareness of social issues and have a well-developed sense of right, wrong and social justice. Only a few students currently take the short course GCSE examination. In 1997, more than half secured the higher A* to C grades, with all gaining certification. There were no entrants in 1998. In 1999, although the A* to G pass rate was good, only two of the eight students gained the higher grades - too small a sample to make a realistic comparison with national statistics.

160. The head of department has worked hard to rewrite the outline schemes of work and to manage the disruption occasioned by long term staff absence. There have been some improvements since the last report and recent changes are providing opportunities to raise the status of the subject and improve levels of learning and attainment. Raising standards of achievement and monitoring the effectiveness of teaching should now be priorities. Other areas for development should include more pro-active departmental planning focusing on improvement targets for the whole school. The department should continue to develop a specific assessment and marking policy which ensures consistency and is supported by regular team meetings to share expertise and standardise marking. Room allocation should be reviewed so that students are taught in suitable accommodation. The new GCSE course requires a wider range of teaching and learning materials for students at all levels of attainment. Improved displays would capture the attention of students and clearly identify the RE base.