

INSPECTION REPORT

ST AMBROSE BARLOW RC HIGH SCHOOL

Swinton, Greater Manchester

LEA area: Salford

Unique reference number: 105989

Headteacher: Mr William Livesey

Reporting inspector: Dr K C Thomas
3390

Dates of inspection: 12 – 16 June 2000

Inspection number: 186925

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Shaftesbury Road Swinton Greater Manchester
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr B Bridgen
Date of previous inspection:	22 January 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Kenneth C Thomas	Registered inspector	Special educational needs	What sort of school is it?
			What should the school do to improve further?
			How high are standards? a) The school's results and achievements.
			How well is the school led and managed?
Judith Tolley	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	How well are pupils taught?
Geza Hanniker	Lay inspector		How high are standards? b) Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development.
			How well does the school care for its pupils?
			How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Valerie Banks	Team inspector	Geography	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
John Brigden	Team inspector	Art	
Martin Flatman	Team inspector	Music	
		GNVQ	
Mark Gill	Team inspector	History	
Patricia Hanage	Team inspector	Mathematics	
		Equal opportunities	
Jeffrey Hardman	Team inspector	Design and technology	
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Anthony Pearson	Team inspector	Physical education	
Alan Quinn	Team inspector	Science	
Mary Sewell	Team inspector	English	
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The Office for Standards in Education
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Ambrose Barlow High School is a voluntary-aided Roman Catholic technology school for boys and girls aged 11-16 in the Diocese of Salford and Salford Local Education Authority. The majority of pupils are drawn from four Roman Catholic primary schools serving three large local authority housing estates. The total number of pupils is 661, which means that it is smaller than most secondary schools. The proportion of pupils with English as an additional language, at 0.8 per cent, is low in comparison with schools nationally and all of these pupils speak English fluently. The attainment of pupils coming into the school, although wide-ranging, has shown a steady improvement over recent years and in 1999 was above the national average, overall. The proportions of pupils with special educational needs, at 11.3 per cent, and those with statements, at 0.9 per cent, are both below the national average. The proportion of pupils who are entitled to free school meals, at 13.6 per cent, is broadly average and lower than at the time of the last inspection. The school is popular and oversubscribed: the number of pupils has increased by one third since the last inspection. The school was awarded Technology College status in September 1999.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St Ambrose Barlow Roman Catholic High School is a good school, providing a good quality of education for its pupils. Leadership is strong, purposeful and innovative and there is a shared commitment to continuous improvement and raising standards. Good teaching enables pupils to make the most of the good opportunities provided. Resources are well managed and the school provides good value for money, within a supportive context.

What the school does well

- The head provides excellent leadership and a clear educational direction for the school and is well supported by governors, the senior management team and staff of the school.
- There is a high commitment to continuous improvement.
- School development and financial planning are excellent.
- The school ethos is one in which everyone is valued and there is a high commitment to success.
- The educational and personal support and guidance provided for pupils is very good.
- A wide range of extra-curricular activities, from which many pupils benefit, enriches pupils' learning and personal development.
- The school has excellent relationships with its partner institutions.
- The school makes very good use of new technology.
- The school receives very good support from parents.

What could be improved

- Pupils' work is not always marked in accordance with the school's marking policy and marking does not always provide pupils with clear guidance on how to improve the standard of their work.
- Pupils' end-of-Key Stage 3 action targets are not always related to National Curriculum level statements so that pupils are not provided with clear guidance on the standards they are striving to achieve.
- The Individual Education Plans of pupil with special educational needs do not contain subject specific learning objectives.
- There is a lack of rigour in the assessment of the progress that pupils with special educational needs are making.
- Accommodation for physical education and drama is unsatisfactory.

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 22 – 26 January 1996 and has made very good progress since that time. Standards of attainment in the end-of-Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests have risen at a rate that is consistent with the national trend. The key issues identified in the previous report have all been tackled systematically and the quality of teaching has improved. Pupil numbers are rising and

the school is oversubscribed. The very effective leadership of the head and senior management team, together with good support from the governors and very good planning, has developed clear strategies for raising standards. The school has achieved Technology College status and is well placed to continue to improve its provision and the standards pupils achieve.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 14 and 16 – 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	B	B	C	B
A levels/AS levels				

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Overall attainment in National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 was average when compared with all schools. Standards in mathematics and science are in line with national averages while standards in English are above the national average. When compared with similar schools, overall attainment in the core subjects in 1999 was above average. In comparison with similar schools, attainment in science is average; it is above average in mathematics and well above average in English. Work in art, information and communication technology, history, and modern foreign languages are strengths at this key stage, with achievement in these subjects above national expectations. Achievement in other subjects is in line with expectations.

Overall attainment in the GCSE examination taken at the end of Key Stage 4 in 1999 was average when compared with all schools but above average in comparison with similar schools. Over the past three years, pupils' results have remained in line with the national average. Results in English, mathematics, French, German and history were above the national average while results in science and design and technology were in line with the national average. Results in physical education and geography were below the national average. Standards in information and communication technology are above national expectations by the end of the key stage, while standards in music are below expectations. A high number of pupils with special educational needs achieve at least one GCSE grade. Pupils attain good standards in extra-curricular activities.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils have very good attitudes to school. Pupils enjoy coming to school and this is evident in the vast majority of lessons.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is very good. The majority of pupils behave in a considerate and orderly manner and show respect for others in lessons and around the school.
Personal development and relationships	The very good quality of the relationships amongst all groups is a strength of the school. Pupils are willing to take responsibility and respond positively to the many opportunities provided. This has a good effect on their personal development.
Attendance	The attendance rate is satisfactory and has been consistently in line with the national average since the last inspection report. Nevertheless, the school continues to make strenuous efforts to improve attendance.

Pupils are highly motivated, keen and enthusiastic about learning, both in school time and extra-curricular activities. The willingness of pupils to show initiative and to exercise responsibility is much in evidence in the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching was good or better in 70 per cent of lessons and very good or excellent in 28 per cent of lessons. No unsatisfactory lessons were observed. There are examples of excellence in teaching in history and modern foreign languages in Key Stage 3 and in English, mathematics, modern foreign languages and physical education at Key Stage 4. Teaching of this quality has a significant effect on pupils' attainment and progress. Teachers have good subject expertise and use varied, interesting and challenging teaching methods, which stimulate pupils' interest and commitment to learning. The teaching of basic skills is good across the school and pupils are provided with opportunities to develop their reading, writing, speaking, listening and numeracy skills in most subjects. The use of information and communication technology is being developed in many subjects to aid pupils' learning. There are inconsistencies in marking in some subjects with the consequence that pupils are not provided with clear guidance on what they must do to improve the standard of their work. Although homework is well used to consolidate and extend learning in most subjects, there is inconsistency in the setting of homework in a few subjects. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. However, pupils' Individual Education Plans lack subject specific learning objectives and not all teachers make full use of the information gained from pupil assessment. As a consequence, planning does not cater for the full range of pupils' attainment levels in some lessons. There is insufficient rigour in the evaluation of the effects of the teaching of pupils with special educational needs when they are withdrawn from lessons and taught in individual and small groups. The school has made good progress in improving the quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection report.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum, which meets its stated aims. The curriculum is strongly influenced by the school's status as a Technology College. There are well-managed initiatives, innovative projects and a very good range of extra-curricular activities.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The school makes satisfactory provision for pupils with special educational needs. They are fully integrated into the school community, are confident and feel secure.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The very few pupils with English as an additional language have no language difficulties that require additional support.

Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school makes good provision for pupils' spiritual development and very good provision for pupils' moral, social and cultural development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school has good arrangements for monitoring pupils' academic and personal development. The school takes its responsibilities for child protection and pupils' welfare very seriously and has very good procedures for promoting good behaviour. Health and safety procedures are satisfactory.

Overall, the curriculum is broad and balanced and much improved since the time of the last inspection. The National Curriculum is enhanced in technology, information and communication technology, science and mathematics and there is a strong commitment to the raising of basic skills in literacy and numeracy. A very good range of extra-curricular activities enriches pupils' opportunities and contributes to many aspects of personal development. A very good programme of support and guidance, related to pupils' personal, careers and academic development, helps them to make good progress in all aspects of school life.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The head provides excellent leadership and a clear vision for the future development of the school. This guides the planning and implementation of many initiatives, which enhance the quality of education. The senior management team and heads of department are supportive and effective. The co-ordination of special educational needs is satisfactory.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	They are effective and fulfil their statutory responsibilities. They provide very good support to the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good: there is rigorous monitoring and evaluation of teaching and pupils' progress. This includes the senior management team, heads of department and external LEA officers.
The strategic use of resources	The School Development Plan provides a clear framework for spending priorities. Very good use is made of the school's resources. Non-teaching staff provide valuable support.

Leadership of the school is highly effective. There is a positive ethos in the school and staff at all levels have a high commitment to the raising of standards. Rigorous monitoring of the school's work has brought about significant improvement since the last inspection. The school is a self-evaluating organisation. It has a good grasp of its strengths and weaknesses and has the capacity to make further improvements. Great care is taken over financial planning. External grants and other resources are used efficiently and for the purposes intended.

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 school expects pupils to work hard and achieve their best.• The progress their children are making.• The school is helping their children become mature and responsible.• The good teaching.• The school is well managed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The closeness with which the school works with parents.• The amount of homework pupils are given.• The information the school provides.• Extra-curricular activities.

Parents are highly supportive of the school and inspectors endorse parents' positive views. Some parents had mixed feelings about the closeness with which the school works with parents and the information the school provides. Inspectors found that the school strives hard to involve parents and that the quality of information provided is very good. With regard to homework and extra-curricular activities, inspectors found that homework is set regularly in most, but not all, subjects and homework tasks are not always used to consolidate and extend pupils' learning. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities, in which substantial numbers of pupils participate.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. When the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are taken together, pupils' attainment in the 1999 National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 was average by national standards. There are differences between subjects, with standards in English being above the national average, while those in mathematics and science are in line with it. However, in comparison with similar schools overall attainment in the core subjects in 1999 was above average. Again, there are differences between subjects. Although, in comparison with similar schools, attainment in science is average, attainment in mathematics is above average while attainment in English is well above average. Examination of results over the past four years shows that there are no significant differences in attainment between boys and girls. The average National Curriculum tests point score for all core subjects shows a rising trend over the last four years that is broadly in line with the national trend. Work in English is a particular strength at this key stage and this is reflected in the National Curriculum test results, which have been consistently above the national average. Results in mathematics show steady improvement, particularly at the higher levels, over the last three years. However, results in science show a decline in test scores since 1997 that is steeper than the observed downward national trend. Also, at the time of the last inspection the girls were reaching higher attainment levels than the boys but their performance has since declined to a point below that of the boys. However, the results were in line with the average for similar schools. Comparison of the end-of-Key Stage 2 average National Curriculum test point scores of the pupils who entered the school in 1996 with the average point scores the same pupils achieved in the end-of-Key Stage 3 National Curriculum test in 1999 shows that they had made satisfactory progress. Work in art, information and communication technology, history and modern foreign languages are also strengths at this key stage with achievement in these subjects above national expectations. Achievement in other subjects is in line with expectations. The few pupils with English as an additional language are achieving above average standards and those with special educational needs are achieving satisfactory standards.
2. The 1999 results in the GCSE examinations show that 50 per cent of pupils achieved five or more A* - C grades, compared with the national average of 46 per cent, and 86 per cent of pupils achieved five or more A* - G grades compared with 91 per cent nationally. There has been an increase in the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A*-C grades over the past four years, although the 1999 percentage was just below the 1998 percentage. Similarly, although the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A* - G grades shows a gradual increase from 1996 to 1998, they dropped in 1999 as did the average total GCSE point score. As a consequence, although the 1999 average points score per pupil was close to the national average, the trend in the average scores over the past four years was below the national trend. The general tendency is for the average point score of girls to be higher than that of boys.
3. Standards in English have shown a gradual improvement over recent years. The percentage of pupils obtaining A* - C grades in English language in 1999 was well above the national average while the percentage of pupils obtaining A* - C grades in English literature was close to the national average. Inspection evidence indicates that standards at Key Stage 4 have continued to improve and are above those achieved last year, with particularly good improvement in standards in English literature. In 1999, girls achieved higher standards than boys, which is consistent with the national trend. The standards reached by pupils in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 4 are in line with national averages, although above average in comparison with similar schools. Standards in mathematics have improved since the last inspection and in 1999, the percentage of pupils obtaining the higher A*- C grades was just above the national average. Inspection evidence indicates that this improvement is being sustained. Overall standards of attainment in science at the end-of-Key Stage 4 are broadly in line with the national average. The percentage of pupils achieving A* - C grades was just above the national average while the percentage of pupils obtaining A* - G grades was below the national average. There is a tendency for boys to outperform girls. All pupils with special

educational needs obtained a GCSE grade in the A*-G range in at least one subject and most obtained A*-G grades in several subjects. Comparison of pupils' average point scores in end-of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests with average GCSE point scores shows that pupils are attaining standards at the end of Key Stage 4 that are consistent with their previous levels of attainment.

4. Inspection evidence indicates that standards in many subjects are above average at the end of Key Stage 4. This is confirmed by the 1999 GCSE results, which show that in art, all of the pupils entered for the GCSE examination in 1999, including those with special educational needs, obtained grades in the A* - C range. Following a period of sustained improvement, standards in history were well above the national average as were standards in French. Standards in German are above the national average, while the standards of pupils following the new GCSE drama course and the new GNVQ manufacturing course are above expectations. The proportion of pupils achieving GCSE grades A* - C in design and technology was in line with the national average. Results in food technology have shown a steady improvement over the past 3 years and the percentage of pupils achieving A* - G grades in 1999 was above the national average. Standards in information and communication technology are improving and are above national expectations by the end of the key stage.
5. Although the 1999 GCSE results in physical education show an improvement on those achieved in 1998, they remain below the level reported at the previous inspection. Small numbers of pupils have chosen to take geography as a GCSE subject in recent years and the results have been consistently below the national average. However, as a consequence of action taken by the school management to improve provision in geography, the numbers of pupils taking the subject have risen substantially and inspection evidence indicates that standards are also rising. Standards in music have also been below national expectations over recent years. However, following staffing changes, a GCSE examination course was introduced in September 1999 and there are indications that standards, although below expectations, are beginning to rise.
6. The overall standard of attainment of pupils on entry to the school is average by national standards. Comparisons of pupils' average end-of-Key Stage 2 National Curriculum point scores in 1996 in English, mathematics and science, with those obtained by the same pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 show that pupils make satisfactory progress through the key stage. Similarly, comparisons of pupils' average end of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum point scores with average GCSE point scores at the end of Key Stage 4 show that pupils make satisfactory progress through Key Stage 4. The very small numbers of pupils with English as an additional language are all on the gifted and talented register and are making good progress, as are pupils with special educational needs.
7. Pupils' standards of literacy are above average and are being further improved through the implementation of effective literacy strategies in all subjects. The senior management team display a very good understanding of the implications of national literacy initiatives, both for the curriculum and for teaching methods, and are providing effective leadership in the development of strategies to raise standards of literacy. Staff development has enabled improved understanding of all issues related to raising standards of literacy. A school policy for literacy has been developed and a literacy action plan is being implemented. Linked to this plan are a variety of strategies for improving reading, with information on pupils' reading abilities being provided to all subjects. Use of the library is well integrated with teaching and learning and pupils are able to read and extract information from text and use referencing skills effectively. Subject-specific key words have been identified in order that pupils' learning can be consolidated by their consistent reinforcement. Pupils make good use of specialist vocabulary in most subjects and in art, for example, the knowledge and use of technical language enables pupils to express judgments about the quality of their work. A literacy summer school is due to be held during the school holiday to improve continuity between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 and the school plans to set literacy targets for all pupils this Autumn.
8. Most pupils speak clearly and with a level of confidence that is consistent with and often above expectations for their ages. They listen and talk well to one another, whether engaged in small group and paired work or in whole-class discussion. The writing skills of most pupils are

satisfactory and written work is generally accurate. Pupils write with an awareness of audience and there is evidence of redrafting and extended writing, especially in English and history. There is, however, a need to increase pupils' opportunities to engage in extended writing in other subjects and insufficient attention is given to improving standards of presentation in many subjects. The use of spelling lists in most subjects has enabled good progress to be made in the correction of common spelling errors. A firm foundation has been laid in the development of the school's strategy for improving basic skills and the school is well placed for further development as a pilot school in Salford's Literacy Initiative.

9. Pupils' standards of numeracy are generally in line with expectations. There is a strong emphasis on improving numeracy skills in mathematics lessons in Key Stage 3 and mental arithmetic skills are practised regularly in mathematics lessons. Examples of the effective use of numerical skills were observed in a number of lessons. For example, in geography pupils use their skills for simple representation of data, such as bar graphs, line graphs and pie charts. Measuring and calculating skills are used effectively in design and technology and in science pupils collect data and display results accurately and in a variety of ways. Numeracy skills are further developed in Key Stage 4 and pupils, in information and communication technology for example, are able to write algebraic formulae and use them in spreadsheets. The standards of literacy and numeracy of pupils following the GNVQ manufacturing course are enhanced through the core skills programme. There is no evidence that calculators are over-used by pupils in any subject and when calculators are used, they are used competently. A school numeracy policy is being developed to guide the numeracy strategy and raise standards. As part of this process an audit has been carried out to identify the particular numeracy skills required in all subjects.
10. Overall standards of attainment in information and communication technology are above national expectations at both key stages. Considerable progress has been made in the development of pupils' information and communication technology skills since the last inspection. The use of computers in a wide range of subjects is developing well and this is making a valuable contribution to the development of pupils' skills.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

11. The attitudes and behaviour of pupils, including those with special educational needs, are very good. The substantial majority of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire indicated that their children enjoy coming to school and this is evident in most lessons. Pupils are very enthusiastic about the school and when groups of pupils being interviewed by members of the inspection team were asked if they would recommend the school to their friends, the answer was an unequivocal 'yes'. Pupils report that they like the teaching and find most lessons interesting. They particularly like the calm and friendly atmosphere that is apparent in the school. Parents endorse these views. Pupils show that they are keen to learn and make very good efforts to achieve their learning goals. They sustain concentration, respond well to challenges and are prepared to persevere when work is difficult. For example, in a Year 8 lesson on Chinese calligraphy, pupils listened intently, followed instructions carefully and used their initiative when applying the skills being taught, which led to standards of work that were above expectations for the age group.
12. Pupils' personal development and the quality of the relationships amongst all groups are very good and a strength of the school. Pupils work, study and play well together and are prepared to listen to and show respect for the views of others. Boys and girls readily collaborate with each other when working in small groups and pupils are ready to volunteer to read aloud or report back their findings to the class as a whole. This provides pupils with a great deal of self-confidence and has a positive effect on standards of attainment. This is evident in modern foreign languages, for example, where pupils display enjoyment and great self-confidence in their ability as linguists. They are not afraid to make mistakes and eager to demonstrate to visiting adults their prowess of writing poetry in a foreign language. Pupils support each other very well when working in small groups. In English, for example, the trust that is developed as a consequence of the very good relationships enables pupils to use National Curriculum criteria to assess their own and each other's work. They do this sensibly and sensitively and in the process gain an increased understanding of what they must do to improve the quality of

their own work. Consistent with the school's code of conduct, which states that 'everyone will act with courtesy and consideration to others at all times' and 'try to understand other people's point of view', pupils listen to the viewpoints of others and show respect for other people's points of view. This was evident, for example, in a Year 10 personal and social education lesson where pupils engaged in sensible small group and whole-class discussions on HIV and AIDS. Pupils' attitudes to learning in science are generally good and this is evident both in lessons and in the good classroom displays of pupils' work. However, in a few science lessons pupils were too passive and insufficiently engaged and relied too heavily on directions from the teacher. In design and technology, pupils demonstrate much enjoyment and tenacity when making artefacts and take pride in their work. However, in one Year 10 lesson, the unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour of a small number of pupils had an adverse effect on attainment and progress in the lesson.

13. The behaviour of the vast majority of pupils both in lessons and around the school is very good. Most pupils are courteous, respectful and friendly and there are few incidents of inappropriate behaviour. Pupils generally observe the school's code of conduct and respond positively to the system of rewards and sanctions. Pupils' behaviour and conduct improve as they get older and older pupils provide good role models for younger pupils. They treat their own property and that of the school with respect and are careful when using computers and other equipment. The school makes strenuous efforts to provide support and avoid the need to exclude pupils and the rate of exclusions has been falling. Nevertheless, the challenging behaviour of a small number of pupils is such that it inevitably leads to exclusion from school. As a consequence, during the last school year there were 31 fixed period exclusions. Following a very serious infringement of the school rules, it was also necessary for the school to exclude four boys permanently. Both of these figures are broadly in line with the number of exclusions found in secondary schools of similar size. The school has a clear anti-bullying policy and takes a serious view of any such incidents. Pupils interviewed during the week of the inspection reported that while there had been occasional incidents of bullying, these had been dealt with effectively by the school. They were also confident that any future incidents would be dealt with equally effectively.
14. The willingness of pupils to show initiative and to exercise responsibility is much in evidence. Through the School Council and by acting as prefects, pupils make a positive contribution to the day-to-day running of the school. The head boy and girl and their deputies participate in the selection of prefects and organise prefects' daily duties. Pupils also help with the staging of drama productions and other school events.
15. The attendance rate is satisfactory and has been consistently in line with the national average since the last inspection report. Nevertheless, the school makes strenuous efforts to improve attendance. Analyses of the attendance patterns are carried out and the information obtained is used by year heads, form teachers and the Education Welfare Officer to provide additional support for persistent absentees. Pupils are generally punctual at the start of morning and afternoon sessions and most lessons start on time.
16. The very good attitudes, behaviour and personal development noted in the previous inspection report have all been sustained, as has the satisfactory rate of attendance.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

17. The overall quality of teaching is good at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. In all of the 152 lessons observed teaching was satisfactory or better. At Key Stage 3, teaching was good or better in 60 per cent of lessons and very good or excellent in 21 per cent of lessons. Teaching was slightly better at Key Stage 4, where 75 per cent of lessons were good or better and 39 per cent of lessons were very good or excellent.
18. Teaching is very good in drama, information and communication technology and modern foreign languages and good in English, mathematics, art, geography and music at both key stages. Teaching in history is very good at Key Stage 4 and good in Key Stage 3. In science teaching is good in Key Stage 4 and satisfactory in Key Stage 3. Teaching in other subjects is

satisfactory, although there is a substantial amount of good teaching in all subjects. There are examples of excellence in teaching in history and modern foreign languages in Key Stage 3 and in English, mathematics, modern foreign languages and physical education at Key Stage 4. Teaching of this quality has a significant effect on pupils' attainment and progress.

19. Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach and draw on them effectively to plan their lessons, provide clear explanations and give appropriate guidance to pupils. In mathematics, teachers carefully structure explanations so that, for example, a Year 10 class was able to make good progress in their understanding of quadratic equations. In design and technology, teachers made good use of a ready-made product to explain quality and manufacture to a Year 8 class. In modern languages, teachers use French or German very effectively and often exclusively in lessons to develop pupils' listening skills, reinforce learning and enable pupils to identify and apply patterns in the languages for themselves. In art, teachers help pupils to recognise the visual effects they are developing in their work and give expert guidance in techniques used in calligraphy, wax carving, charcoal drawing and painting in acrylics. In English, teachers used their subject knowledge well to guide Year 9 pupils in their investigation of Steinbeck's novel 'The Pearl' and Year 7 pupils in their exploration of character in the novel 'Paper Tigers'. In geography, teachers develop pupils' understanding through clear presentations and explanations, for example in their study of Japan and energy sources. In physical education, effective demonstrations provide good support for pupils' learning. For example, in a Year 8 lesson the teacher's detailed knowledge of javelin throwing enabled pupils to make good progress in learning the throwing technique. However, in some science lessons there is an undue preoccupation with procedures rather than with the explanation of concepts and ideas, which delays the development of knowledge and understanding.
20. The teaching of basic skills is good across the school. In mathematics, teachers start lessons with activities to improve recall and pupils' mental agility and make good use of 'Successmaker' to develop pupils' numeracy skills. Numeracy is also developed through measuring and judging proportion in art and design and technology and in interpreting data in geography and science. In English, modern languages, geography and physical education, pupils are encouraged to talk about their work and teachers use a range of strategies to develop pupils' written work; for example, key words are listed on a wall in the geography area. Reading is developed in many subjects and pupils often read in pairs or groups or read aloud to others. The use of information and communication technology is being developed in many subjects to aid pupils' learning. For example, in geography Year 7 pupils use information and communication technology to carry out research and handle data in their local studies. The effective teaching of basic skills is a feature of the GNVQ manufacturing course in Key Stage 4.
21. Lesson planning is good. Teachers plan their lessons effectively and in many cases share their objectives with pupils. As a result, most pupils are clear about what they are doing and are fully involved in their learning. In art, for example, good demonstrations provide pupils with the steps they need to achieve tasks and in modern languages very well sequenced activities enable pupils to build on previous learning and use new language confidently. In science, geography and history, teachers provide a good variety of activities which maintain pupils' interest, and in physical education, pupils are given planned opportunities for reflection on the progress being made. Good lesson planning and clear explanations which support pupils' learning are features of lessons in design and technology. Very good lesson planning in information and communication technology ensures that there is a clear focus on what pupils will know, understand and will be able to do by the end of each lesson.
22. Teachers' expectations are generally appropriate and challenging. In mathematics, for example, pupils are expected to explain the methods they are using and in modern languages pupils are expected to use French or German in lessons and to explain patterns in the languages. Pupils at all attainment levels rise to the challenge and make very good progress. For example, classes containing mainly pupils with special educational needs were able to use French and German to exchange information and describe people to their partners. Similarly, a Year 10 class rose well to the challenge of expressing their ideas through the writing of poetry in German. Teachers make good use of questioning to consolidate and reinforce pupils'

learning. Skilful questioning was seen in art, history, science and modern languages. However, in a few science and mathematics lessons, pupils' capabilities were not fully taken into account in teachers' planning, so that activities did not always provide an appropriate challenge with the consequence that some pupils found tasks too difficult while others found the tasks too easy.

23. Teachers use a good range of strategies to enable pupils to learn and develop skills. Paired and small group work is used well in many subjects. For example, good use is made of small group discussion for pupils to practise French or German in modern languages. Small group work is also used to undertake investigations in science and to discuss ideas and solve problems in geography and history. In English, Year 9 pupils worked effectively in small groups when discussing novels by John Christopher. Group work is also used effectively in science, physical education and in personal, social and health education to increase pupils' levels of understanding. A variety of games and songs are used effectively in modern languages to motivate and engage pupils and help to improve pupils' confidence in using French and German.
24. Classroom management and organisation are usually good and relationships between pupils and their teachers are very good. For example, in modern languages, geography and history, teachers create a very supportive atmosphere where all pupils, including those with special educational needs, feel secure enough to be able to offer suggestions, take risks and not be afraid of making mistakes. In art and English, teachers engage pupils' interest and pupils work confidently and independently to complete tasks. In physical education, lessons are well organised, with concern for safety, and conducted in a manner which encourages pupil participation. However, in a few lessons in design and technology and science, weaknesses in planning led to a lack of involvement and unsatisfactory behaviour by a small number of pupils.
25. Teachers make good use of a variety of resources to stimulate pupils' interest and to make explanations clear. For example, teachers make good use of such things as the overhead projector, video clips and information and communication technology when making demonstrations and to illustrate ideas. This underpins the development of new knowledge and skills and the progress that pupils are making. In the majority of lessons teachers make good use of time and set deadlines for tasks to be completed. This provides an appropriate challenge to pupils and helps to maintain a good pace in lessons. In physical education and science, time is often allowed for pupils to review their work, which helps to consolidate learning and helps pupils to make progress. Teachers make increasing use of information and communication technology as a teaching and learning resource. In geography, for example, a Year 7 class made effective use of the Internet to gather information on the local water supply. Similarly a Year 7 class in English made good use of the Internet to gather information on Sir Walter Raleigh. Information and communication technology was also used effectively with a class of lower attaining Year 10 pupils in mathematics, who were able to use spreadsheets to record their investigative findings and to present these findings in the form of pie charts.
26. Marking is well used in several subjects to give pupils clear information on the standard of their work and on what they have to do in order to improve. Pupils' self-evaluation and peer assessment are features of teaching in English, art and physical education and help pupils to gain an understanding of the criteria used in assessing work. However, there are inconsistencies in marking in several subjects, including English, mathematics, geography and physical education, where marking is generally encouraging but lacks the constructive comments needed to enable pupils to improve. Pupils in Key Stage 3 are not sufficiently aware of National Curriculum levels or their progress through them and marking is not usually linked to them. Although homework is well used to consolidate and extend learning in most subjects, there is inconsistency in the setting of homework in mathematics and in some science lessons there is insufficient consolidation of learning before moving on to a new topic.
27. The quality of teaching of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. Most pupils with special educational needs are confident and often ask thoughtful questions in lessons, which help to consolidate their own understanding of the work being undertaken. Pupils with special educational needs are generally taught in normal classes. In most of these lessons, teachers are aware of the general targets in pupils' Individual Education Plans and take account of

these in lesson planning. However, there is a need to translate these general targets into subject-specific learning objectives in order that the full range of pupils' attainment levels is taken into account in teachers' lesson planning. When pupils are occasionally withdrawn from lessons and taught in individual and small groups, they receive good support for specific skill development. However, insufficient rigour in the evaluation of the effects of this teaching makes it impossible to make accurate statements about the progress that pupils are making.

28. The school has made good progress in improving the quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection report. The quality of teaching was then judged to be satisfactory, with much that was good or very good but some that was unsatisfactory or poor. The strengths identified in the previous report have been sustained, while improvements have been made in the areas of weakness. The overall quality of teaching is now good, with much very good and some excellent teaching and none that is unsatisfactory. The need to extend the range of teaching and learning styles so that more opportunities are provided for the development of learning skills in all subjects was identified as a key issue for action in the last report. In response to this issue the school has taken positive action to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning and to identify the ways in which pupils learn most effectively. As a result of the school's actions and initiatives to build on its strengths, spread good practice and share ideas, there has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching and learning overall and in particular in geography, music, information and communication technology and modern languages. However, there is still room for improvement with regard to the use of Individual Education Plans by subject teachers and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the individual and small group teaching of pupils with special educational needs.

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

29. The overall curriculum of the school is good. It meets statutory requirements for all subjects and provides equality of opportunity for all pupils. The curriculum is broad and balanced at both key stages and there are good opportunities for pupils' personal development. The school has made substantial progress in its curricular provision since the time of the last inspection. The structure of the teaching day has been reviewed and the total weekly teaching time extended to 26 hours and 15 minutes, which exceeds government recommendations. All departments have adequate time to teach their subjects.
30. As indicated in the school prospectus, the curriculum model has been strongly influenced by the movement of the school towards Technology College status, which it obtained in September 1999. This means that the National Curriculum is enhanced in technology, information and communication technology, science and mathematics. There is also a commitment to the raising of basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Monitoring of the curriculum is effectively carried out by the curriculum working party and by regular reports from the technology college co-ordinator to the senior management team.
31. At Key Stage 3, pupils are taught all the subjects of the National Curriculum, including religious education, as well as drama and personal and social education. Pupils are taught in mixed attainment groups in Year 7 and then taught in sets based on attainment levels in some subjects from Year 8. This arrangement suits the needs of most pupils. All pupils study a modern foreign language, with French or German alternating as the main language. In Year 8, pupils are given the opportunity of studying a second foreign language. The impact of technology college status is having a beneficial effect in broadening the curriculum. Since the last inspection, provision for information and communication technology has improved considerably. Information and communication technology is now taught as a discrete subject in Key Stage 3 and lessons in the subject are being increasingly supported by the use of information and communication technology in most other subjects at both key stages. Provision for information and communication technology is an emerging strength in the school and is particularly well used in design and technology, mathematics, history and geography. However, it is at present insufficiently used in music and modern foreign languages.

32. Curricular breadth at Key Stage 4 is ensured by pupils having to study a common core of subjects: English, mathematics, double science, technology, modern foreign languages, physical education, religious education and personal and social education. The range of options offered has been extended since the last inspection to better suit the needs of all pupils and to place an increasing emphasis on the vocational contexts of learning. A GNVQ in manufacturing has been introduced and more GCSE options are available through the offering of child development, drama, music and information and communication technology. Some parents and pupils expressed the view that the option arrangements limit pupils' choices. However, inspection evidence indicates that few pupils do not get their first choice. The curriculum for physical education is satisfactory but as at the time of the previous report it is restricted by the lack of suitable facilities for individual activities. Dance is no longer taught as part of the physical education curriculum owing to a lack of teaching expertise.
33. A key strategy in provision for pupils with special educational needs is the reduction of class sizes in order to allow all staff to address the needs of these pupils most effectively. In order to support this strategy, staff development time has been devoted to the development of appropriate teaching methods to meet the needs of pupils of all levels of attainment. Included in these is a school programme for literacy, which is designed to improve reading and writing in all subjects, and there are indications that this has had positive effects on pupils' reading and writing skills. The needs of higher attaining pupils have been catered for through a specific development plan for these pupils. Through its recent involvement in Salford's 'Excellence in Cities' initiative, the school has made very good progress in identifying and providing for gifted and talented pupils and has established a very effective system of 'learning mentors'. The extensive work undertaken in both areas is already having a positive impact on the attitudes, motivation and standards of the pupils involved. Parents at the pre-inspection meeting spoke favourably of the provision made for pupils with special educational needs. The programme for personal and social education is satisfactory. It is carefully planned and covers sex, health and drugs education. Teachers are provided with resource materials that enable the programme to be taught satisfactorily by form teachers. Effective use is made of outside speakers as part of the programme.
34. Curricular planning is good and the school has excellent relationships with its partner institutions and effective arrangements to ensure that there is curricular continuity between the key stages. Close liaison with the primary schools helps to ensure continuity between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. This is particularly good in English, for example, where the literacy strategy bridges the two key stages. This will be underpinned by a Summer Literacy School to be held in August. Year 6 pupils in each of the primary schools are also attending information and communication technology lessons after school on a rotational basis and this not only improves pupils' skills in information and communication technology before entry to the school but also provides a bridge between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. The school is also working with the Hospital School so that pupils in hospital can benefit from such things as video conferencing. Similarly, good curricular links have been established with schools and colleges offering post-16 provision and pupils are well prepared to move on to the next stage of their education.
35. In response to the pre-inspection parents' questionnaire a number of parents disagreed with the statement that 'the school provides an interesting range of extra-curricular activities'. However, inspection evidence shows that the range of extra-curricular activities provided by the school is very good and that the school makes good use of the local community. Visits are made to the theatre, museums, art galleries, poetry readings and concerts. Pupils engage in climbing, fell walking, orienteering, caving, canoeing and night navigation under the care of Salford Exploration Group, which is based at the school. Foreign visits include ski trips and visits to France and Germany by the modern languages department and the science department undertakes fieldwork in France. The school has a thriving youth theatre, which gives annual productions, and pupils are involved in a number of collaborative community activities such as the Salford Arts Festival. Pupils' artwork is displayed in Hope Hospital and the Salford Education Offices. The school is very alert to opportunities for pupils to take part in national competitions for art, poetry, music and creative writing. Visits from professional artists, musicians and dancers and theatre-in-education companies and close links with the Halle Orchestra extend pupils' cultural appreciation and provide pupils with opportunities to work with

outstanding performers. The physical education department offers a wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities and there are history, science and information and communication technology clubs. Year 11 pupils are appreciative of the homework club and after-school facilities offered to help them improve their examination grades. They are particularly appreciative of the 'learning mentors', who are based in the library and provide both individual support and group revision after school and a variety of resource materials to support individual pupils' learning in a variety of subjects.

36. Provision for careers education and guidance is good and enhanced by the excellent links the school has developed with post-16 institutions. The careers programme is effectively co-ordinated and based on well-structured careers units, which are taught as part of the personal and social education course. A 'World of Work' event is provided for pupils in Year 9 with help from national organisations and the local business community. At Key Stage 4, the programme includes two week's work experience for pupils in Year 10. Work experience is enhanced by the requirement that pupils make formal applications and attend interviews in order to secure work experience placements. There are very good links with careers service personnel, who interview Year 11 pupils individually, and the careers section in the library has been extended to support careers work. Planned developments include the provision of careers information through the school's computer network.
37. The school's mission statement shows its clear commitment to developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness and overall provision for that is very good. It is underpinned by the Catholic Christian framework, which influences the school's planning and development and is much in evidence in the general school ethos. It is a caring community in which pupils feel secure, valued and respected.
38. Provision for spiritual development is good. The religious life of the school and religious education clearly play major and valuable parts in the development of spirituality. There is a good, thoughtful programme for assemblies and worship, which is centred on a theme for the week. During the week of the inspection the theme was Pentecost. Each year-group has one assembly a week and an act of worship is an integral part of the assemblies. On other days pupils have prayers in their form period. In the acts of worship observed each had the potential for a spiritual experience: some were successful but in others the opportunity for considered reflection was lost by a somewhat hurried and routine approach. The theme of Pentecost was not always addressed. Pupils have opportunities to attend Mass, prayer and liturgy groups and to participate in residential retreats. Every four years there is a whole-school mission. Religious education makes a very significant contribution in the provision for spiritual development but opportunities are missed in other subjects. Although there are good examples of pupils' spiritual development being promoted in subjects such as English, music, modern languages and history, there is a need for a greater awareness of opportunities to explore non-religious aspects of spirituality, such as mankind's achievements and the magnificence, mystery and wonder of the natural world in other subjects.
39. Provision for pupils' moral development is very good. There is a clear framework of values, based on the religious principles of the school, which is reflected in the daily life of the community. The code of conduct is known to all pupils and regarded as fair and appropriate. Staff provide good role models and pupils understand what is expected of them in terms of behaviour and of respect and consideration for others. Moral issues are raised and discussed through a range of subjects and highlighted in some assembly themes. The work covered in religious education plays a significant part in the provision of moral development. It provides opportunities for pupils to study the religious impact on moral behaviour and explore their own moral codes. This is supported in the programme for personal and social education. Other strong contributions come from English, history and geography. Moral development is also enhanced through a number of charitable activities, including a long-term commitment to supporting the work of the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development.
40. Provision for social development is very good. Pupils are provided with many opportunities to develop self-confidence and self-esteem and show initiative. These opportunities feature regularly in lessons and include not only such things as role-play in English and history but also service on the Year and School Councils, community work, fund-raising for charities, extra-

curricular activities and the school activities week and, for Year 11 pupils, the prefect system. Pupils are encouraged to work collaboratively in many subjects. They are given every opportunity to relate positively to one another and to teachers and visitors to the school. Aspects of the personal and social education programme also develop pupils' awareness of social issues, such as bullying, stealing and drug taking. It also looks at the importance of community and citizenship. Other issues of social consequence are tackled across the curriculum; for example, the impact of environmental issues on people's lives is considered in art, science and geography.

41. Provision for the development of pupils' cultural awareness is very good. At the last inspection there was a call to 'enhance the cultural dimension of the curriculum and pupils' wider cultural awareness'. An understanding of pupils' own culture continues to be generally well supported through the broad curriculum and there has been considerable improvement in the development of a wider cultural awareness. Contributions to the latter include large and successful productions, such as the Mardi Gras evening, theatre trips and visits to France, Germany and Italy. Activities week includes aspects of other cultures, such as a steel band. Displays about the school show relevant aspect of other cultures, for example, Japanese exhibits and the Civil Rights Movement in America. In drama some African artefacts are used to stimulate pupils' imagination as they create dramatic themes. Religious education includes a study of other faiths and leaders representing some of these have visited the school. In art, both western and non-western traditions, for example Chinese art, are studied. The curriculum in music makes a significant contribution through exploring culturally and geographically diverse music from a variety of countries, including India and Indonesia.
42. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. Provision for information and communication technology has been enhanced in Key Stage 3 and extended in Key Stage 4. The quality of provision in geography and music has been improved and the cultural dimension of the curriculum has been widened so that pupils are provided with an enriched range of cultural experiences. Attention has also been paid to the key skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening, which now form part of pupils' learning experiences in most subjects of the curriculum.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

43. The school takes its responsibilities for child protection and pupils' welfare very seriously and complies with the procedures recommended by the local education authority for child protection. The school provides a supportive environment in which to learn. Following discussion at staff meetings, the governing body has recently reviewed and updated the school's child protection policy. Teachers are alert for any behaviour changes that might give cause for concern and the school maintains close links with the relevant child protection agencies.
44. Continuity in care is a feature of the school's pastoral system. It is built on the role of the form teachers. In order to ensure that pupils have stability when they are settling into the school form teachers stay with their forms for the first two years they are in the school. Form teachers change at the start of Year 9 and, in order to ensure continuity as pupils move from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 and then through Key Stage 4, these form teachers stay with their groups for the remainder of their time in school. Pupils are in contact with their form teachers every morning for registration and form time and for their weekly personal, social and health education lessons. As a consequence, teachers develop a very good knowledge of individual pupils and their particular social and educational needs. This knowledge underpins the school's provision for pupils' personal development, which is a strength of the school. Heads of year also play important roles in ensuring continuity in care. The heads of Years 8-11 move with the years to which they are attached and so are able to provide good support for form teachers through the very good knowledge of pupils and their families which they develop over the four-year period. Continuity at the time of transfer from the primary schools is ensured by the head of Year 7 remaining as the head of year for each incoming year group. This allows the head of Year 7 to build up close links with the primary schools and both parents and heads of primary schools believe that this is an effective arrangement and that the school induction procedures,

for both pupils and parents, are very good. Additional pastoral support is provided by members of the senior management team, who are allocated to each year group, and by the two deputy head teachers, who each have responsibility for a key stage. Good support is also provided to pupils through the learning mentor scheme, which is part of the 'Excellence in Cities' initiative, and pupils are appreciative of the help they receive to improve the standards of their work. The success of the scheme is evidenced by the self-referral of several pupils who, although not originally identified to be part of the scheme, want to join.

45. Overall procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are good. A very good system is used to collect assessment information about pupils' attainment on entry to the school, including Key Stage 2 National Curriculum test results, reading scores and cognitive ability test scores. Although in many subject areas there are good assessment procedures, there is some variation in the consistency and quality of practice. Assessment procedures are good in modern foreign languages, English, mathematics, information and communication technology and history. Marking in English and information and communication technology, for example, is closely linked with National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades and teachers keep detailed records to monitor pupils' progress and to build a helpful picture of their strengths and weaknesses. The use of pupils' self-assessment strategies is also effective in these subjects as part of a drive to involve pupils in reviewing the standard of their own work. In English, pupils are taught how to mark and grade each other's work to develop their self-assessment skills. In a minority of subjects there is no established procedure for ensuring that marking is used and applied in a consistent way and to make reliable judgements about the standards of pupils' work. Procedures for the identification and assessment of pupils with special educational needs are good.
46. Overall, the use of assessment information is good. At a whole-school level, there is a very effective system for collecting and analysing information about pupils' prior attainment and this is used to set attainment targets at both key stages. A rigorous process is used to forecast pupils' end-of-Key Stage 3 attainment levels in core subjects. At Key Stage 4, these data are used effectively to set challenging but realistic targets for pupils based on their predicted GCSE subject grades. The data are also used for each GCSE subject to predict the percentage of pupils gaining A* -C grades, A*-G grades and the average point score. This information is effectively used to inform teaching and planning in English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology, modern foreign languages and history. The use of target setting for both groups and individual pupils at Key Stage 4 is well established but the use of target setting at Key Stage 3 is at an early stage of development. There is variation in the use and quality of 'action targets' in written comments in pupils' books and in other feedback. These targets are not always related to National Curriculum level statements and this makes it difficult for pupils to know the standards that they are working towards and striving to achieve. Detailed records of attainment and progress kept by the majority of subject departments enable them to form a reliable and accurate picture of pupils' attainment. End-of-Key Stage 3 assessment is satisfactory and statutory requirements are met. A careful analysis of end-of-Key stage results is helping subjects such as science to review trends in pupil attainment and to make informed judgements about whether standards are high enough for all pupils in a teaching group or year group.
47. Assessment information is used efficiently to prepare reports for parents as a part of each pupil's Record of Achievement. Overall, reports to parents are good, although there is variation in the usefulness and clarity of information in some subjects. Reports are good or better when comments provide a precise indication of a pupil's strengths and weaknesses, how these relate to National Curriculum levels and what needs to be done by them to improve the standard of their work; but this is not always the case. The school is efficient in monitoring pupils' academic progress. Each year, in the autumn term, their progress is reviewed and form teachers analyse the subject performance of all pupils in their form groups to identify the individuals that are underachieving. Pupils' progress is effectively measured against their predicted end-of-Key stage target and there is a good mentoring system in the school for those who need additional support. Pupils' progress is monitored closely during any period of learning difficulty. The value of National Records of Achievement is well understood and used by teachers and pupils. The school has recently been commended by the Salford Accreditation Board for the quality of its work in this respect. Assessment has been highlighted as a priority

for improvement in the current School Development Plan and the assessment policy has been revised. This will help to guide practice and to establish a thorough and consistent approach, particularly in the use of marking and for target setting at Key Stage 3.

48. The school has a well-understood system of rewards to support pupils' behaviour. The rewards and sanctions are seen as aids to foster self-discipline and the creation of a good atmosphere for teaching and learning. The school's code of conduct is clear and simple and pupils understand it very well. It is prominently displayed in all areas of the school and included in pupils' homework diaries. Great stress is laid on fairness and the importance of acting in accordance with Christian values. The teachers fulfil these aims very well and the pupils hold them in high regard for it. A detailed record of all incidents is kept. The pastoral team reviews the record regularly and governors are kept well informed through the Pupil and Welfare Committee. The school places great emphasis on the need for pupils to be in regular attendance and is making strenuous efforts to improve pupils' attendance. The school has agreed and set attendance improvement targets with the local education authority. A 'first-day response' has been initiated so that parents are contacted immediately a pupil is absent without notification. Records of attendance are maintained in pupils' homework diaries, which are signed by parents and teachers every week. Parents are also informed about the attendance rate of their children in the interim and end-of-year reports and in the Record of Achievement. Good attendance is recognised as part of the school system of merit awards. Special awards are made to pupils who are in full attendance over a whole term, which a high proportion of pupils achieve.
49. The school succeeds very well in fostering the pupils' personal development and in raising their achievements. The school has a long tradition of negotiating and setting targets with its pupils to enhance their self-esteem and academic progress. Significant opportunities are provided to pupils to demonstrate their talents as editors and contributors to the school's 'Pupil Zone' magazine. This is a substantial volume and enterprise where judgement, good taste acceptable to a wide range of readership, initiative and achievement are on display. Pupils have to negotiate with other pupils regarding the quality of their contributions and the editors have to meet deadlines for publishing. It offers an insight for the editors and contributors into the real world and for fellow pupils and adults into what interests and worries the young people and how they think about a wide variety of issues. The overwhelming majority of parents express the view that the school is helping their children to become mature and responsible.
50. The school has maintained and enhanced the good standards of care provided for pupils noted in the previous inspection report. Parents are now provided with copies of their children's annual reports as a matter of course and there is increased rigour in the collection of assessment information.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

51. The school has built up a good and effective partnership to support pupils' learning. Responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire and comments made at the pre-inspection meeting with parents show that the vast majority of parents have very positive views of the school. In particular, parents feel that the school expects pupils to work hard and achieve their best and that as a consequence their children are making good progress. Parents also feel that the school is helping their children to become mature and responsible and that this is due to good teaching and effective management.
52. The school has good links with most parents and teachers have a good knowledge of pupils and their families. This provides a considerable support to pupils' learning. The school is welcoming to parents and, in response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, the majority of parents expressed satisfaction about the approachability of the school. The school provides very good quality information to parents that is both academic and organisational in nature. The school prospectus is well produced and provides parents with much useful information when their children are transferring from the primary schools. Through pupils' homework diaries, newsletters, reports and parents' evenings, parents are kept well informed about both school events and their children's progress. Form teachers and heads of year maintain personal contact with parents during the year and there are good lines of communication. School reports clearly identify the levels and grades at which pupils are working and the

progress they are making. Parents' evenings and other functions, such as annual music and drama productions, curriculum evenings, open evenings and information and communication technology classes, are well attended. Attendance at parents' evenings is recorded and charted against previous years so that the school can monitor the effectiveness of the evenings and identify any gaps in communication with parents. Surveys of parental attitudes to school or school issues are conducted regularly and the information obtained is taken into account in school planning and decision-making. There is an active parents and teachers association, which meets monthly, and through its various activities raises substantial additional funds for the school each year.

53. The school has made satisfactory progress in its partnership with parents since the last inspection report. The good links with parents noted in the previous inspection report have been strengthened and through these links and such things as the surveys of parental opinions and attitudes that the school undertakes the school and parents are working together to improve the quality of education the school provides.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

54. The overall management of the school is very good. The head provides excellent leadership and a clear educational direction for the school. The school mission statement pledges the school to provide, within a Catholic framework, an academic and vocational curriculum that prepares pupils for life in an increasingly technological society and to develop in pupils the willingness to take responsibility and to look for opportunities to improve the quality of life of others less fortunate than themselves. The school aims to be a distinctive technologically advanced organisation, providing leadership and support for its neighbours by seeking innovative ways of making the family of schools, of which it is a part, technologically self-sufficient while providing a range of services to the community. The school is achieving a good measure of success in relation to its mission statement and achieved Technology College status for four years from September 1999. The school is also in the final stages of accreditation for the Investor in People award. The school has a very good ethos and provides a well-ordered learning environment in which everyone is valued and there is a strong commitment to raising standards. The effectiveness of this is evident in pupils' attitudes and behaviour, their enthusiasm for school and their interest and involvement in activities, as well as in pupils' personal development and relationships, which are all very good.
55. Effective management is seen as fundamental to establishing a culture within which there is a constant focus on raising standards and improving the quality of education the school provides. For example, decisive management action has brought about significant improvement in the quality of provision in music and geography. All development planning is guided by the mission statement, which is reflected in the principles and values that underpin all development objectives. There is a series of meetings each term, which collectively contribute to planning, monitoring and evaluation in the school. Working parties on the curriculum, special educational needs, information and communication technology, assessment, the technology college and the 'excellence in cities' initiatives meet every four weeks and are required to present reports to the senior management team. There are regular meetings of subject departments and again, termly reports are required to be presented to the senior management team. Through these meetings and through heads of department meetings, pastoral year team meetings and pastoral management meetings, all staff are provided with very good opportunities to participate in planning and making decisions. The School and Technology College Development Plans clearly identify relevant priorities and cover both medium-term and long-term goals. Plans are costed effectively and have clearly defined targets, tasks, criteria for success, staff responsibilities and timescales. All departmental development plans are well linked to the School Development Plans and serve as effective working documents.
56. The school makes good use of a range of sources of information in order to monitor and evaluate its work. Central to the processes of monitoring and evaluation are the collation and use of assessment information. In this, the school has made good progress over the past two years. The deputy head with responsibility for assessment has established a comprehensive assessment database and carries out detailed analyses of pupils' attainment information. This

information is presented to heads of departments in a clear and unambiguous way and they are required to consider the implications for teaching and learning within their areas of responsibility. However, there are inconsistencies in the extent to which departments take appropriate action following their deliberations. The school is aware that the more consistent use of assessment information in the planning of teaching and learning is the next stage of development. Good use is also made of assessment information to measure the progress made by pupils by comparing the attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 with attainment at the end of Key Stage 3. Formal lesson observations are carried out by heads of department on an annual basis and form part of the professional review process. The outcomes of the observations are reported to the head and the deputy head with responsibility for staff development and are included in the teacher's professional development file. Through this monitoring the senior management team has developed a good awareness of the school's strengths and weaknesses. One of the features of management at all levels throughout the school is a strong commitment to improvement. This is very much an outcome of the changes in both senior and middle management that have been made by the head and governors since the time of the last inspection. The two deputy heads, who have both joined the staff in the last three years, are highly competent and provide the head with very good support as does the senior management team, which has been extended to include the heads of English, art and religious education together with the examinations co-ordinator, technology college co-ordinator, timetable co-ordinator and school bursar, in addition to the head and his deputies.

57. The overall quality of management provided by heads of department is very good. Subject leadership in English is excellent and marked by much enthusiasm. The head of department in mathematics has been in post for less than a year but is already providing strong and effective leadership. Instability in staffing in science over recent years has had some adverse effects on pupils' progress. However, the head of department, who has been in post since the start of the current term, is already showing good leadership. She has undertaken a thorough review of the department and has a clear vision of how the department must develop in order to raise standards. Very good subject management is evident in modern languages and information and communication technology and good subject management is a feature in art, drama, design and technology and history. The school has appointed a new head of department in geography, who takes up post in September. In the meantime, one of the deputy heads, herself a former head of geography, is providing good subject leadership and successfully overseeing the transition period. Management in physical education is satisfactory and the music department is now being led by a capable and competent musician, who has made significant improvement in music provision in the year he has been in post. The management and co-ordination of special educational needs is satisfactory. The special needs co-ordinator has a clear understanding of the requirements of the Code of Practice and has significantly improved the quality of pupils' Individual Education Plans. All staff receive detailed information about pupils on the special educational needs register. The governing body is kept well informed on special educational matters through regular reports made by the special educational needs co-ordinator to the governors' pupils' welfare committee.
58. The governing body is effective and supportive. It meets all of its statutory responsibilities through a well-considered committee structure. Governors take a keen interest in the work of the school and provide the school with a substantial amount of specialist help and advice. Positive relationships exist between the governing body and the senior management team. Governors receive regular detailed reports from the head and other senior members of staff and are aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The quality of financial planning is excellent. Governors are actively involved with the head and the senior management team in financial planning and monitoring and are given good support by the school bursar. The school has effective procedures to ensure that all funds are used for the purposes intended and the principles of best value for money are applied in the use of its resources. Action has been taken to attend to the few minor issues raised in the most recent auditor's report.
59. Arrangements for appraisal and professional development are very good. The deputy head teacher with responsibility for staff development has paid close attention to the identification of individual teachers' development needs and how these can be matched to school development priorities. As a consequence there have been significant improvements in procedures and practice since the last inspection. These include the more rigorous evaluation of training

received and better provision for the training needs of non-teaching staff. The school is seeking, through the Investor in People initiative, to continue to improve this provision. Arrangements for the support and professional development of both newly qualified teachers and students undertaking initial teacher training are very good and highly valued by participants, as is induction for all new members of staff. A recent report from HMI commented very favourably on the quality of support given to student teachers.

60. Subject teachers are appropriately qualified in their main teaching areas. Support staff make effective contributions in lessons and there is suitable technician support in science. Since the last inspection a full-time qualified librarian has been appointed and is making a significant contribution to the transition of the school library into a learning resource centre. However, design and technology continues to lack appropriate technician support. The skilled and experienced secretarial and clerical staff provide a welcoming school office and contribute very effectively to the administration and organisation of the school. The school bursar provides very effective support in financial administration.
61. The standard of accommodation provided for teaching and learning is satisfactory, overall. The school has been alert to opportunities to secure additional funding and good progress has been made in improving the accommodation since the last inspection. Accommodation for English, art, modern foreign languages and science is good but it is unsatisfactory for drama and physical education. The School Development Plans take account of current inadequacies and the need to improve the accommodation in the light of a projected increase in pupil numbers.
62. Overall provision of resources to support learning is good. They are very good for technology and for information and communication technology and good for subjects other than science, physical education and music, where they are just satisfactory. The school library is being developed as a learning resource centre and is well equipped with computers, through which pupils can access the Internet and use CD-ROMs. Both the quality and quantity of books have been improved. However, the number of books per pupil remains below the national average. All other weaknesses in resource provision identified at the last inspection have been addressed.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

63. In order to raise standards and the quality of education provided, the governors, senior management and staff of St Ambrose Barlow Roman Catholic High School, with the help of the Local Education Authority, should:
- Ensure that all teachers mark pupils' work regularly and consistently, in accordance with the school's marking and homework monitoring policies, and that the marking provides pupils with clear guidance on how to improve the standard of their work;
(paragraphs: 26, 69, 78, 113)
 - Ensure that pupils' end-of-Key Stage 3 action targets are related to National Curriculum level statements so that pupils have a clear understanding of the standards they are striving to achieve;
(paragraphs: 26, 46-47, 85, 95)
 - Improve provision for pupils with special educational needs by ensuring that:
 - pupils' Individual Education Plans contain subject specific learning objectives and that all teachers make use of them in planning lessons;
 - there is more rigour in the assessment of the progress that pupils with special educational needs are making;*(paragraphs: 27-28, 85)*
 - Continue to make representations for improvements to the accommodation for physical education and drama.
(paragraphs: 32, 61, 107, 145)

In addition to the key issues above, the following less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the governors' post-inspection plan: extended writing (8, 111); teaching methods (12, 19, 84, 113); behaviour (12, 24, 101); level of challenge (22); use of homework (26, 69, 78, 86); use of information and communication technology (31, 133); availability and use of books in the learning resource centre (62, 68); technician support (103); use of time (144).

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	152
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	63

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5	22	41	33	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	661	
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	90	

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	7	
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	114	

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

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	6
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	10

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	7.9
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.7
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end-of-Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	59	74	133

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	36 (54)	42 (49)	33 (44)
	Girls	63 (55)	50 (36)	38 (32)
	Total	99 (109)	92 (85)	71 (76)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	74 (87)	69 (68)	53 (60)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	36 (34)	37 (35)	20 (27)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	36 (53)	38 (46)	29 (41)
	Girls	55 (52)	43 (40)	39 (33)
	Total	91 (105)	81 (86)	68 (74)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	68 (84)	61 (69)	51 (59)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	33 (34)	38 (38)	28 (22)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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

Attainment at the end-of-Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	56	47	103

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	24 (22)	45 (44)	49 (45)
	Girls	27 (24)	44 (41)	45 (41)
	Total	51 (46)	89 (85)	94 (86)
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	50 (52)	86 (97)	91 (99)
	National	46.3 (44.6)	90.7 (89.8)	95.8 (95.2)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	35.5 (39.3)
	National	38 (36.8)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	17	n/a
	National		n/a

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	3
White	657
Any other minority ethnic group	1

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	31	4
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	39.6
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	6
Total aggregate hours worked per week	190

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.6
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	23
Key Stage 4	19.4

Financial information

Financial year	1998/99
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	£
Total income	1,692,585
Total expenditure	1,610,497
Expenditure per pupil	2,521
Balance brought forward from previous year	127,325
Balance carried forward to next year	209,413

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	681
Number of questionnaires returned	280

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	36	51	10	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	49	48	3	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	44	47	5	2	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	29	50	15	4	2
The teaching is good.	36	56	6	1	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	32	52	12	4	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	50	39	8	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	69	3	2	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	31	46	17	3	3
The school is well led and managed.	44	45	5	2	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	43	49	4	0	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	25	49	9	5	12

Other issues raised by parents

Written comments were included with 22 (8%) of the questionnaires returned. Several of these comments expressed strong support for the school and praised the way in which the school is helping pupils to become mature and responsible young people. A small number of parents' comments related to general standards of behaviour and the way individual cases of poor behaviour had not, in their view, been followed up thoroughly enough.

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

ENGLISH

64. Standards of attainment on entry have been gradually rising and in 1999 were above average. This is reflected in the standards being attained in Key Stage 3. At the end of Key Stage 3 pupils' attainment, as reflected in the 1999 National Curriculum test results, is above the national average and well above average in comparison with the standards achieved by pupils in similar schools. The standards attained by boys are well above the national average. Inspection evidence indicates that the overall standards of pupils currently at the end of Key Stage 3 are above those of last year's pupils. Pupils with special educational needs are attaining standards that are consistent with their previous levels of attainment.
65. At the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' attainment in English language is well above average with 65 per cent of pupils obtaining A*-C grades compared with 55 per cent nationally. In English literature 59 per cent of pupils obtained A*-C grades, which is close to the national average. The trend over the last three years is moving steadily upwards. Inspection evidence indicates that this trend has been sustained and that in English language, the standards of pupils currently in Key Stage 4 are above those of last year's Year 11 pupils and in English literature the standards are significantly above. Girls achieve slightly higher standards than boys in both subjects. Virtually all pupils who are identified as having special educational needs are attaining well with most achieving grades in the A* - G range at the end of Key Stage 4.
66. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards in speaking and listening are satisfactory and frequently good. Pupils listen well and confidently take part in group work and presentations, as in a Year 8 lesson where pupils presented their findings on 'prejudice' to the class and in a Year 7 lesson, where pupils delivered a BBC style news presentation. Pupils are able to sustain a character in role, as in a Year 7 lesson on the text "Paper Tigers". At Key Stage 4 overall standards of speaking and listening are good and those of higher attaining pupils are often excellent. Pupils are confident and fluent speakers and are willing and able to use talk and discussion to explore complex ideas. This was particularly evident in one Year 10 lesson where a higher attaining group of pupils was helped to identify bias and persuasion in media texts through effective group discussion. Similarly, in a lesson on 'Macbeth' a lower attaining group of pupils used discussion effectively to help them understand Macbeth's motives for murder. Through the school debating society, the school not only gives a clear indication of the importance of good speaking and listening skills but also provides very good opportunities for pupils to develop confidence in oral work and the development of listening skills.
67. Pupils' writing skills at Key Stage 3 are slightly above average. This is a consequence of good teaching strategies, which include the use of writing frames, leaflets, letters, diaries and brochures and the implementation of effective literacy strategies in all subjects. Enlarged writing frames are used effectively to help pupils achieve lesson objectives, as in a Year 7 literature lesson where pupils used an imaginative frame to explore with sensitivity the feelings of characters being studied. Pupils redraft to improve the quality of their work and frequently refer to a dictionary or thesaurus to ensure that spellings are correct or that the most appropriate word has been chosen. Lower attaining pupils are supported by key words and vocabulary, which are prominently displayed in classrooms. In Key Stage 4 higher attaining pupils write with confidence, clarity and lucidity. Pupils' coursework demonstrated excellent presentation and a high level of commitment to the subject. This was evidenced by examples of redrafted coursework where both structure and content had been revised and improved. Higher attaining pupils produce folders containing a broad range of work of a consistently high quality. Especially high quality work was produced in assignments on Shakespeare and the media. Some lower attaining pupils still have difficulty with spelling, punctuation and grammar but are able to produce imaginative pieces which clearly demonstrate an understanding of audience and purpose in their writing. Pupils of all abilities, at both key stages, make effective use of technology both as a resource and as a tool for improving presentation. Pupils regularly take part in poetry and writing competitions, which helps both to stimulate interest and develop expertise.
68. Standards in reading are generally slightly above national expectations. At Key Stage 3, most pupils read fluently, explore vocabulary and refer to textual evidence to support a viewpoint.

This was seen in a Year 8 lesson on the text 'The Granny Project'. Several reading strategies have recently been introduced which have had beneficial effects on pupils' reading abilities. A particularly good example of this was seen in a shared reading lesson where a group of lower attaining pupils gained a good understanding of the sensitive issues of a guilty conscience through the reading of the novel 'Buddy'. A very good example of collaborative reading was seen in a Year 9 lesson where the novels 'Death of Grass' and 'The Guardians' were being studied. Pupils generally make very good use of the fiction and non-fiction books in the learning resource centre. However, lower attaining pupils still read fewer books than other pupils and there is a need to monitor the use of the learning resource centre by pupils of differing attainment levels as part of the school's literacy strategy. By Key Stage 4 pupils are reading with a high degree of skill and understanding. A very good example of this was seen in a Year 10 lesson where pupils' reading skills were so advanced that in a comparison of newspaper articles one pupil was able to challenge the suitability of an article in one of the newspapers for a particular audience. In another lesson the teacher skilfully used guided reading to help lower attaining pupils identify the key features of character in Shakespeare's 'Henry V'.

69. Pupils make good or very good progress in response to mostly good and very good teaching at both key stages. Pupils with special educational needs are also making good progress in both key stages. Teachers display very good subject knowledge and high expectations of pupils. Planning is excellent and assessment criteria are shared with pupils at both key stages. This helps pupils to gain a good understanding of the qualities of work at different levels and grades. Linked to this is the use of marking to help pupils both identify the weaknesses in their own work and give them targets for improvement. The department has made a good deal of progress in this respect. However, there is a lack of consistency in practice and there is a need to develop a more cohesive approach to marking and target setting by all teachers. Lessons are well planned and lesson tasks are generally challenging and well matched to pupils' levels of attainment. Good use is made of questioning and good feedback in lessons helps pupils to make very good gains in understanding. This was seen in a Year 7 lesson, for example, where, in a study of the novel 'A Pair of Jesus Boots', effective questioning by the teacher helped pupils to identify the purpose of stage directions. The best lessons are characterised by good pace, high expectations and extended plenary sessions to consolidate learning. Where lessons are not of this standard, time is not managed as effectively and the lesson objectives are not kept sufficiently in focus. Homework is generally well used both to consolidate and to extend pupils' learning. However, there is inconsistency in the volume of homework set between the key stages with a dramatic increase in Key Stage 4 compared with Key Stage 3.
70. Pupils' attitudes are very good at both key stages. They respond in a positive and mature way when engaged in group discussions and role-play activities, or when feeding back to the class as a whole from small group work. Pupils are co-operative and friendly relationships are a feature of lessons. Pupils are able to sustain concentration and have a businesslike approach to their work. Behaviour in the lessons is very good. Pupils display a capacity to work independently and move from one activity to another with the minimum of fuss. Work is generally well presented, especially in their folders and on wall displays. Pupils very obviously enjoy the subject and appreciate the work of their teachers.
71. The strengths of the department lie in a well-qualified, hard working and very committed group of teachers, who respond well to the excellent leadership of the head of department. There is a clear commitment to continuous improvement and the raising of standards. Development planning is excellent, as are the schemes of work and policies which guide the activities of the department. A varied, broad and balanced programme of work has been produced which provides a good range of structured tasks based on interesting and stimulating literary texts. Schemes of work include regular occasions for assessment opportunities through which the progress of pupils is effectively monitored.
72. Much has been done to address the issues in the last inspection report. Effective use is made of information and communication technology and speaking and listening skills are much improved. Opportunities for pupils to develop as independent learners have been increased and there are indications that pupils have responded well to these. Overall, this is a thriving and energetic department whose work is enriched by numerous extra-curricular activities in which many pupils participate.

MATHEMATICS

73. Pupils enter the school with generally average mathematical skills and knowledge. Pupils in Years 8 and 9 make more rapid progress than those in Year 7, as in Year 7 higher attaining pupils spend too much time on work they can already do. Nevertheless, all pupils make satisfactory progress through Key Stage 3. As a consequence, National Curriculum test results have improved steadily, particularly at the higher levels, over the last three years. The 1999 results were in line with the national average and above average in comparison with similar schools. This is confirmed by the standards of work seen during the inspection. By the end of Year 9, higher attaining pupils can use Pythagoras' theorem and trigonometric ratios to find unknown sides and angles in right-angled triangles. Average attaining pupils can calculate percentages of given quantities, such as in money problems, find areas using formulae and can solve simple linear equations. Lower attaining pupils can find areas of shapes constructed from rectangles, can identify lines of symmetry and solve simple equations. However, lower attaining pupils sometimes have difficulty in identifying the correct units to use when, for example, calculating area.
74. The standards reached by pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 are in line with national averages. This is confirmed by the results in the GCSE examinations in 1999, which were above those for similar schools. Since the last inspection, the proportion of pupils reaching the grade of A*-C has improved and in 1999 was just above the national average. All pupils who complete the course are entered for the GCSE examination and virtually all receive a grade in the A*-G range. Inspection evidence indicates that pupils are working at a standard that is at least what would be expected from their end-of-Key Stage 3 results. Many of the highest attaining pupils have made particularly good progress as a consequence of additional lessons being provided outside the normal timetable and grouping arrangements which enable one group of pupils to prepare for higher tier papers. Pupils in Year 10 are making good progress from their end-of-Key Stage 3 baseline, and again, setting across the whole year group helps staff to match work more closely to pupils' needs. The schemes of work, and changes to grouping arrangements, are helping to improve standards. Pupils follow courses which keep the more demanding entry options open as long as possible. These are key factors, along with good teaching, in pupils' good achievement by the end of the key stage. By the end of Year 11 higher attaining pupils can draw and interpret a wide range of graphs. For example, they can use a graphical calculator to explore the effects of different transformations on quadratic or cubic functions. They can factorise quadratic expressions and use the cosine rule to find unknown sides and angles. Average attaining pupils can use Pythagoras' theorem to find unknown sides of a right-angled triangle and can solve linear equations, some solving simultaneous equations. Average and lower attaining pupils can calculate the probability of given events occurring. Lower attaining pupils can collate and represent data graphically. They can carry out simple arithmetical calculations when, for example, working out percentages and fractions. Sometimes average and lower attaining pupils, although arriving at the correct answer, have difficulty in recording their methods of solution.
75. Throughout the school pupils achieve similar standards across all aspects of mathematics, reflecting the balanced course they receive. Most pupils can choose the appropriate standard techniques and apply them correctly to get the right answer to a problem. The increasing emphasis on problem solving is helping pupils to tackle situations where there is no obvious method of solution. Pupils in Key Stage 3 now have many opportunities to systematically improve their numeracy skills in mathematics lessons and this is resulting in an improvement in speed and accuracy. Pupils have very good skills and confidence in using information and communication technology in their mathematics work. Factors in this are well-planned opportunities to develop and use these skills and also the good provision of computers. The use of information and communication technology is well integrated into mathematics lessons.
76. Pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to others in their classes. Many pupils with special educational needs are in small groups and the amount of individual attention they receive is a key factor in their good progress. There are no significant

differences in the attainment of boys and girls. Analysis of external assessment results shows small fluctuations from year to year but no significant differences.

77. The quality of teaching and learning is good. During the inspection week, the teaching was very good in about a third of lessons observed, good in just over a third and was satisfactory in the rest. Teachers' specialist knowledge is good and they are able to explain ideas and methods clearly. They use diagrams, charts and models well to help pupils understand new ideas. For example, in one Year 8 lower attaining group, coloured plastic shapes were used to effectively and quickly demonstrate the progress made in the previous lesson in calculating areas. This enabled pupils to discuss the different approaches they had tried and to quickly move on to more difficult problems. Their concentration and enjoyment and very good teaching lead to a rapid improvement in their ability to investigate increasingly complex questions. In all lessons, planning and organisation are very good. This is a key factor in the effective use of the 45-minute lessons and the incorporation of a wide range of activities.
78. In most lessons there is a good introduction, often using a short mental arithmetic section, sometimes using information and communication technology, which leads into a clear description of what pupils are going to do in the main part of the lesson. In lessons where teaching is good or very good, there is usually a review section at the end of the lesson. Teachers use questions and answers to draw the strands of the lessons together. Sometimes they ask pupils to demonstrate their methods of solutions to the class. These all help pupils to think about what they have learned. Often homework is then set to give more opportunities to practise these skills. However, there are some inconsistencies in the setting of homework and in the quality of written feedback given to pupils through the marking of their homework and class work.
79. Nearly all pupils work hard, enjoy their lessons and are well behaved. Pupils from all year groups appreciate the amount of help they get, both in and outside class. When teaching is good, or very good, more time is spent in whole-class discussion, explaining and thinking about different ways of dealing with problems. This helps pupils to achieve more, and also captures their interest. When teaching is satisfactory, rather than good or very good, the teacher often spends too much time with individuals, as opposed to working with the whole class. This can lead to a slowing of the pace of the lesson for other pupils. Occasionally the teacher has to spend too much time making sure that all pupils concentrate on their work and do not waste time.
80. The head of department, who has been in post for less than a year, has clearly identified the priorities for raising achievement. She provides strong and effective leadership to a hardworking and co-operative team of teachers. Curriculum and lesson planning is very good and successfully underpins the drive to provide a broad mathematics experience and also raise the standard of pupils' work. The department is leading the development of a school numeracy policy and an audit has been carried out to identify the particular numeracy skills required in all subjects.
81. Good progress has been made in dealing with the issues from the last inspection report. Standards have improved, particularly for higher attaining pupils. Actions taken to raise standards include more pupils in Year 10 and Year 11 following a course leading to higher grades at GCSE. Also, Year 7 pupils were setted for the past two years but, owing to timetabling problems, have reverted to mixed attainment classes for the current year. Teaching has improved considerably and is now good. Factors in this are using good practice from national numeracy initiatives and the use of information and communication technology. Both have had a positive impact on the pace and variety of lessons.

SCIENCE

82. Standards of attainment in the end-of-Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests in 1999 were in line with the national average. There has been a decline in test scores since 1997 that is steeper than the observed national trend. At the time of the last inspection the girls were reaching higher attainment levels than the boys but their performance has since declined to a

point below that of the boys. A comparison of the attainment levels of the cohort entering in 1996 with those it achieved in the National Curriculum tests in 1999 shows those pupils' progress overall to have been satisfactory. These results are broadly in line with the average for similar schools.

83. In 1999, the percentage of pupils achieving A*-C grades was just above the national average, with boys outperforming girls. The percentage of pupils achieving A*-G grades was below the national average. A comparison of the attainment levels of this cohort between the end of Key Stage 3 and GCSE shows that satisfactory progress has been made through Key Stage 4. Standards of attainment in both key stages are, broadly, at the same levels as at the time of the last inspection.
84. Inspection evidence indicates that standards of attainment are equal to national expectations at both key stages. The large majority of pupils can make appropriate notes and diagrams and describe their experimental work. The use of workbooks for each topic supports this but the storage and organisation of these and other materials in folders cause problems for some pupils, particularly lower attaining pupils. Their records of work need closer monitoring to ensure that they are a useful resource for learning. At Key Stage 3 there is no clear indication of any significant differences in attainment between the physical, material or life sciences. Attainment in investigative science, whilst at average levels, is below that found at the last inspection. The over-prescriptive, rigid approach to this is restricting development. Examples of detailed work of high attainment were seen in topics such as the variety of life and adaptation to the environment. Work on forces showed thorough analysis of carefully collected data through experimentation. In a study in Year 9, knowledge of the nature of atoms and molecules was applied to collision theory. At Key Stage 4 attainment in life sciences is generally above average. Good quality work was seen in detailed explanation of the human digestive process. Lower attaining pupils showed good knowledge and understanding in a study of the development of an embryo. Investigations undertaken for GCSE coursework meet national expectations overall but there is a general weakness in the skill of evaluation. Nonetheless, there are examples of investigations that are well above average, including instances of very good use of chemical knowledge and understanding in a study of the growth of yeast.
85. Attitudes to learning are mostly good. This is evident in the many examples of extensive, well-presented work seen, including some thoughtful and careful project work and poster displays and commitment shown in lessons. Concentration levels are mostly satisfactory and sometimes good. Pupils are very largely co-operative with the teacher and work collaboratively with each other. Interest and enthusiasm are more evident at Key Stage 4 but across the key stages there are a significant number of lessons where pupils are too passive and not actively engaged. The nature of the lesson often determines this and the pupils readily accept being led by the teacher and so show little initiative or even inquisitiveness. Pupils' effort and productivity increase when the teaching transmits an enthusiasm and interest and they are involved in challenging work. Such teaching encouraged a lower attaining set in Year 10 to tackle the concept of energy level changes in exothermic and endothermic reactions. The gains in acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding are more often satisfactory at Key Stage 3 but overall they are good. This is evident in the increasing depth and extent of coverage in the written work as pupils move through the key stages. For example, Year 9 are able to enhance their understanding of earlier work on the properties of materials by applying kinetic theory and a Year 10 class extended Key Stage 3 work on classification to describe how an animal's features are related to its environment. Learning is noticeably improved when teachers firstly confirm pupils' knowledge of basic principles and then let them apply it to a new situation. A Year 9 class used facts about the structure of matter in order to relate surface area to the speed of a reaction and in Year 10 pupils used their understanding of the nitrogen cycle to explain pollution in lakes and rivers. Pupils' own knowledge of their learning is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4. In the latter it is improved by the recently introduced procedures for monitoring assessment, the structures imposed by GCSE and the introduction of target setting. The quality of marking pupils' work is inconsistent. The diagnostic feedback is too often inadequate. Too little use is made of assessment of classwork and homework. Where grades are given for attainment they are not related to any clear national criteria. Percentages in end-of-topic tests in Key Stage 3 are not translated into National Curriculum levels. Pupils

report that oral feedback after such tests is useful, it is not structured enough to help them improve their performance. The longer-term assessment is good. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall. Most pupils gain a GCSE pass or a Certificate of Achievement. A Year 10 group carrying out soil analysis made good progress in moving from simple filtration to GCSE work on the pH scale. A higher level of in-class support is needed for pupils with special needs and their Individual Education Plans should be more evidently used in the planning of lessons.

86. There have been numerous staff changes in recent years, including periods of cover by supply teachers. This lack of continuity has had some adverse effects on pupils' progress. The situation has now stabilised and the quality of teaching is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4. This is a similar finding to the last inspection. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject are very good and used effectively in teaching basic skills through a good range of learning activities, including opportunities to use information and communication technology. The use of questions, particularly at the beginning of the lesson, to review pupils' recall and understanding is usually employed successfully and helps them to focus quickly but often time is not left at the end of a lesson to give a summary of key points. Practical work is generally well organised and resourced but there are occasions when group sizes are too large for each participant to benefit fully. The broad planning of the curriculum is good but the schemes of work need to be expanded. Lesson plans drawn from them do not always include precise learning objectives or any linked means of assessment that will ascertain whether or not the pupils have achieved them. Homework is set regularly but its purpose with regard to the consolidation, extension and assessment of pupils' learning is not always clearly indicated.
87. The head of department has been in post for just six weeks but is showing good leadership. A thorough review of the department has been undertaken in that time and a development plan drawn up. Priorities have been determined and there is a clear vision of how the department must develop in order to raise standards further. The improved recording of data and the wider use of data will enable better monitoring of pupils' progress, teaching and the curriculum.
88. Since the last inspection standards have remained broadly average by national standards but the girls' performance has declined. The quality of both teaching and learning has remained good. Funding and the provision of resources have improved but a shortage of textbooks remains. The provision and use of information and communication technology have improved.

ART

89. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 were just above national expectations with no significant difference between the performance of girls and boys. The attainment of pupils with special educational needs was satisfactory. Inspection evidence suggests pupils currently in Key Stage 3 are achieving similar standards. Pupils' use their sketchbooks for homework and to select and record visual information for class work. They learn how to explore and present ideas, recording from first hand observations and developing ideas for independent work. All pupils use a range of two-dimensional and three-dimensional materials such as paint, mixed media, wax, clay and papier-mache work to express and communicate their ideas. Three-dimensional work is of a high standard. Pupils know about artists from different times and places, including examples from the French Cubist style and Chinese art. All pupils use a satisfactory range of technical terms when they talk about the visual effects, practical processes and techniques that they use. Average and higher attaining and talented pupils are acquiring the skills needed for them to make decisions about the purpose of their work and how to improve it. Pupils' numeracy skills are in line with expectations when they measure and use methods to judge size and proportion to make accurate still-life drawings. The majority of pupils with special educational needs attain standards according to expectations.
90. Overall, pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is well above the national average. In 1999, all of the pupils entered for the GCSE examination gained A* - C grades and this was well above the national average, the average for the school and the average for similar schools. There was no significant difference between the performance of girls and boys. All

pupils with special educational needs obtained grades in the A*-C range. Over the last three years, standards have continued to be above or well above the national average. In lessons and in the work seen at Key Stage 4, attainment in art is above national expectations. Pupils are competent when they use techniques such as pastel and pencil drawing, acrylic painting and printmaking to create designs to explore and develop their own ideas. Pupils explore a range of ideas and techniques and combine visually interesting images and technical control to produce striking work such as colourful, abstract studies in pastel, based on plant forms. Higher attaining and talented pupils flourish when they are given scope to develop their technical skills and to use their initiative to respond to the themes that they are set.

91. Progress at both key stages is good. At Key Stage 3, Year 7 pupils are quick to adjust to sustained studies in art. Pupils at all attainment levels acquire the confidence to experiment with new ideas and techniques. They make rapid progress when they are taught craft skills and when they study artists to explore ways of expressing ideas. At Key Stage 4, achievement is good when pupils are taught how to use source material imaginatively and to develop their technical skills to realise their own ideas. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress at Key Stage 3 and very good progress at Key Stage 4.
92. In art, pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are good at both key stages. They listen carefully to teachers and use the practical advice they are given. They are helpful during practical sessions when they are asked to organise and manage the materials and equipment they need for their artwork. Pupils at Key Stage 3 work well together in groups and are developing the skills needed to work collaboratively on a piece of art work. At Key Stage 4, higher attaining and talented pupils are able to express informed opinions about how they might select and explore visual ideas to make personal response to GCSE art projects.
93. Overall, teaching in art is good throughout the school. At Key Stages 3 and 4, teachers plan their lessons well and provide pupils with clear learning objectives. Whole-class teaching is effective and good use of questioning and directed discussion with pupils help teachers to check whether the art tasks they have set are understood. Teachers give very good practical demonstrations to provide pupils with the steps to be successful. Expert guidance is shown to use techniques such as wax carving, charcoal drawing or acrylic painting and calligraphy techniques. Teaching is good when examples of artists' and pupils' work are used to illustrate visual ideas and concepts. In a Year 8 class, a visiting Chinese artist demonstrated calligraphy skills. These teaching aids and resources motivate and inspire pupils. Praise is used to encourage pupils and teaching methods include a good balance of support and challenge. This ensures that pupils make noticeable improvements to their artwork during a lesson. Self-assessment methods are used well so that pupils can acquire and develop the skills and confidence associated with reviewing and refining their practical work. The process of review is effective in helping pupils to value their work and achievements. Consequently, their attitudes and behaviour in art are good. Homework is being set and used effectively to support class work.
94. At Key Stage 3, subject knowledge is used skilfully to help pupils recognise the visual effects they are developing in their work. As a part of whole-class discussion, pupils are encouraged to identify and list the qualities that would make their work successful. Although teachers are knowledgeable about the subject strengths and weaknesses of pupils, insufficient reference is made to National Curriculum levels. Pupils have limited knowledge or understanding of the National Curriculum standard that they are striving to achieve. At Key Stage 4, self-assessment is effective in helping pupils to judge the success of their work and Year 10 pupils are being encouraged to develop the skill of judging the GCSE standard of their own work.
95. The head of department provides effective leadership and good subject management. Art teachers work well together as a team and they are dedicated to promoting the status of the subject and to raising standards. In-service training has been effective in helping staff work on the priorities identified to improve the impact of art in the school. Good support had been provided for the newly qualified teacher. Subject documentation is comprehensive and provides a good source of reference for art policies and practices. The monitoring of pupils' attainment and progress and the analysis of end-of-Key Stage 3 results for art are at an early

stage. The department recognises that it now needs to use this information to inform teaching and planning and to set targets for Key Stage 3 pupils.

96. Since the last inspection, standards at Key Stage 4 improved significantly. Over the past three years there has been a sharply rising trend, with standards above or well above national standards. The use of information and communication technology has changed little since the last inspection but recent improvements in the provision of equipment will help art teachers to develop this aspect of the curriculum. Good progress has been made to broaden the curriculum and three-dimensional work and printmaking now feature strongly at Key Stage 3. Overall, good progress has been made in this subject since the last inspection.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

97. Teacher Assessments show the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 to be above the national average. However, inspection evidence indicates that the standards of pupils currently in Key Stage 3 are about average. There is little difference in standards between boys and girls. In food technology pupils demonstrate that good foundations are being laid in the subject. For example, in their first practical food technology lesson since Year 8, all pupils in a Year 9 class were able to make a 'ready made' version of a disassembled product, even though their kitchen management and food preparation skills showed a lack of recent practice. The class showed much interest and enjoyment in the lesson and made good progress in their learning as a result of clear guidance by the teacher. In a Year 8 lesson on the effects of tension on structural design pupils made good use of new technology in the form of the 'Scantech' program to identify the relationship between the size of a building and the frequency of earthquake vibrations. They were able to recognise how low frequency creates tension. In electronics, a Year 8 group demonstrated their ability to solder components into a printed circuit board to be used as the alarm system for a 'steady hand' game. Pupils with special educational needs are attaining standards consistent with their previous levels of attainment and generally making good progress in both designing and making. They show an understanding of the design brief and recognition of the components that make up printed circuits. Higher attaining pupils demonstrated a very good understanding of the stages of construction and practical electronics of a high standard. There were, however, weaknesses in those aspects of the work which relate to investigation and analysis of the product.
98. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A* - C in the 1999 GCSE examination was at the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving A* - G grades was above the national average, with all pupils entered obtaining grades in the A* - G range. Girls' results were slightly above the national average for girls whilst boys' results were slightly below the national average for boys. A high proportion of girls are entered for the foundation level, which restricts them to a grade C at GCSE. Results in food technology have shown a steady improvement over the past three years and results in resistant materials and graphic products are above those obtained in 1997. However, results in technology systems declined in 1999 to be well below those obtained in the previous two years.
99. Inspection evidence indicates that overall standards in Key Stage 4 are as nationally expected. In Year 11, while pupils' graphical skills are broadly in line with expectations, the standards of their design work is high. Pupils make good use of investigative and analytical skills and these skills become more advanced as they move through the key stage. However, the work of a group of pupils studying systems and control was limited in relation to course expectations, with regard to both their major and minor projects. The good progress pupils are making in food technology was evident in a Year 10 lesson where pupils demonstrated a good level of understanding of a range of processes associated with food preparation and cooking. They also demonstrated a good awareness of health and safety issues relevant to food preparation and cooking. Standards on the recently introduced GCSE option in childcare are in line with expectations. Pupils demonstrate a high level of interest and enthusiasm for the subject and this was clearly evident in a Year 10 lesson where a parent brought a baby into the lesson so that the pupils could have a practical lesson on bathing a baby. As a consequence, pupils made particularly good progress in this lesson.

100. Pupils are generally making satisfactory progress at both key stages. Where progress is at its best, expectations are high and teachers use careful explanations with good examples to demonstrate the importance of quality. Pupils are provided with appropriate challenges and the explanations and examples provide pupils with clear guidance both on what they are required to do and the standards they must strive to achieve. Pupils make good progress as a consequence. Where pupils do not make such rapid progress, as in a Year 9 electronics lesson, there was a lack of pace and challenge and some of the work undertaken in the lesson would have been better suited for homework. In food technology pupils make satisfactory progress in their understanding of food products. During a Year 10 lesson, for example, pupils were able to explain the reasons for their choice of food, ingredients and menus. Progress is underpinned by the use of information and communication technology to calculate the nutrient value of meals and to enter their results in their examination folders.
101. Most pupils in all years have positive attitudes towards the subject. They demonstrate enjoyment and tenacity when making artefacts and take a clear pride in their work. They work with a sense of commitment, both when working individually and when working in small groups. They are well behaved and operate in a correct and safe manner. Pupils form friendly relationships, are ready to help one another and the majority show respect for their teachers. However, a small number of boys in one Year 10 lesson demonstrated persistent unsatisfactory behaviour, which had an adverse effect on progress in the lesson.
102. The quality of teaching is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4. Lessons are generally well planned and organised within each material area of design and technology and the use of resources and class management are satisfactory. Teachers are suitably qualified and exhibit a real willingness to move forward. Expectations are generally high and practical skills are well taught. Teachers take account of hygiene and health and safety matters and instil in pupils the need to work safely at all times. Teachers assess and record attainment, identify National Curriculum levels and involve students in the assessment process.
103. The department has made good progress since the last inspection. A GNVQ manufacturing Part I course has been developed and added impetus has been given to the work of the department by the gaining of technology college status. Although the need to develop a more consistent and coherent view of the subject of design and technology, reflecting the single discipline described in National Curriculum documentation, which was identified at the last inspection, remains, the department has derived a great deal of benefit from the impact of the technology college initiative. For example, good progress has been made in the development of industrial links with companies such as Universal Music (Blackburn), S&B (Salford) and Eaton Transmissions (Salford), and GNVQ course materials have been developed in collaboration with these companies. A very good link has also been established with Salford University through the CAD/CAM initiative. At the last inspection issues related to the insufficient storage and the poor acoustics of the technology block were noted. These issues remain and , together with the lack of technician support, are impacting upon standards, particularly with regard to health and safety within the preparation area. Full refurbishment of food technology has taken place since the last inspection and current design and technology learning resources are very good.

DRAMA

104. Standards in drama are above national expectations at both key stages. Pupils are confident in the use of a range of drama techniques. They are able to understand the terms 'freeze frame', 'improvisation', 'forum' and 'chamber theatre'. Pupils in Key Stage 3 are able to explore ideas and create performances through cameos, freeze frame and improvisation. Pupils gain a good understanding of the dramatic process through participation. This was seen, for example, in a Year 8 lesson where 'Carrie's War' was used as a basis for the exploration of the notion of 'superstition'. In another Year 8 lesson on 'My Mate Shofig' characterisation was explored by using a series of freeze frames, which led into short well-presented improvisations
105. In Key Stage 4, pupils following the new GCSE course learn new dramatic techniques and conventions rapidly. As a consequence they are able to work independently and show a great

deal of imagination in structuring dramatic sequences. For example, in a Year 10 lesson on 'Slaves to Technology' pupils were able to transfer a series of ideas and values, one 'population' to another, with such a high level of skills that the lesson flowed from one activity to another with little intervention by the teacher. The standard of attainment in this lesson was well above average for pupils at this stage of their GCSE course.

106. The quality of teaching in drama is very good and sometimes excellent. As a consequence, pupils make very good progress in the subject. Teachers have high expectations, which produce positive responses from the pupils in the form of refreshingly lively pieces of work. Pupils confidently manage and evaluate their own improvisations and make subtle changes to their work in the light of these evaluations. Teachers provide excellent feedback to pupils and this gives pupils confidence and clear guidance on what they must do to improve the quality of their work. Work in drama is strengthened by the school's Youth Theatre, which stages annual productions and provides opportunities for pupils of all abilities to perform and is enriched by frequent theatre visits.
107. The accommodation for drama is unsatisfactory and this has an adverse effect on standards, as valuable time is lost from lessons because of the need to rearrange furniture and equipment in the hall or gymnasium used for lessons. Pupils are able to experience 'forum theatre' but the lack of equipment inhibits the further development of theatrical skills.

GEOGRAPHY

108. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 in lessons observed and recent work seen were in line with those expected of 14-year-olds, although few achieve higher levels. Over the last four years, few pupils have taken geography as a GCSE examination subject in Key Stage 4 and their results have been well below national averages. Although results improved in 1998, they were still below average and fell to well below again in 1999. Although boys achieve better results than girls, both boys and girls perform less well in geography than in other subjects. Weaknesses in some teaching and staffing difficulties were key contributory factors in pupils' under-performance in geography. The school has taken firm action to overcome these deficiencies. This action includes changes of staff, of GCSE syllabus and improving teaching methods, with increased emphasis on examination preparation. As a result, standards, although still below expectations, are improving and the numbers choosing to take geography as an examination subject have risen appreciably.
109. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils use geographical vocabulary well. They can use a range of simple techniques and handle information from secondary sources. They are particularly good at locating features on a map and show sound understanding of the importance of location in determining the characteristics of different places. Their understanding of physical processes and environmental issues are well developed in place. In work about Japan, higher attaining pupils can organise and justify arguments for and against nuclear power well; average attaining pupils can arrange most of the evidence logically. Lower attaining pupils are less sure and need some help from the teacher.
110. By the end of Key Stage 4, most pupils use key terms well. Few demonstrate other than a limited capacity for geographical analysis or initiating geography questions. Lower attaining pupils have difficulty in remembering what they have learned previously. They show some understanding of environmental management and physical processes in their work on National Parks and water. In coursework about the local area, most pupils use a limited range of techniques. Higher attaining pupils relate conclusions well to original ideas, average-attaining pupils make some links with theory and lower-attaining pupils show limited understanding. In both key stages, the use of fieldwork to develop techniques and analytical skills is limited. The use of information and communication technology, particularly the Year 7 cross-curricular project, is beginning to help pupils to research and handle information.
111. Pupils enter the school with broadly average standards in geography. Most make satisfactory progress in both key stages in relation to their prior attainment. They make slower progress at the beginning of the year, as a consequence of a restricted range of teaching methods and too

little time spent on challenging written work. Inspection evidence indicates that the changes initiated by the school have resulted in better progress. Pupils' writing and standards of numeracy have improved because teachers are placing more emphasis on the accuracy of text and data. Pupils' work has also improved because of the increased emphasis on decision-making and independent thinking. In Key Stage 4, the progress of most of the small number of pupils in Year 11 who are taking the GCSE examination has been unsatisfactory. Progress for the larger numbers of pupils who are presently in Year 10 is much better. This is the direct result of grouping pupils into sets based on attainment levels and their positive response to better teaching. Pupils are building well on earlier work, increasing their knowledge and understanding of physical processes in case studies like the one on Kielder Water. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, benefiting from departmental efforts to match work to suit different abilities. Most achieve a grade in the A*-G range in the GCSE examination.

112. Pupils are well motivated and clearly enjoy challenging and interactive activities. They show a growing self-confidence in their abilities to express themselves. Their high level of interest is demonstrated by the improved standards of presentation of their work, which is seen, for example, in displays about the Swanage Coastal Path. When provided with the opportunities pupils are prepared to use their initiative and engage in individual research. They work hard on project work and their positive attitudes contribute to their progress.
113. The quality of teaching is now good and sometimes very good. Teachers use their knowledge well to give interesting explanations and develop understanding through careful questioning. They plan lessons very well so that pupils are clear about what they are doing. Good relationships and management of behaviour lead to a working atmosphere in which pupils feel secure enough to ask questions and ask for assistance. Most teachers use a variety of methods and resources to interest and involve everyone. Increased attention is being given to developing pupils' vocabulary and improving their oral skills through paired and group work. These characteristics were demonstrated, for example, in a Year 10 lesson about river and coastal processes. Pupils were stretched by a well-designed series of activities and by working in pairs; they were able to learn from each other. As a consequence, lower attaining pupils gained the confidence to tackle more difficult individual tasks. The teacher intervened well to overcome difficulties. By the end of the lesson, most pupils were able to evaluate and improve the accuracy of their work. In a few lessons, teachers either do not involve pupils enough and so miss opportunities to test pupils' understanding in order to build on what they know, or do not re-focus the lesson when the pace shows signs of flagging. Good verbal feedback is given in some lessons to help pupils to improve. However, although pupils' work is marked regularly, it does not provide pupils with sufficient information on what they must do in order to improve. Also, some of the comments made on pupils' work are not followed up. Homework is well used to support class work.
114. A new head of department starts in September. The deputy head, herself a former head of geography, is successfully overseeing the transition and teachers are working closely as a team. The Key Stage 3 schemes of work meet statutory requirements. They have been completely revised to include a range of experiences suitable for all abilities. They ensure a more consistent approach and provide good support for teachers new to the school. Key Stage 4 schemes of work are in the process of revision. Statistical data about pupils and assessment results are not used enough to modify the curriculum and plan for improvement. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. While some pupils work in a well-equipped and stimulating classroom with informative displays, others are taught in non-specialist rooms, including the dining room.
115. The school has taken effective measures to improve standards and provision since the last report and the department is well placed to make further improvements. Standards in Key Stage 3 have risen from below the national average and Year 10 work indicates that standards in Key Stage 4 are improving. Pupils are more positive and are benefiting from work better suited to their needs. The school is aware that fieldwork still needs developing and has firm plans to include this in the near future.

HISTORY

116. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above national expectations. The development of enquiry skills is a particular strength. These feature strongly in pupils' learning from Year 7 in the exploration of a wide range of sources. For example, Year 8 pupils displayed good levels of understanding of the economic benefits of the slave trade and understood and empathised strongly with the slaves and for the human abuses involved. For example, when the treatment of the Jews in Nazi Germany was being studied in Year 9 pupils displayed a well-developed sense of morality. Many pupils display their knowledge and understanding within group work and through role-play. Role-play was, for example, used effectively by Year 7 pupils acting out the changing status of farm workers with the collapse of the feudal system following the Black Death. Most pupils in Year 7 establish a good grasp of chronology.
117. In 1999 pupils gained a pass rate of 68 per cent for grades A*-C and 100 per cent for grades A*-G. These results were well above the national average and well above the average of other subjects in the school. GCSE results have shown a strong and consistent improvement over recent years. Year 10 pupils display very well developed enquiry skills and are able to make shrewd judgments on the relative values of different information sources as, for example, when looking at the effects of food rationing during the Second World War. The individual studies of Year 11 pupils are generally well written, detailed and demonstrate well-developed study skills, including the effective use of information and communication technology. There is little difference in the attainment of boys and girls overall, although the quality of the written work of girls is significantly better.
118. The pace of learning is good through Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4. This closely reflects the quality of teaching. In the majority of lessons pupils display very good and sometimes excellent levels of interest and concentration. From Year 7 pupils are set tasks that require independent and small group research and these skills are well developed by Year 9. Constant constructive interaction in the classroom and much informative marking of pupils' written work help them to develop a good knowledge of the standards they are achieving. The effective use of visual images, pair and small group discussion and role-play help lower attaining pupils to participate fully in lessons and to make good progress. The progress of higher attaining pupils is enhanced by the effective use of a range of recently introduced resources that significantly extend many topics. Pupils' relationships are very good, which enhances the quality of paired and small group work.
119. Teaching is good overall at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4. Excellent and very good teaching is characterised by a lively and enthusiastic approach that stimulates and motivates pupils so that they are highly productive and fully engaged in the lesson from start to finish. Particular strengths seen in most lessons are detailed lesson planning, the use of a wide range of teaching and learning methods, positive relationships and effective management of pupils. Factors contributing to satisfactory rather than good or better teaching are a lack of focus in the questioning of pupils to establish their levels of knowledge and understanding, a lack of balance in the use of time and a lack of clarity in setting out the objectives for the lesson. Good use is made of homework, which is often varied and challenging and frequently requires pupils to work collaboratively.
120. High quality fieldwork and a popular extra-curricular history club enrich the curriculum. Limited use is made of the local community as a source for learning. Assessment is systematic, and used to compose a detailed profile of pupils' progress over time. Bench marking and targeting are used effectively for pupils taking the GCSE course. However, there are inconsistencies in the use of individual targets at Key Stage 3. Subject management has many strengths and is very good overall. The development plan is comprehensive and appropriately focused.
121. The department has made very good progress since the last inspection. There has been a substantial improvement in performance in the GCSE examination. The quality of teaching is significantly better and pupils are demonstrating a wider range of skills and deeper knowledge and understanding. Assessment practices are more consistent, management practices are more refined and more effective and very good progress has been made with the application of information and communication technology to learning.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

122. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards are high in relation to national expectations. Through Key Stage 3 pupils build on the high standards already achieved in Year 7. For example, pupils in Year 7 are competent in the use of clip art, word art, word 3D and word processing. They are able to use a full range of formatting skills, import, copy and paste to present a high quality design. During the inspection no work was available for pupils in Year 11. Teacher Assessments and inspection evidence indicate that the standards of attainment of the current Year 10 are high, with the standards of the current Year 9 above those being achieved in Year 10. Pupils following the new GCSE examination course are able to design such things as spreadsheets for calculating tourist currency rates or for managing second-hand car sales. In both cases standards are high. Standards at both key stages are underpinned by the increasing use of information and communication technology in subjects across the curriculum. In mathematics, for example, lower attaining pupils were able to use the 'Successmaker' program to improve their numeracy skills. In geography, information and communication technology was used effectively in a project on Salford 2000. In English, information and communication technology is used effectively in the study of Shakespeare. Information and communication technology is also used effectively in many areas in design and technology, personal and social education and in careers education.
123. Pupils enter the school with levels of attainment in information and communication technology that are broadly in line with national expectations. Thereafter their progress is good. This good progress pupils are making was clearly seen in a Year 8 lesson, for example, where pupils were able to design the full range of support systems needed to manage a school tuck shop. During the lesson they developed their knowledge and understanding of spreadsheets so that they were able to calculate the tuck shop's finances. They learned how to describe formulae and apply formulae to calculate the sum in a spreadsheet. Pupils following the GCSE course are making similarly good progress. In one Year 10 lesson, for example, the group gained an increased understanding of a wide range of applications involving spreadsheets and word processing. Pupils' progress is underpinned by the setting of deadlines for assignments and clear targets in relation to their learning. Pupils with special educational needs make good gains in their use of information and communication technology. Whilst there is no specific planning for gifted and talented pupils in information and communication technology, these pupils are making good progress and there are indications that with specific target setting they could be making even better progress.
124. Pupils are well motivated and clearly enjoy both their discrete information and communication technology lessons and the many opportunities they are given to use computers in other subjects and in the learning resource centre. They show increasing levels of self-confidence in their abilities to use computers. Pupils respond very well in lessons and remain focused on their work. They are prepared to use initiative and demonstrate independence in their work. Visits to the information and communication technology rooms and the learning resource centre both at lunchtimes and after school find many pupils working sensibly and purposefully on the computers.
125. The quality of teaching is very good at both key stages. The specialist teachers have a very good subject knowledge, which is used very effectively in lesson planning. Teachers' expectations of pupils are high and lessons have clear aims and objectives that are shared with pupils. Classroom management is good and lessons are characterised by a purposeful working atmosphere. One of the strengths in teaching is the effective use of resources and in particular the imaginative use of new technology, which has enabled new teaching methods to be developed. This makes a significant contribution to pupils' attainment and progress.
126. The new head of department is providing very good subject leadership. The planning and monitoring of the work in the department are very good and the head of department provides a clear vision for the development of information and communication technology both as a discrete subject and across the school as a whole. The department is supported by very good technician support and external links with the hospital school ensure that whatever the circumstances pupils' needs are supported.

127. Significant improvement has been made since the time of the last inspection. There has been a significant rise in standards of attainment in both key stages and this is linked to similar improvements in the quality of teaching. The use of information and communication technology is now embedded in the work of most subjects.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

128. Standards achieved in French and German are above national averages overall. By the end of Key Stage 3 the majority of pupils achieve standards above national expectations in both languages. Listening and speaking skills are very well developed; pupils respond confidently to questions and instructions in French and German, participate in speaking tasks to exchange information, describe events in the present and past and express their opinions and preferences. For example, in French pupils in Year 8 gave their opinions about a wide range of leisure activities and justified their views, canvassed the opinion of others and reported back their findings to the class. In Year 9 pupils of all abilities described a third person in detail and distinguished between a range of people being described, and explained why they had reached their conclusions. In German all pupils identified the main points from interviews about leisure activities; higher attaining pupils identified more detail, for example how often they participated or how they felt about different activities. All pupils in a Year 9 German class explained and applied rules of word order successfully to describe their actions in detail. Writing is usually accurate and pupils write for a variety of purposes and audiences to produce simple narrative, letters, posters and brochures; all use a good range of vocabulary and structure to describe events in the past and present. Higher attaining pupils write at length and in detail on a variety of topics; lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs do so more simply, following a model. All pupils identify the main points and higher attaining pupils are able to work out the meaning of some unfamiliar language from short texts and extracts of speech. By the end of Year 9 the majority of pupils have a good understanding of the way the languages work and are beginning to use their knowledge to adapt the languages to suit their own needs. All pupils achieve well in relation to their ability. Teacher Assessments indicate that the majority achieve levels of attainment in line with national expectations: work seen during the inspection indicated that the majority achieve above these levels.
129. By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils develop all four skills and widen their range of vocabulary and structures. They skim and scan texts for specific detail. For example Year 10 pupils used detailed texts to find out about the French school system and then used this information to identify detail from extended interviews and others expressed their opinions about school in some detail and gave reasons for their views using a good range of vocabulary and structures from memory. In Year 10, in German pupils talked in detail about holidays and produced some imaginative poetry describing their feelings. All pupils are confident in their use of the language, speaking and listening skills are very well developed and the majority of pupils achieve high standards in writing, recounting events in the past, present and future, describing their feelings and ambitions and writing persuasively about a variety of contemporary issues.
130. In GCSE examinations in 1999 standards achieved in French were high compared with national figures, with 75 per cent of candidates achieving A*-C grades. In German standards achieved were slightly above national averages, with 56 per cent of candidates achieving A*-C grades, and in both languages the average points achieved by candidates were high compared with national figures. However, numbers entered for French are low and for German they are high compared with national figures so that comparisons are not reliable. German results compare very favourably with national figures for pupils' performance in the first foreign language. Girls achieve better than boys in examinations but in lessons no difference was observed. All pupils achieve significantly better in French and German than in other subjects.
131. The quality of teaching is very good overall. In all lessons observed it was at least good and in over 70 per cent of lessons it was very good or excellent. In more than a quarter it was outstanding. There are many strengths and few weaknesses. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and use it very effectively to conduct activities in French or German to develop pupils' listening and speaking skills and plan lessons so that pupils build successfully on

previous learning through the provision of very well sequenced activities and appropriate resources. They use the overhead projector and flashcards very well to focus attention, clarify meaning and support and encourage pupils to participate in speaking tasks. For example flashcards were used very effectively with a Year 9 class to enable them to work out patterns in word order in German and as a basis for many games in both languages. Questions are used very skilfully by teachers to enable pupils to use the languages successfully themselves and identify and apply patterns. Management and organisation are invariably excellent and these, together with the excellent relationships teachers maintain with pupils, are major factors in creating a supportive yet demanding atmosphere in all lessons. Pupils feel confident in trying out the languages for themselves and are not afraid of making mistakes. Pupils respond very positively to the high expectations of their teachers: all pupils are concerned to do well and they have confidence in themselves as competent linguists. For example, pupils with special educational needs achieve high standards in relation to their ability and are confident in using both French and German to exchange information and express their likes, dislikes and preferences and average and higher attaining pupils are confident in their ability to use the language they have learned about daily routine and holidays, for example, to write creatively. Teachers use a very good range of teaching strategies to interest and challenge pupils. Songs, games, rhymes and frequent opportunities to work informally in pairs and small groups to exchange information are very effective in raising pupils' confidence. Teachers monitor pupils' progress closely during activities and intervene sensitively to encourage and support, ensuring that all pupils make very good progress. They know their pupils well and have a very good understanding of how pupils learn and what kind of activities will interest and motivate pupils; as a result, enjoyment is a characteristic of all lessons. Marking is regular and thorough and pupils are given frequent encouragement and guidance about how to improve but this information is not always sufficiently used to plan for the outcomes of groups of differing ability within classes and on a few occasions some pupils found tasks too difficult or too easy because resources and activities had not been adapted sufficiently to enable them to achieve their potential.

132. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes towards the subject are excellent. They are enthusiastic, keen to participate, listen attentively to the teacher and to each other and work well in pairs, concentrating on tasks set. They are very well motivated, display enjoyment in activities and maintain excellent relationships with each other and with their teachers.
133. Leadership and management of the department are excellent and teachers work very effectively as a team. They are committed to achieving high standards in both teaching and learning and providing all pupils with a wide range of learning experiences, including the opportunity to take part in study visits to Germany and France and use these experiences as effective foundations for GCSE coursework. The work of the department is clearly focused on raising standards and they are constantly reviewing and evaluating their work to this end. Statutory requirements are met and provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. The use of information and communication technology is yet to be fully developed because equipment has only recently been provided and teachers require training to use it to best effect to support and extend learning. There are not enough textbooks but the resources available to the department are used very effectively. Procedures for assessing pupils' achievement and progress are very good but pupils are not aware of their progress through National Curriculum levels to be able to track and plan their own progress and information available is not used systematically to plan outcomes for groups of pupils in lessons.
134. Since the last report the department has made very good progress, identifying ways of raising standards and improving the quality of teaching and learning. As a result there has been a significant improvement in standards and the department has achieved a high level of consistency in teaching and learning in both languages. They have a very good capacity to continue to improve.

MUSIC

135. Since the previous inspection standards of pupils' musical attainment have risen significantly. The school now provides pupils with good opportunities to extend their musicianship in music

lessons and in extra-curricular activities. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils' standards of musicianship are in line with national expectations. Pupils demonstrate their knowledge and understanding by composing and performing Gamelan music. They follow the conventions of the music and compose creatively and enthusiastically. Pupils sing and play with accuracy and confidence a variety of songs from across the world. They are able to construct simple chordal accompaniments and enjoy rehearsing in music lessons. Pupils have a sound knowledge of traditional and graphic notation. Pupils with special educational needs are presented with appropriately challenging work and attain standards that are consistent with their previous levels of attainment.

136. Standards of music in Key Stage 4 are below national expectations. A GCSE examination course in music was introduced in September 1999. The few Year 10 pupils who are following the GCSE course are making good progress but have entered the course with low levels of knowledge and practical musicianship. Pupils are able to complete some of the simpler questions from past GCSE papers and are able to recognise the music of some historical periods and styles. Pupils' personal musicianship is less well developed because none of them has benefited from four years of comprehensive musical education based on the demands of the National Curriculum and few of the group have reached the higher grades on their first instrument. Pupils' performance of an Elizabethan Pavane during the inspection demonstrated that their musical abilities are improving and that their confidence is growing. Pupils can recognise simple ostinato and ground bass patterns and are able to complete some of the GCSE listening exercises confidently and competently. The school has, since the previous inspection, re-established its link with the local music service and now pupils are being entered for Associated Board instrumental examinations. Few instrumentalists reach grades above Grade 3 but standards are rising. Pupils are not currently provided with classroom opportunities to use computer technology for their composing and performing activities.
137. Teaching is good overall at both key stages. Music teaching is characterised by an excellent knowledge and understanding of the subject and this is used to plan lessons effectively. Within music lessons there is a good balance between whole-class, group work, and individual work. Pupils are encouraged to keep music live and are given good opportunities to rehearse on the newly purchased electronic keyboards and the percussion instruments. Discipline is firm and caring and class management is securely based within an ethos of respect and concern for all pupils. All groups of pupils working on practical activities receive good quality support and guidance within the lessons and all are shown how to improve their work. Pupils demonstrate interest and enthusiasm and enjoy the opportunities to be creative in their singing and playing. The one area that needs to be developed is the monitoring and evaluation of pupils' musical development and progression throughout the school and especially by the end of Key Stage 3. The teaching of the newly formed GCSE class is never less than good. The teacher knows the requirements of the syllabus well and provides GCSE pupils with a good grounding in performance, composition and listening. During the week of inspection pupils were taught about the Elizabethan court and the dances and other music of the period. The teacher played interesting and pertinent examples of the music and provided high quality handouts about styles and instruments. Tailor-made scores were provided for individual pupils so that all could confidently rehearse a Pavane. GCSE teaching is effectively enabling pupils to discover music and composers hitherto unknown and unheard.
138. The attitudes of the pupils at both key stages are good. During inspection all classes entered music lessons sensibly and worked well. Pupils now understand the everyday routines of the department and come expecting to play instruments or to sing. In all lessons seen pupils respected the instruments and went about their music-making industriously and confidently. Pupils relate well to each other and their teacher and work at a good pace. The department anticipates a good number of Year 9 pupils opting for GCSE music from September 2000 onwards.
139. The music department is very well led by a capable and competent musician who has been in post for just over a year. He has taken the department forward. Good quality concerts and carol services have been presented to instil a sense of pride and achievement into public performances. The visiting instrumentalists enjoy teaching within the school and the number of pupils who get involved in music making is growing. There is a now a clear sense of

purpose and vision within the department, which is committed to raising standards, increasing participation rates and to promoting the Catholic ethos of the school. Further work by the head of department is needed in introducing more information and communication technology into the curriculum and in the monitoring of the pupils' academic progress. The department must now build on its good practice by providing regular weekly activities for singers and instrumentalists outside lesson time.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

140. Standards attained by pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 are mostly in line with and sometimes above national expectations. Boys' and girls' performance in track and field events in athletics, and their knowledge and understanding of techniques, are at the level expected for their age. They are able to talk about one another's performances and suggest improvements. Pupils know how to warm up and, when given the opportunity, they can take responsibility for this part of the lesson by selecting and demonstrating appropriate, safe stretching exercises. However, only a few can explain the effects of exercise on body systems. Boys and girls in Year 7 have a good understanding of shot-putt technique, which they use well to achieve above average levels of performance. It is not possible to make reliable comparisons with the above average standards found at the time of the previous inspection because of changes to the curriculum. For example, dance, where standards were found to be particularly high, is no longer taught.
141. In Key Stage 4 lessons, standards are generally in accord with national expectations and similar to those found at the time of the previous inspection. However, pupils have too few opportunities to plan a suitable programme of exercise relevant to their chosen activities. GCSE examination results in the A*-C range in 1999 were below the national average and pupils' achievements were below the standards achieved in other GCSE subjects. However, the results do represent an improvement on those achieved in 1998 but remain below the level reported at the previous inspection. Girls' results were better than boys' results and by a greater margin than is found nationally, though the numbers involved are too small to make reliable comparisons. All pupils achieved a grade in the A*-G range, which is above the national average. Inspection evidence indicates that the standards of pupils presently in Key Stage 4 are higher than those obtaining nationally. A significant number of pupils achieve good standards in extra-curricular activities at both regional and national levels.
142. Pupils make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3 as they improve their skills and knowledge and understanding of techniques. This is because of their positive attitudes and teaching which is never less than satisfactory and sometimes good. Progress in planning and evaluation is less consistent largely because the ways in which they are expected to analyse each other's performance are sometimes too demanding. Progress in Key Stage 4 is satisfactory but restricted because pupils are not given enough opportunities to take responsibility for their learning. Very good progress in tennis is linked to excellent teaching, which provides interesting yet challenging activities that make progressively increasing demands on pupils. Pupils who have special educational needs make similar progress to other pupils because the teachers have a good understanding of their particular needs.
143. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good. Participation rates in most classes are good and standards of kit are high. Pupils enjoy their lessons and readily volunteer to answer questions or take part in demonstrations. They are confident about talking to each other about performance and when acting as timekeepers for running events. Most listen carefully to their teachers and have a very good commitment to their learning activities. Pupils behave well in all lessons. Relationships with each other and with their teachers are very good and they are courteous and helpful to visitors. They readily show their appreciation of each other's success. Boys and girls work naturally and easily with each other for the most part although occasionally, in mixed classes in both key stages, a small minority of girls are inhibited from giving full commitment to running events. A quarter of the pupils take part in, and benefit from, the good extra-curricular programme of mostly, but not exclusively, representative team games.

144. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory and in half the lessons observed it was good. Occasionally the teaching is excellent. A major strength of the teaching is the quality of relationships, which creates a positive ethos for activity, learning and enjoyment in lessons. Teachers have good subject knowledge on the whole, with highly developed expertise in some areas, notably tennis. All teachers use a good range of teaching approaches. They give clear demonstrations and explanations of skills and question pupils well to help them recall what they have learned. Learning activities are interesting and progressively challenge pupils through the lesson. Competition is used well to motivate and interest the pupils. Pupils are given regular opportunities to plan and evaluate their performance but in some lessons they are not given sufficient guidance in what to look for, and so the learning opportunities are restricted. Uneven time distribution in most athletics lessons results in differences in the quality of learning experience for the pupils involved. Information and communication technology is used well in GCSE lessons. In a good GCSE lesson on sports injuries, pupils used information from a CD-ROM to support practical experience. Marking of the work in pupils' GCSE files is inconsistent and does not give pupils a clear idea of the standards which they are achieving in relation to examination criteria until the end of Year 10.
145. Subject management is satisfactory and day-to-day routines operate smoothly. Good contingency planning ensures that pupils still receive reasonable opportunities for learning when bad weather prevents lessons taking place outdoors. Good progress has been made in response to most of the curricular issues raised at the time of the previous inspection. Schemes of work now identify progression, are linked to National Curriculum assessment criteria and ensure that all pupils have opportunities to plan and evaluate their work. The curriculum has been improved by the introduction of tennis but indoor accommodation remains unsatisfactory and the problems are exacerbated by increasing pupil numbers. As a consequence there remains an over emphasis on invasion games. Extra-curricular provision has been broadened though it is still largely restricted to team games.

VOCATIONAL COURSES

146. The school introduced a GNVQ manufacturing course for pupils of all abilities in September 1999. The start that has been made has been very positive. The current cohort, currently coming to the end of Year 10, is reaching standards above national expectations and has come to terms with the subject discipline and the modes of assessment embodied in the course. Pupils have a good understanding of manufacturing processes and have benefited from first hand experience and knowledge of two local companies. Pupils have demonstrated considerable knowledge of materials, design processes, production and marketing and have begun to look at manufacturing in a new, imaginative and mature way. Standards of pupils' literacy and numeracy have been enhanced by the core skills lessons. Pupils have developed their information and communication technology skills and pupils with special educational needs are attaining appropriate standards.
147. Most pupils are enjoying the course and are making good progress. Almost all pupils have completed the course and their assignments. Some of the work has been very well researched, recorded and presented with a good blend of computer aided and more traditional drawings and designs. Many pupils have taken a pride in their work and some have correctly been recommended for merits and occasionally distinctions for specific assignments. Pupils relate well to all their GNVQ teachers but do not always clearly see the value of communication and number work.
148. The teaching is never less than satisfactory and sometimes good. There is a clear sense of purpose and industry in GNVQ lessons. Teachers work very hard to make the subject come alive and prepare their lessons well. They set helpful and clear performance criteria, check the evidence thoroughly and mark the assignments accurately. The marking and assessment of pupils' work are carried out with care and attention to detail. Great emphasis is placed on the importance of health and safety in the work place. Pupils of all attainment levels receive good support from teachers and this underpins the progress they are making.

149. The course is well led by a competent and capable teacher. He has worked hard to introduce this valuable alternative to the GCSE options and provided a group of sixteen pupils with a well-planned and well-taught programme. The teachers have worked well as a team to ensure that the course is predominantly practical and have demonstrated to pupils that vocationally based education is challenging and flexible. The links that teachers have established with the two local firms, one making CDs and the other making benching and furniture for technologically based industries, have given pupils high quality insights into contemporary industrial practices. The school must now ensure that all pupils on this course have a thorough knowledge and understanding of all the possibilities of the new and state-of-the-art computer aided machinery which enhances the technology rooms.