

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **ST PAUL'S CATHOLIC SCHOOL**

Leadenhall, Milton Keynes

LEA area: Milton Keynes

Unique reference number: 110517

Headteacher: Mr M Manley

Reporting inspector: Mr C Sander  
4151

Dates of inspection: 19<sup>th</sup> - 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2000

Inspection number: 187026

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Voluntary Aided

Age range of pupils: 12 to 19 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Phoenix Drive  
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Milton Keynes  
Bucks

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr J Keane

Date of previous inspection: February 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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Mr G Ellis	Lay inspector	Vocational courses	Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well the school cares for its pupils How well the school works in partnership with parents
Mr B Meech	Team inspector	Mathematics	
Mr D Innes	Team inspector	English	
Ms V Blackburn	Team inspector	Science	
Mrs S Innes	Team inspector	Information technology Design and technology	
Mr P Redican	Team inspector	Art	Assessment
Ms J Boulton	Team inspector	Physical education Equal opportunities	
Mr D Martin	Team inspector	History Economics	Resources
Mr B Goodman-Stephens	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	Staffing
Ms S Stanley	Team inspector	Music	Curriculum – personal development
Mr M Galowalia	Team inspector	English as an additional language	
Ms O Hall	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
Mr J Knight	Team inspector	Geography	Curriculum – quality and range

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

St Paul's Catholic School is a mixed, voluntary aided, comprehensive school for pupils in the age range 12-19. They start at the school in Year 8 and join it from approximately 40 partner combined and middle schools. There are 1164 boys and girls on roll, of whom approximately 90 per cent are Catholic. Eighty per cent are white, 4 per cent Black Caribbean, 4 per cent Chinese with a small number of pupils from several other ethnic minorities. The school is of above average size and oversubscribed. It has increased in size by about 4 per cent since its previous inspection in 1996. The proportion of pupils actually claiming free school meals (7 per cent) is well below the proportion eligible. There are 82 pupils for whom English is an additional language. This is high in comparison with the national average. One hundred and forty-three pupils have special educational needs, broadly in line with the national average, of whom 28 have statements. There is specialist provision for a small number of visually impaired pupils and for a small number who have communication difficulties. Attainment on entry has been slightly below average since the last inspection but rose in 1999. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and of those for whom English is an additional language has risen since the previous inspection. There are currently 238 students in the sixth form, of whom slightly more than half are female, following both GCE and GNVQ courses. Over 70 per cent of the sixth form enter higher education.

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

This is a very effective school. Standards at both key stages are above the national average and broadly in line with it in the sixth form. Behaviour is very good. The very good quality of teaching and very good leadership and management are driving up standards. The socio-economic circumstances of its pupils are broadly average. They achieve well at both key stages and in the sixth form. When all these very positive factors are weighed against the above average unit cost per pupil it is very clear that St Paul's Catholic School gives very good value for money to its pupils and students, their parents and the wider community of Milton Keynes.

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

- Standards overall in national tests and GCSE examinations are above the national average and very good teaching is raising standards at an impressive rate.
- The very good teaching is so successful because very good subject knowledge and consistently high expectations provide challenging opportunities for pupils to learn very well.
- Very good leadership and management promote a very high, shared commitment to improve standards, attitudes and the quality of provision.
- Provision for pupils' personal, social and moral development and for monitoring their academic progress is excellent.

#### **What could be improved**

- Skills in numeracy and information and communication technology are taught inconsistently in some of the subjects pupils study.
- Boys are still doing less well than girls in some subjects, particularly at Key Stage 4.
- Legal requirements for the teaching of information and communication technology are not fully met.

*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 previously inspected in February 1996. Since then, the rate and range of improvement has been very good. The key issues identified at the previous inspection have been well addressed because the governors and headteacher have extended their action plan to include broader, well-defined strategies for improvement across the school as part of very good school development planning. The previously well below average standards in music and geography at Key Stage 3 and in modern foreign languages at Key Stage 4 have risen. The improvements in teaching have been dramatic in both modern foreign languages and in English. Teaching across the school is now very good whereas previously it had been barely satisfactory. The quality of teaching and learning is now monitored very effectively and the management of staff development is much improved. Except in science, standards at Key Stage 3 are running ahead of the challenging targets set by the governors and the proportion of pupils obtaining 5 or more GCSE grades A\*-C has improved by more than 15 per cent since 1996, well ahead of the national trend. Standards in the sixth form have also risen significantly since the previous inspection, from below both local and national averages to standards in line with the national average. The leadership and management of the school are now much stronger. Very good teaching and very good leadership are now the hallmarks of the school. Pupils are now much better prepared for life in a culturally diverse society. The misbehaviour noted in 1996 is no longer evident and exclusions have halved. Attendance has remained at a satisfactory level, broadly in line with the national average.

## STANDARDS

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

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

\* No comparison has been made with similar schools as there are relatively few 12-19 schools nationally with similar characteristics.

Standards were above the national average in the 1999 national tests at the end of Key Stage 3. They were well above the national average in English, above the national average in mathematics and close to it in science. Boys' standards are much improved in English over the past three years. In mathematics, boys' standards have been steady but consistently above their age group nationally. Assessments in the other subjects of the National Curriculum over the same period indicate a continuing gap between the standards achieved by boys and girls. Results in English and mathematics are well ahead of the school's targets; those in science are running slightly below them. The proportion of pupils obtaining 5 or more GCSE grades A\*-C in 1999 was above the national average. Pupils' average GCSE points score was well above the national average. More than 9 out of 10 pupils obtained 5 or more GCSE grades A\*-G, broadly in line with the national average. Compared with their age groups nationally, boys are improving but girls are doing so at a faster rate within an above average trend of improvement overall. The 15 per cent improvement is very close to the very challenging target set by the governors in 1997. Standards at GCE A-level in 1999 were broadly in line with the national average and have exceeded the demanding targets set by the governing body in 1997. Taken as a whole, standards in vocational subjects are above the national average.

In the work seen at Key Stage 3 during the inspection, standards were well above national expectations in modern foreign languages, above national expectations in English, mathematics, science, design and technology and history. They were broadly in line with national expectations in drama, art, geography, information and communication technology and music. At Key Stage 4 they were well above national expectations in art, above national expectations in English, mathematics,

drama, design and technology, music, business education, vocational courses and physical education. Standards were in line with national expectations in science, geography and history and below national expectations in information and communication technology. Standards in the sixth-form GCE A-level courses were well above national expectations in art and history; they were above national expectations in science, design and technology, drama and music; they were in line with national expectations in English, mathematics, geography, information technology and modern foreign languages. In GNVQ courses, standards were above expectations in health and social care and in business.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils are very well motivated. They want to do well and take part. They value highly what the school provides.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. The overwhelming majority want to learn. A very small minority are sometimes distracted in class. This is a very orderly community.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. One of the key reasons why pupils and students do so well. Pupils work very well indeed with each other in class. There is a high degree of mutual trust and respect between adults and young people.
Attendance	Satisfactory. Unauthorised absence has reduced since the last inspection. Overall attendance has remained steadily in line with the national average.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in 99 per cent of lessons seen. It was very good or better in 35 per cent of lessons and unsatisfactory in 1 per cent of lessons. Teaching was good or better in 87 per cent of lessons. The quality of teaching was good in English and mathematics at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4. It was good at both key stages in science. In all three subjects it was very good in the sixth form. The best teaching overall was seen in modern foreign languages at both key stages and in English at Key Stage 4. The high degree of challenge that results from teacher's high expectations, the pace and rigour of their presentation and the high level of subject knowledge that instils confidence and engages pupils' and students' interests are its major strengths. A careful balance of support and challenge helps pupils of all abilities to achieve well. There is insufficient use of information and communication technology in mathematics and geography, and in art at Key Stage 3. Even in the very good and sometimes excellent teaching in modern foreign languages there is room for improvement in this respect. Work needs to be still more closely matched to pupils' needs in science. Occasionally, lessons do not meet the needs of pupils for whom English is an additional language when specialist support is not present. Overall, the teaching of basic skills is satisfactory. Good foundations are in place to develop literacy skills but there are missed opportunities to develop skills in numeracy and information and communication technology.



## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The quality is good at all key stages and in the sixth form. Range is unsatisfactory because some legal requirements for information and communication technology are not fully met. There is a good balance and range of GCSE and vocational courses. The quality and range of extra-curricular activities is very good.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Teaching is good overall with very good support in class. The resource centre provides high quality support materials. The planning of suitable work is a particular strength and pupils are fully included in the life of the school. The management of this provision is excellent. Targets in some individual education plans need to be more precisely matched to the individual's needs.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language.	Specialist language support is good. Provision is less effective when pupils are not supported in class. The school budgets well for additional support.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Excellent, including excellent provision for pupils' moral and social development and very good provision for their spiritual and cultural development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very well, with some excellent features, particularly in the monitoring and support of personal development and very good monitoring of academic performance. Procedures for monitoring attendance are satisfactory. It works very well with parents and carers.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The very high quality leadership of the headteacher and key staff promotes excellent teamwork and strong subject leadership. The very effective definition of priorities sets out clearly the school's long-term direction.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Statutory requirements for information technology in the National Curriculum are not fully met. In all other respects governors fulfil their responsibilities very diligently and contribute much in setting the direction and targets for further improvement.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. The monitoring of teaching quality led by key staff is a particular strength. The results of spending decisions are considered most carefully and pupils' potential and results are analysed thoroughly.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The well qualified, specialist staff is well deployed, the overall provision of learning resources is good. The principles of best value are applied to its major expenditure decisions. Longer-term financial planning is very good.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pupils are expected to work hard and do their best.</li><li>• It is easy to approach the school if problems arise.</li><li>• The school is very well led and managed.</li><li>• Pupils make good progress.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There were no significant issues identified.</li></ul>

The inspection team agrees with those parents who completed the questionnaire or who attended the meeting before the inspection that St Paul's Catholic School is a very good school. The pupil planner booklet is indeed well used for communications between home and school and homework arrangements are thorough. The team also agrees that standards are now very well monitored and that pupils now feel it is 'cool' to do well in their studies. The team noted the strong concerns of several parents who attended the meeting before the inspection about the timing of the inspection and its impact on pupils who were preparing for and taking public examinations. It was not possible to gauge the impact but pupils were very positive in their conversations with inspectors.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

#### **The school's results and pupils' or students' achievements**

1. Pupils had just started their new timetable when the school was inspected. Those who joined the school in September 1999 were already starting the final year of Key Stage 3. Fourteen-year-old pupils had just started Year 10 of their GCSE and GNVQ courses, 15 year-olds were starting the second and final year of these courses and 17 year old students in the sixth form had just started the second year of their GCE A-level and GNVQ courses. These arrangements are part of the school's drive to accelerate pupils' and students' learning and raise standards. The evaluation of standards at the end of each key stage was based on the actual age of the pupils at this time, rather than their newly-timetabled year. Standards in religious education were inspected and evaluated separately as part of the Section 23 inspection that took place simultaneously with the Section 10 inspection.
2. Since the last inspection, pupils' standards on entry to the school have been slightly below average. The standards of those entering the school in September 1999 were closer to the national average. The school's very thorough initial assessments, including the use of standardised tests, indicate that the proportion of higher attaining pupils is below the national average, in part because many of those pupils attend grammar schools in a neighbouring county. The proportion of middle attaining pupils is usually slightly above the national average. Standards on entry to the school were slightly higher in September 1999 because the proportion of lower attaining pupils reduced from above to broadly in line with the national average. However, the proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language is rising and the proportion of pupils who have special educational needs has almost doubled in the last three years.
3. The main themes of the results and achievements in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 are standards above the national average, particularly strong performance in English, and improvement since 1997 that is running ahead of the targets set by the governing body. Nine out of every ten parents who completed the inspection questionnaire agreed that pupils make good progress, of whom more than half did so strongly. The findings of the inspection fully support this view.
4. Taken as a whole, standards in the 1999 national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 were above the national average. The proportion of pupils reaching the national expectation, Level 5, and above was well above the national average in English, above the average in mathematics and close to the national average in science. This pattern was repeated for pupils reaching Level 6 and above in 1999 and there has been a similar pattern of standards in these subjects since 1996. Higher attaining boys and girls did better in English and mathematics than they did in science. Overall, the trend of improvement in the national test results at the end of Key Stage 3 has been broadly in line with the national trend.
5. Boys have done particularly well in English, improving their results significantly over the last three years in comparison with their age group nationally. During this period, boys have maintained a steady, above average performance in mathematics but girls' results have fluctuated around a level over time that is broadly in line with the national average. There has been a contrary pattern in science where boys' standards have fluctuated a little whilst those of the girls have been broadly steady.

Over time, boys are just above and girls just below the national three-year points score average in science.

6. It is not possible to make a reliable comparison with similar schools as there are very few 12-19 schools nationally with similar characteristics.
7. There has been very good progress in meeting the targets for Key Stage 3 set by the governing body in 1997. In English, results are well ahead and in mathematics they are ahead of the targets set. Only in science are they running slightly below target by the end of Key Stage 3. The proportion of higher attaining pupils reaching Level 7 in the national tests has been well above the target set of 2 per cent above the national average.
8. The 1999 statutory teacher assessments show that, taken as a whole, standards were broadly in line with the national average in geography, history, information and communications technology, art and music. They were well below average in modern foreign languages and design and technology and also below the national average in physical education. Over the last three years, assessments have fluctuated and merit a degree of caution in their interpretation. More accurate indicators of current standards in these subjects lie in the work seen during the inspection, much of which was above that recorded in the 1999 teacher assessments. This is particularly the case in modern foreign languages and design and technology where standards were lowest in 1999.
9. There is a continuing gap in these assessments between the results of the boys and the girls. This broadly reflects the pattern for the age group nationally. Over the last three years the standards of the girls have been steady whilst those of the boys have fluctuated and were well below the national average for their age group in 1999. Girls did much better in art and music than the boys. The gap between the standards of boys and girls has narrowed in both history and geography and boys did better than girls in modern foreign languages. However, in geography and modern foreign languages this results from a decline in girls' standards rather than a significant improvement by the boys.
10. Taken as a whole, in nine out of ten lessons seen during the inspection pupils were working in line with national expectations. Standards were above national expectations in half of these 190 lessons and well above expectations in ten per cent of them. Standards above national expectations were a more dominant feature at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. They were a feature of two-thirds of sixth-form lessons, half of Key Stage 4 lessons and in four out of every ten lessons at Key Stage 3. Because the inspection took place during the public examination period, no lessons were seen that included pupils or students currently concluding the second and final year of GCSE or GCE examination courses.
11. Standards well above national expectations were seen at Key Stage 3 in modern foreign languages. Standards were above national expectations in English, mathematics, science, design and technology and history and broadly in line with national expectations in all other subjects of the National Curriculum. Teaching is having a particularly powerful impact on raising standards in English and modern foreign languages because teachers think very carefully about the most suitable methods to use.
12. The analysis of pupils' work and evidence of what they were doing in lessons confirm that standards by the end of Key Stage 3 are much improved since the previous inspection. These improvements are directly related to the much-improved

quality of teaching. The most striking improvements have been in modern foreign languages, particularly in pupils' speaking and listening skills, English, mathematics and science. Previous areas of weakness have been dealt with very effectively in these subjects and also in music where more emphasis on singing within much improved schemes of work, the good range of extra-curricular activities and the increased number of pupils receiving individual instrumental tuition are all helping to raise standards.

13. Very effective intervention by the leadership team has done much to improve standards in mathematics and science and excellent subject leadership in English has transformed them. Standards have risen in mathematics as a result of improved investigative work that gives pupils greater opportunity to write at length about what they have done. Above average standards have been maintained in history where, again, regular opportunities to write at length are helping to raise standards further. Standards are in line with national expectations in art but further improvement has been slowed because there are insufficient opportunities and resources to develop and apply skills in information and communication technology. Pupils' drawing skills are weak when they join the school but they make good progress thereafter. Whilst standards in gymnastics skills have improved, pupils' confidence in looking critically at each other's work in physical education is insufficient to produce an overall further rise in standards. Some continuing weaknesses in literacy skills are restricting further improvements in standards by lower attaining pupils in geography and, to some extent, in English where handwriting is frequently good but spelling and punctuation are unsatisfactory.
14. Pupils make good progress and achieve well by the end of Key Stage 3. In mathematics, for example, standards improve from below average to above average and higher attaining pupils in science achieve particularly well in developing an understanding of difficult scientific concepts. Many pupils achieve very well in design and technology because they make very good progress in using tools and in developing their design skills. They achieve very well in modern foreign languages because very good teaching encourages them to speak with confidence and listen with care in group and pair work. In history, pupils achieve well because they make good gains in knowledge. In many subjects, pupils' positive attitudes are promoted by the high expectations within the very good teaching. This helps them to achieve well.
15. This prevailing pattern of above average standards and improved performance, well supported by the governing body's challenging target setting, is also the key characteristic of standards at Key Stage 4. Girls do better than boys in many subjects despite considerable efforts across the school, and particularly in English and modern foreign languages to narrow the gap. The significant improvement since the previous inspection in the proportion of pupils obtaining 5 or more grades A\*-C and the sustained very high proportion of pupils obtaining 5 or more grades A\*-G are an indication that the school is succeeding in improving the results of its above average pupils whilst maintaining good levels of achievement by all.
16. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, performance was above the national average. Fifty-four per cent obtained 5 or more grades A\*-C. More than nine out of ten pupils obtained 5 or more A\*-G grades, a proportion close to the national average. This is a significant improvement on the pattern of results at the time of the previous inspection. The trend in improvement of the average points score obtained over the last three years has been greater than the trend nationally. The proportion of both boys and girls obtaining 5 or more grades A\*-C was well above the national average for their respective age groups, a recurring feature of the last three years' GCSE

examination results. Both boys and girls are raising their standards but girls are doing so at a faster rate across a wider number of subjects.

17. Because there are very few schools with the age range 12-19 nationally with similar characteristics, it is not possible to make a precise evaluation of the school's performance in 1999 compared with similar schools.
18. Within this overall pattern of improvement, standards between subjects at GCSE varied in 1999. They were well above the national average in drama and above it in art, business studies, design and technology, English literature, German and physical education. Standards were broadly in line with the national average in English, mathematics, music and Italian. They were below the national average in information technology, science, French and history and well below it in geography. Over the last three years, pupils have been doing significantly less well in geography, science and mathematics.
19. Over the last three years, results have been rising in drama, English and French. They have also risen over the past two years in history and remained steady but below the national average in geography over that period. The grades obtained by boys have improved in all these subjects except history. They have also improved in English literature. The grades obtained by girls have improved in all these subjects and also in mathematics, art, business studies and design and technology. Boys' results have declined over that time in science, business studies and design and technology; those of the girls only in geography. The gap between boys' and girls' performance has been widening in art and business studies.
20. Following the previous inspection, the governing body set a challenging target in the range of 55 to 65 per cent of pupils to achieve 5 or more GCSE grades A\*-C or their equivalent. This required an improvement of more than 15 per cent and the school is now very close to reaching it.
21. The inspection took place when 16 year-old pupils were either taking examinations or involved in a planned programme of private study. Fifteen-year-old pupils had just started the timetable of their final GCSE year at the beginning of June. This arrangement provides them with an additional seven weeks of lessons over the two-year GCSE and GNVQ courses; a further way by which the school is driving standards upwards. In addition to a wide range of work completed previously by these pupils, 15 year-old pupils were observed in lessons as they made an early start to their Year 11 timetable.
22. Taken as a whole, standards were at least in line with national expectations in nine out of ten lessons at Key Stage 4. Pupils were working above national expectations in half of them and well above that standard in a small number. In several subjects, standards have risen still further over the last twelve months and are now higher than the 1999 GCSE examination results. Standards were judged to be well above national expectations in art and for the ten per cent of pupils who study biology, chemistry and physics as separate subjects. They were above expectations in all other subjects except dual award science, modern foreign languages, geography, history, business studies and vocational courses where they were broadly in line with national expectations. In information and communication technology standards were below national expectations.
23. Standards are rising at Key Stage 4 because weaknesses identified in the previous inspection have been dealt with, pupils' standards are higher at the start of GCSE courses and the overall quality of teaching has improved greatly. In subject areas

where there has been particularly marked improvement, a greater degree of challenge and success in improving the standards and attitudes of boys are important features. Nowhere was this better seen than in modern foreign languages. Current standards are very much higher now than they were twelve months ago, a clear indication of both the pace and degree of improvement in the teaching of this subject. Standards are rising in many other subjects because aspects of both teaching and material resources are improving. For example, in English the choice of literary texts is now much more challenging and particular care has been taken to meet the reading interests of boys. A clearer understanding of examination requirements and increasing success in improving the attitudes and performance of boys is helping to raise standards in history. A greater degree of challenge is also a feature in mathematics where demanding work in algebra extends understanding beyond GCSE course requirements and boys are responding well in producing carefully presented graphical work. The very good standards in art are reflected in the high quality work across a range of materials, including oils. Standards in information and communication technology are below expectations because pupils have insufficient opportunity to develop skills in data logging and there are insufficient available resources. In other aspects of this subject, standards are in line with expectations.

24. Standards in GNVQ vocational courses at Key Stage 4 are above expectations in Intermediate level business and in line with expectations in Intermediate level information technology and foundation level engineering.
25. Pupils make good progress and achieve well by the end of Key Stage 4. Their achievements are very good in art and modern foreign languages and good in English, drama, design and technology, history, music, business studies, physical education, child development and in vocational courses. They achieve satisfactorily in mathematics, science and information and communication technology.
26. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well. Those with statements make very good progress towards the targets set in individual education plans and annual reviews. The majority of pupils withdrawn for literacy support improve their spelling and reading considerably during Year 8 and this helps them to cope better in class. Pupils who work in the communication resource centre make good gains in language, social and co-operative skills through effective group activities planned to extend their confidence and vocabulary. In a Year 10 literacy lesson the majority of pupils made good progress in planning a *curriculum vitae* and writing a letter to an employer. The use of the computer increased their awareness of effective presentation and supported checking for accuracy. Pupils at the first stages of the special educational needs register are making satisfactory progress overall. However, the targets on pupils' individual education plans do not indicate clearly enough the skills that are to be developed or provide a sufficient degree of challenge.
27. There are 82 pupils who speak English as an additional language. Seventeen of these are at an early stage of learning English. The main first languages are Cantonese, Italian and French. They achieve well and make good progress by the end of both key stages and in the sixth form. For example, most of the pupils have moved up at least one of the four language stages defined by the local education authority. All students in the sixth form for whom English is an additional language, have passed the GCSE or equivalent examination in English language. Pupils make good progress in lessons when they are supported by language support staff who provide greater opportunities for pupils to practise speaking, listening, reading and writing and when there is a good match between the pupils' current learning needs

and their level of language. On occasions when they have no support and the language of the lesson is too difficult for them, for example in one science lesson seen during the inspection, progress is unsatisfactory.

28. Pupils who have English as an additional language make unsatisfactory progress when, occasionally, the teacher does not explain the meaning of important technical words in lessons. For example, in a chemistry lesson, pupils found it difficult to understand and explain the properties of elements because they did not understand the teacher's use of the words 'reacts' and 'volatile'.
29. Standards of numeracy and mental arithmetic are satisfactory and often good at Key Stage 3 in mathematics lessons. This owes much to a strong emphasis on promoting number skills whenever possible in mathematics lessons at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Lessons are often planned to end with a short number puzzle, or number game and these are popular with pupils. Pupils use calculators with care and confidence and are taught to estimate orders of magnitude of the expected answer and to check the result from their calculator against this. Many can work without a calculator to a considerable extent.
30. The evidence of pupils applying their mathematical skills in other subject areas is patchy. In science the poor mathematical skills of some below average ability pupils limits their understanding at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4 in science pupils can represent data graphically, calculate lines of best fit and work with formulae and equations. There is good promotion of mathematical skills in design and technology with most lessons involving measuring and calculating and work with technical drawing and graphics requiring understanding of shape and space. In physical education and geography pupils collect and record data and use bar charts and graphs to demonstrate relationships. There is however only limited use of more sophisticated statistical techniques in GCE A-level geography. Calculation of price, percentage, temperature and time are features of modern foreign languages, angles pattern and symmetry are encountered in art and sequence, pattern and rhythm in music.
31. In other subjects there is little evidence of pupils displaying their numeracy skills and outside the mathematics department little exploitation of pupils' investigative skills in looking for patterns and testing hypotheses. There is no whole-school policy for numeracy and few links between mathematics and other subject departments. There is, however, no overall plan across subjects that seeks to identify both the needs and the opportunities to develop mathematical skills. Action is needed in this area if the standards are to rise even higher.
32. Standards of literacy are below average when pupils enter the school but rapidly improve to good levels as they move up through the key stages. Pupils identified as having significant weaknesses in reading, including those who have special educational needs, make very good progress because of the additional help provided by support assistants and sixth-form students. At the end of Key Stage 3, most pupils speak confidently, read with satisfactory understanding and write effectively for a range of purposes. A significant minority, mostly of lower attaining pupils, make frequent errors of spelling and sentence construction in written work. Higher attaining pupils read with good understanding and their writing is fluent and accurate. Pupils achieve good standards of reading and writing in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form because they become skilled in understanding the meaning of texts. In most subjects of the curriculum, there is evidence of increasingly well-organised and effective provision to raise levels of attainment.



33. Standards in information and communications technology (ICT) are broadly in line with national expectations at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form. They are below national expectations at Key Stage 4. Since the start of the current school year, changes in the way these skills are taught are starting to raise standards. Pupils now learn to use computers and develop particular skills in separate ICT lessons. They can then use what they have learnt in their other subjects. For example, they use word processing for drafting and for creative and critical writing in English at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. In physical education, pupils at Key Stage 3 produce fitness graphs whilst at Key Stage 4 they word process projects and use CD-ROMs to research information. In mathematics, pupils use spreadsheets to present information. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in ICT because they are able to use computers in lessons and at other times to complete longer pieces of writing. Pupils make good use of the internet to research information and they are learning to select what is important and relevant. Because the skills of word processing, desktop publishing, spreadsheets and databases are well taught by specialist teachers, pupils are able to extend their skills in other subjects where teachers have a good awareness of the specific and most effective use of ICT in their subject. However, schemes of work in the various subjects do not identify clearly enough how pupils will be presented with increasingly challenging opportunities to develop their skills further and it is insufficiently clear how the skills developed in one subject might be further practised or developed in another. There are not enough computers for all pupils to make sufficient progress in sensing and data logging.
34. Taken as a whole, standards in the 1999 GCE A-level examinations, or their equivalent, were broadly in line with the national average. There has been a significant improvement since the previous inspection. In 1998 and 1999 the school hit the challenging target set by its governors after the previous inspection. At the time of the previous inspection the average points score for students taking two or more GCE A-level courses or their equivalent, 11.9, was below both the local and national averages. Since then the average points score has risen to 17.4 and the proportion of students achieving at least an E grade, 91 per cent in 1999, has exceeded the governors' target of 85 per cent. Female students performed better than male students. The gap was wider than the national difference.
35. A strong feature in these results was the very high proportion of students obtaining the higher grades, A and B, in art, French and Italian and the well above average proportion so doing in biology, history and chemistry. This proportion was also above the national average in English and theatre studies and broadly in line with it in geography, German, design and technology and physics. The percentage of grades A and B was below the national average in economics and sociology.
36. Standards in vocational qualifications for 16 to 18 year-olds were well above the national average at GNVQ Intermediate level and above the national average at GNVQ Advanced level. Results were particularly good in Intermediate level business where two-thirds of the students gained a distinction and also in Intermediate Part One business where more than half of the students did so. Results were also very good in Advanced GNVQ business where more than three quarters of the students gained either a merit or a distinction and in Advanced GNVQ health and social care where all students achieved at least a merit and half of them a distinction. Results were similarly good in this subject at Intermediate level with two thirds of the students gaining a distinction and no student less than a merit.

37. It was not possible to observe lessons of students finishing the final year of their GCE A-level and Advanced GNVQ courses but a range of work was analysed. This confirmed that, taken as a whole, standards in GCE A-level subjects are slightly above expectations. Standards were highest, and well above expectations, in history and in art. Excellent mixed-media work and highly imaginative responses were outstanding features in art and the high quality of work in history was founded in students' well-developed skills in analysing complex problems. Standards were above average in science, drama, design and technology and music. They were broadly in line with expectations in English, mathematics, geography, information technology and modern foreign languages.
38. Students make good progress and achieve well in both GCE A-level and Advanced and Intermediate GNVQ courses. When their current standards are compared with what students could do at the start of the sixth form, they are achieving very well in history and in art and well in English, science, theatre studies, design and technology and music. Achievement is also good in Advanced and Intermediate GNVQ courses. Achievement is satisfactory in all other subjects studied.

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

39. Pupils' attitudes and their behaviour are both very good. They are very well motivated towards their work. Their personal development and their relationships are both excellent. Parents consider that the school is very successful in achieving good standards of behaviour. Attendance is satisfactory.
40. Pupils enjoy school and their lessons. They are enthusiastic and have very good attitudes to learning. This is one of the reasons why so many of them make good progress. Pupils' attitudes are enhanced by the very good class management skills of teachers, by the clear expectations that they have of pupils' and students' work and behaviour and by the enthusiastic teaching in so many lessons. The overwhelming majority of pupils and students are well motivated towards their learning. They are enthusiastic, show very good interest, are involved in their activities with high levels of sustained concentration and commitment. Taken as a whole, interest and attention are very good. The very isolated instances of inattention are usually when pupils at Key Stage 4 become distracted because they fail to see clearly the relevance or importance of individual lessons.
41. Pupils enter school with satisfactory levels of social skills and independence. These are considerably further developed during their time at school and most of them display very good confidence and self-esteem. The majority of pupils retain very good concentration, undertake tasks independently when required and work purposefully when engaged on challenging tasks or when required to work within exacting time limits. They are without prejudice and talk freely and readily about their work. During lessons most of them join in activities and discussions. Very few instances of inattention or uncooperative attitudes to learning were seen. The vast majority of students display very good standards of self-discipline and work very well when unsupervised.
42. Pupils with special educational needs have positive attitudes to their work, sustain concentration and make good progress at all key stages. They want to work in a calm, reflective atmosphere. They also show enthusiasm in taking part in activities, listening attentively and enjoying challenging tasks. They are 'included' very well in lessons and work very well with other pupils.

43. The previous inspection report indicated that, although taken as a whole the school was an orderly community, there was a small, but significant minority of pupils who misbehaved. Since then there have been major improvements in how teachers organise lessons and share their expectations clearly with pupils, so that behaviour now is very good. Four years ago, pupils and students generally got on well with each other. Now relationships are excellent within a naturally relaxed but challenging atmosphere in lessons and around the school.
44. Pupils understand, accept and respond very well to the school's code of conduct. They are fully aware of the high standards expected of them. Their movement around the school is orderly, but never regimented. They display a mature and caring approach in all their activities. They want to work and show determination to succeed. During the inspection no aggressive, sexist or racist behaviour or bullying was observed. Boys and girls work well together. This year there has been only one permanent exclusion, an exceptional and untypical case, and only a small number of fixed-term exclusions. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection. The school's study room facility for pupils excluded from lessons has been discontinued as it is deemed no longer necessary.
45. The school is an orderly community and standards of behaviour in class are generally very good. Students and pupils are smart, friendly and courteous. They are considerate of each other, showing care and respect. Standards of behaviour outside of classrooms are also very good.
46. Pupils and students are proud of their school because they value what it stands for. They are careful with equipment and resources. For example, in science they carefully observe safety procedures. They collaborate well in group work and learn effectively from each other. They are trustworthy, thoughtful and considerate, respecting the feelings, values and beliefs of others.
47. The very high standards of relationships are major strengths of the school. Relationships between pupils themselves and with all adults are excellent. This is exemplified by a strong ethos founded on and expressed through mutual trust and respect. Pupils feel valued by teachers. They consider the staff approachable and supportive. They relate excellently to each other, working together harmoniously and assisting each other in a mutually supportive environment.
48. Pupils respond very well to opportunities to exercise responsibility and independence. They willingly undertake duties, showing very good initiative and personal responsibility. They are mature when framing questions and display very good social skills in discussions. For example, in many lessons pupils are confident to present their work at the front of the class. Pupils are actively involved in fundraising activities, frequently taking the initiative with detailed arrangements.
49. In the previous inspection report, attendance was close to the national average. Since the previous inspection the level of unauthorised absence has been reduced but there has been no significant improvement in overall attendance. Registers are completed promptly and accurately in accordance with regulations. Some pupils are not always punctual in their attendance.
50. The attitudes, behaviour and personal development of pupils are major strengths of the school. In this way pupils and students fulfil the school's mission to 'fulfil your ministry' and contribute to its 'culture of achievement'. The findings of the inspection fully support the very strong agreement expressed by the parents that attitudes and behaviour across the school are very good.

## HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

51. Taken as a whole, the quality of teaching is very good. It is a major strength of the school that is driving up standards, helping pupils and students of all abilities to achieve well and promoting good learning habits, expressed in a strong determination to succeed. The most powerful features helping this to happen are:
- the skilful use of very good subject knowledge that helps pupils of all abilities to gain knowledge quickly and accurately, develop clear understanding and apply newly-taught skills;
  - the careful planning of the sequence in which the lesson content will be taught;
  - consistently high expectations of pupils of all abilities;
  - the careful choice of the most suitable teaching methods for the pupils;
  - and, in nearly all lessons, the effective management of their learning.
52. The school had just started its new timetable at the time of the inspection. Fourteen-year-old pupils had just begun their GCSE and GNVQ courses but were included in the inspection of the quality of teaching and learning at Key Stage 3. Sixteen-year-old pupils and 18 year-old students were involved in examinations and a planned programme of private study. No lessons for these age groups were seen but a range of their previously completed written work was analysed. The quality of teaching in religious education was evaluated as part of the Section 23 inspection that took place at this time.
53. Very good or even better teaching characterised over a third of the 190 lessons or part-lessons seen during the inspection. The quality of teaching was good or better in 87 per cent of lessons, a very high proportion. The best teaching was seen at Key Stage 4 where the quality of teaching was very good in nearly half of the lessons seen. Excellent teaching was seen on eleven occasions, a high proportion, across a range of subjects, year groups and levels of attainment. Just one unsatisfactory lesson was seen, at Key Stage 3 in science.
54. Teaching was never less than satisfactory at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. It was good or better in nearly every sixth-form lesson and in nine out of every ten lessons seen at Key Stage 4. The quality of teaching was good or better in approximately eight out of ten lessons at Key Stage 3.
55. More than nine out of every ten parents or carers who completed the questionnaire before the inspection agreed that pupils are well taught at St Paul's. Nearly half of them felt strongly that this was the case. The findings of the inspection confirm their views. At the meeting before the inspection there were a couple of concerns about the organisation of homework. The finding of this inspection is that homework is set regularly and for good reason and provides a good level of challenge within overall satisfactory arrangements.
56. At Key Stage 3, the overall quality of teaching is good. It is very good in modern foreign languages, where the best teaching and learning by 14 year-old pupils occurred, and also in design and technology. It is good in all other subjects of the

National Curriculum and in drama. This results in good and occasionally very good learning, particularly in modern foreign languages.

57. At Key Stage 4, the overall quality of teaching is very good. It is very good in English, mathematics, art, music, business studies, vocational courses, design and technology and in modern foreign languages. It was good in all other subjects. The best teaching of 15 year-old pupils was seen in modern foreign languages and in English. Teaching was good in all the other subjects of the National Curriculum and in the range of vocational courses.
58. The hallmark strengths of the regularly very good teaching that enable pupils to learn very well in lessons at Key Stages 3 and 4 are:
- the high degree of challenge that results from teachers' high expectations;
  - the pace and rigour of their presentation;
  - the high level of subject knowledge that instils confidence and rouses pupils' interest.
59. Pace and rigour, providing both intellectual and physical challenges, were a strong feature of lessons in physical education and drama and pupils were also particularly well challenged to achieve well in English and modern foreign languages. In art, very good subject knowledge was presented in a particularly successful way at Key Stage 4 so that all pupils could understand the concepts involved and time deadlines to complete work within a lesson encouraged high degrees of concentration.
60. The decision to organise pupils in single gender groups in English is proving particularly effective in raising the standards and improving the attitudes of the boys. The much improved investigative work in mathematics is helping pupils to think more deeply and the opportunities to write at length in this subject are encouraging good links between literacy and numeracy. The teaching in design and technology, music and history combines a careful balance of support and challenge that helps pupils of all abilities to achieve well.
61. The foundations of the very good teaching in design and technology include both very good specialist knowledge of the subject and a good understanding of the needs of individual pupils. In the teaching of this subject, there is also a very good balance of opportunities for pupils to work together and think for themselves. All these features of very good teaching are seen most strongly in modern foreign languages where teaching is frequently exciting and always well paced, combining a very good range of methods and excellent use of resources to involve pupils very fully, promote good levels of skill in speaking and listening and instil confidence to succeed.
62. Within this overall very good profile of teaching there are one or two areas that require further improvement. There is insufficient use made of information and communication technology, particularly in mathematics and geography, and arrangements to match work to the varying needs of pupils is still insufficient in science where there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to manage their own learning. Whilst the teaching in geography is much improved, there are still occasions when teaching is relatively pedestrian, there is too much reliance on the text book as the sole source of information and the pace is slow. Even in the very good, and sometimes excellent teaching in modern foreign languages there are too

few opportunities for pupils to make use of information and communication technology.

63. Within the overall picture of very good teaching at St Paul's there is a significant proportion of excellent teaching. Examples of excellent teaching were seen at both key stages of the National Curriculum and in both vocational and GCE A-level courses in the sixth form. It was a feature of teaching in English, mathematics, design and technology, music and, most of all, in modern foreign languages and evident in lessons for both lower and higher attaining pupils, both when groups are based on pupils' similar levels of attainment and when they are not. In all, excellent teaching was observed in six per cent of lessons, an untypically high proportion nationally.
64. The critical factors in this highest quality teaching were the excellent planning and levels of expectation which enabled pupils to achieve standards that they had previously not thought possible. In the excellent teaching, pupils' curiosity as well as their interest is aroused.
65. For example, in an excellent mathematics lesson the high level of challenge offered to lower attaining pupils through very effective questioning was readily accepted, leading to a high level of pupil participation in the lesson and a real sense of achievement and confidence by the close. Excellent teaching in mathematics of higher attaining pupils produced just the right mix of competitive spirit and readiness to work together to support excellent progress. A spirit of 'you can do it' pervaded a sixth-form Intermediate GNVQ engineering lesson so that by its close students were both surprised and proud of what they had achieved and gained much from the excellent examples of practical skills provided by their teacher. In an excellent GCE A-level design lesson, students similarly valued highly and gained much from the expertise of their teacher. On several occasions in modern foreign languages, excellent teaching enabled pupils to become totally immersed in the target language by its regular use in a good range of briskly paced activities in a setting where very good display material further promoted concentration and emphasised the immediacy of the language.
66. The overall quality of teaching in the sixth form is very good. Teaching of this standard was seen in all GCE A-level courses except in drama, geography, information technology, modern foreign languages and music where its quality was good. Teaching in the Advanced and Intermediate GNVQ vocational courses is also very good. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen in the sixth form.
67. The strong features evident in the teaching of younger pupils were much in evidence in sixth form lessons. They gain greatly from the very good subject knowledge of their teachers who also know well the individual strengths and weaknesses of their students. This provides a very secure foundation for learning. Explanations and instruction are clear. Teaching methods are very effective in involving students in the lesson by emphasising guidance rather than direction as students explore issues or complete projects. This was a strong feature in theatre studies and initially reticent students in a music lesson were skilfully involved through the enthusiastic promptings of the teacher. High quality discussion that contributed to high standards was a feature of a successful design and technology lesson where the sharply defined objectives within the individual lesson supported students' progress when developing a long-term project. Questions are probing and well used to develop understanding in nearly all subjects. In mathematics, teaching methods as well as resources were well matched to meet individual needs and this generated their enthusiastic involvement when learning about the quotient rule and

in history the combination of excellent resources, a good appreciation of the students' needs and effective group work ensured their full and enthusiastic involvement. Very occasionally, for example in one modern foreign languages lesson, one student was allowed to dominate the lesson. As a result, others were insufficiently involved in oral work and made less progress.

68. There has been a very high degree of improvement in the quality of teaching across the school since the previous inspection. At the time of the previous inspection different standards and criteria were applied in the evaluation of teaching. Current standards and criteria are more exacting. Judged by current standards and criteria, teaching at the time of the previous inspection would have been unsatisfactory. In those subjects where it was unsatisfactory in 1996, music and geography, it is now good. Whereas before there had been misbehaviour in some lessons, much improved teaching methods now promote invariably very good attitudes; the pace of lessons is now invariably good and there is no longer any evidence of low expectations. There are still some occasions when the match of work to pupils' needs is unsatisfactory, for example in science, but overall there has been a good degree of improvement in this area. Many teachers are now much better skilled in helping pupils to think for themselves.
69. The very great overall improvement that has taken place over the last four years owes much to:
- the very good leadership and management of the leadership team in setting and monitoring standards;
  - several significant new appointments in subject leadership;
  - the placing of the issue of teaching and learning at the heart of the school's strategic development plan;
  - very well co-ordinated arrangements to mentor and monitor its quality;
  - a very good staff development programme to support improvement.
70. Pupils' and students' work is marked carefully and indicates a good understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. Helpful marking of their work is an important aspect of the very good relationships, founded on high expectations, that exist between them and their teachers. It helps pupils and students of all abilities to make good progress.
71. There is one lesson in personal, social and health education each week for all pupils. It was possible to see a small sample of these lessons. The overall quality of teaching was satisfactory with some very good features at Key Stage 4, for example the very good use of resources to engage the interest of pupils in the issue of crime and punishment and the effective interventions of the teacher that ensured their attention and involvement was not allowed to flag for a moment.
72. Overall, the teaching of literacy skills is satisfactory. The school has introduced a carefully considered plan to improve these skills and key technical words are introduced carefully and well displayed in many subjects. Good standards of written presentation are expected and achieved by both boys and girls. There is a good degree of consistency in this aspect of the school's work. Writing frames, by which guidance is given about the organisation and development of written work, are also well used to support progress in several subjects and their use is particularly

effective in history and English. However, explicit, progressively more challenging objectives linked to the teaching of literacy skills are not included in the schemes of work in individual subjects. There is an increasing awareness of the general need to tackle issues of literacy in order to raise standards further; there is currently less emphasis on identifying opportunities that might be created to extend literacy skills in all subjects.

73. Skills in information and communication technology are improving. Since September 1999 these skills are taught in a sequence of separate lessons rather than just through the different subjects of the National Curriculum. However, even in subjects where the overall quality of teaching is very good, for example in mathematics and modern foreign languages, the opportunities remain too limited because they are not identified clearly in each subject scheme of work.
74. Numeracy skills are taught inconsistently. There is good practice in design and technology and in some aspects of science but opportunities to build upon the National Numeracy Strategy have not yet been identified explicitly across the schemes of work of each subject. There is a particular need to do so at Key Stage 3 if standards are to rise further, not just in mathematics but in subjects like geography. The challenge in raising standards still further is not only to meet the essential needs but to exploit creatively a widening range of opportunities to develop these skills.
75. Pupils with special educational needs are well taught and make good progress. Support is good when small groups with below average reading, spelling and social skills are taught separately in a small group. This work is effective. It is complemented by very good support within classrooms by teaching and learning assistants who make an effective contribution working in partnership with teachers. The joint planning of suitable work for pupils with statements is very good. For example, in business studies, the teacher and learning support assistant used very effective reward strategies to gain the co-operation and improve the behaviour of a pupil with special educational needs. The pupil met nearly all his targets and was proud of his achievement. Pupils are given the opportunity to work on their own and with other pupils to help them gain confidence and raise their self-esteem. In a practical science lesson a visually impaired pupil gained an understanding of how to separate soluble and insoluble substances and write up the findings with very good support from a specialist support teacher. The visually impaired resource technician gives commendable support for pupils' learning by preparing specialist worksheets and organising information technology programs. Relationships between pupils, teachers and learning support assistants are very good. Specialist staff know their pupils well and have a good knowledge and understanding of their specific needs. However, the targets for learning in individual education plans are not always translated into learning objectives within the lesson planning for pupils at Stages 2 and 3 of the special needs register. Where they are, such as in physical education, progress is very good.
76. Pupils for whom English is an additional language are well taught. The overall quality of teaching provided by the specialist language support staff is good. These staff have good understanding of how to meet the language development and curricular learning needs of the pupils they support. They give clear explanations, helpful repetition and examples of language that help pupils and students to complete their tasks. The support materials are well prepared and when there is opportunity to use pupils' first language to develop English, this is done effectively, for example sometimes in understanding technical words in science. Opportunities for promoting speaking and listening are sometimes missed in lessons because the



support teacher and subject teacher have not planned together to provide them. When the language support teachers cannot be present, pupils for whom English is an additional language do not always make sufficient progress. This is because there is insufficient attention given in the lesson planning and organisation to making sure that pupils understand the vocabulary they need to use. Pupils and students make good progress over time because their work is closely monitored. They also benefit from the language and pastoral support provided during lunchtime and after school.

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

77. The curricular and other opportunities at Key Stage 3 are broad and balanced, except for the relatively low time allowance for music in Year 9. This is compensated for in some measure by the simultaneous allocation of two teachers to each class. Otherwise, all the subjects of the National Curriculum, together with personal, social and health education and drama receive a sufficient allocation of time at Key Stage 3. The diocesan requirement for religious education means that there is an unavoidable reduction in available time for other subjects. The school manages this constraint well but it does limit the possible opportunities to increase the time for music.
78. The Key Stage 4 curriculum, although broad and balanced, has some weaknesses. Not all the strands of information and communication technology are covered, particularly data logging and sensing. As a result, legal requirements are not fully met.
79. At both key stages there is a further weakness in information technology. Opportunities for pupils to practise their computer skills in other subjects are limited. There is no overall record of what skills are being developed at what standard in which subject. Arrangements this year in modern foreign languages make it possible only for those studying French at Key Stage 3 to study two foreign languages at Key Stage 4. However, plans are already in place to offer Italian as the second modern foreign language from 2001. This will remove the current restriction.
80. In all other respects the curricular opportunities at Key Stage 4 are broad and well balanced. The good, developing range of GNVQ courses at both Foundation and Intermediate levels further extend choice. The sixth-form curriculum is broad and balanced, with a good range of A-level and GNVQ courses offering students a wide range of alternatives. It provides a good degree of continuity between the ages of 14 and 19. The GNVQ courses provided at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form are provided for pupils of all levels of prior attainment, thus affording a good degree of equality of opportunity.
81. The school's literacy strategy provides a satisfactory range of curricular opportunities in the majority of subjects. There is a particular emphasis upon teaching key words and concepts and on providing guidance about how to organise and develop extended writing. It is particularly well applied in the English and history departments, but inconsistently so in other subjects. This limits its impact on raising standards. The curricular opportunities to develop numeracy skills in different subjects are even more limited and un-coordinated because these have not been identified systematically and expressed in an agreed policy for all subjects. The school is attempting to put right this weakness.

82. Opportunities to learn are extended successfully beyond the timetabled lessons in a number of ways. For example, there are revision clubs and a computer club. Other areas of strength include physical education, where a high proportion of pupils and students is actively involved in a range of teams and clubs. The modern foreign languages department offers valued annual exchanges to France, Germany and Italy, popular lunchtime quizzes and competitions and very useful visits to the Goethe Institute in London. In English there are entertaining and instructive theatre trips, a popular book week, entertaining and enlightening events on National Poetry Day and several other activities that increase the range of enjoyable learning. All pupils can take part and this very good provision helps to increase motivation and thus contribute to a raising of standards.
83. Planned opportunities for careers education and guidance are good. The programme starts in Year 8 and continues, as part of provision for personal, social and health education, throughout the rest of the age range. Pupils and students receive good advice and guidance from teachers and the Buckingham Careers Service as they move between key stages and at the end of their school career. There is an effective programme of work experience offered to all Key Stage 4 pupils. There are good links with local employers. Business Challenge provides outside mentors, links with local firms are helpful to the GNVQ programme and outside speakers are provided by several bodies, including the Health Authority and Neighbourhood Engineers.
84. The school has good relationships with partner institutions. Although the majority of pupils join the school from four primary schools, there is a total of some 40 partner combined and middle schools distributed over a wide geographical area. Despite their large number St Paul's maintains good contact with them all, and especially with the four main contributing schools. There is a good exchange of information about new Year 8 pupils and a well-planned programme of visits by teachers to the schools. These strong contacts ensure that pupils enjoy a smooth transition to the secondary phase. There are equally firm contacts with local post-16 institutions and with the higher education sector.
85. The school offers a broad and well-balanced curriculum for pupils with special needs and a planned programme for information communication technology in the department. The key features of this successful provision are three-fold: the opportunities to be fully included in the curricular opportunities enjoyed by everyone; specifically targeted provision within this; and the quality of additional support. A certificated course in numeracy and literacy and a Foundation GNVQ engineering course have been introduced at Key Stage 4 for lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs.
86. Pupils with special educational needs are 'included' well in lessons and in the life of the school. Individual pupils and small groups are also withdrawn from lessons for extra help with literacy, communication skills, individual counselling and mobility training. They receive very good support and teaching from specialist staff both in the school and through external agencies. Sixth-form students offer their expertise for additional reading and spelling. This makes a very good contribution to pupils' development of language skills overall. Arrangements for speech therapy for autistic pupils are very effective. Pupils who are visually impaired or who have communication or physical disabilities have full access to classrooms and outdoor activities. A few Key Stage 4 pupils with statements are offered individual support in the learning resource base to catch up on GCSE coursework. This helps them gain confidence and self-belief. Pupils' personal development is effectively enhanced through opportunities for pre-school, break and lunchtime activities. The learning

resource base provides a calm, reflective and safe environment where pupils can work independently or talk with staff in a setting where values and beliefs are shared effectively. There is very positive support for pupils with behaviour problems and this helps them to make full use of the curricular opportunities available.

87. The curriculum makes a very strong contribution to the personal development of pupils, promoting a high degree of co-operation and opportunities for pupils to make decisions and think for themselves. The well planned programme of personal, social and health education covers very well the many issues and challenges faced by adolescents. The GNVQ courses at both Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form help to prepare pupils and students for adult life. Provision for drugs education and sex education is good.
88. The school's provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and students is excellent overall.
89. The provision for pupils' and students' spiritual development is very good and well promoted through opportunities for reflection in meditation, prayer, assemblies, retreats and in lessons across the curriculum. The opportunities provided within religious education are described within the Section 23 inspection report. They also occur in other subjects. For example, in art pupils can explore spiritual themes through the journey of life. At all times, pupils are encouraged to reflect on their talents and how they can use them to help others. In this way the key mission of the school to 'fulfil your ministry' is further expressed. For instance, a Year 10 group is making furniture for the common room. Targets, assessments and rewards are all made by pupils involved in the project.
90. Provision to develop pupils' and students' moral and social development is excellent. There are regular opportunities for pupils and students to think about their actions within the school's Christian, forgiving community. Excellent relationships and very high expectations underpin classroom practice throughout the school, contributing to the very high level of moral behaviour displayed by the great majority of pupils. A well-developed sense of right and wrong is displayed in discussions on moral issues. For example, in history pupils focus on issues such as the Civil Rights movement and they look at the lives of the successful and less fortunate members of society.
91. Across the curriculum pupils and students have a good range of opportunities to work collaboratively. Social and moral conventions are learned through assemblies and School Mass. Teachers are excellent role models. Through the implementation of the mission statement, they focus on the development of the whole pupil and their individual needs.
92. Provision for pupils' and students' cultural development was a key issue in the previous inspection report. The school now makes very good provision for teaching pupils how to appreciate their own and other cultural traditions. For example, within English, pupils study poetry from other cultures at Key Stage 4. In music pupils listen to, and compose in, the styles of jazz and blues from America and raga from India. Outside speakers and actors are invited into school to discuss and illustrate issues such as mental health problems and the Chinese New Year festival. Opportunities to learn about their own culture feature well in English, drama, art, music and physical education but opportunities are missed to explore cultural issues in mathematics and science because there is no reference in schemes of work to science fiction, the history of science or the mathematical activities of earlier civilisations.

## HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS OR STUDENTS?

93. The school cares very well for all its pupils and students because it successfully creates a welcoming, well-supervised and orderly community in which pupils are encouraged to learn. Provision for their welfare is good. Teachers have very good knowledge of the pupils and students and give them very good support. The very good use of educational and personal support and guidance is contributing to the school's rising standards because it helps pupils and students to keep their targets in mind and provides good advice on how to achieve them. There have been considerable improvements to the arrangements for maintaining and improving behaviour since the previous inspection and there are now very good levels of support, advice and guidance. The previous inspection report stated that personal guidance was good, but the programme lacked coherence. The school has tackled this by comprehensive improvements and the creation of an inclusive and supportive community within which there are now excellent procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' and students' personal and academic progress. This very good provision, combined with the very good attitudes that it promotes and the very good teaching in lessons, create a very powerful combination upon which the school's accelerating improvement is founded.
94. The school has a very good child protection policy with very good guidance and practical procedures. There is a named staff co-ordinator who is well experienced and has received the appropriate training. All staff have been thoroughly briefed in the policy and are fully aware of the relevant procedures to be followed. Arrangements for child protection are very good.
95. Responsibilities are defined clearly within the school's thorough health and safety policy. There are clear procedures in place for the systematic monitoring of health and safety requirements and the school receives professional advice from the local authority. While on the whole the school provides a safe and healthy environment, the requirements of the emergency evacuation procedures were, on one occasion during inspection, not followed in design and technology. There are good arrangements for the care and support of pupils who are taken ill at school, including good first aid facilities and carefully maintained accident records. There are good arrangements for supervision at break and lunchtimes.
96. There are very well-considered and very successful procedures for monitoring and promoting discipline and good behaviour. The overwhelming majority are therefore successfully motivated to act responsibly and instances of inappropriate behaviour are rare. A very important aspect of the provision is the example set by adults, including students in the sixth form, within the school community. There is a strong emphasis upon the promotion of self-discipline and personal and social responsibility. As a result, the policy is well understood and conscientiously and consistently applied by all staff. It is also successfully maintained by pupils' own self-discipline and appropriate expectations. This is one of the key reasons why it is so successful. There are very good procedures for dealing with bullying and for resolving incidents that arise. No oppressive behaviour or bullying was observed during the inspection and its rarity was confirmed in discussions with pupils and students.
97. There are systematic procedures for monitoring attendance, effective liaison with the education welfare service and satisfactory arrangements to promote good attendance. As a result of improvements this year, the school now has more clearly defined strategies for improving attendance. The foundations are in place for

improvement in the longer term but rigorous targets and the necessary arrangements to monitor and evaluate their achievement are not in place.

98. The school's very good pastoral arrangements are based on a thorough and sensitive knowledge of all pupils and students as individuals, well matched to their particular needs and this is acknowledged and valued by parents. A high priority is placed on supporting and guiding pupils' and students' learning. The lynchpins are the very good tutorial system and the comprehensive mentoring arrangements which, informed by prior and current attainment targets, provide individual support for all pupils and students. Parents are appreciative of this support which is firmly founded on excellent procedures and records for the monitoring of personal development. In turn, this results in increased self-reliance, confidence and social skills. The gains and advances made to their maturity and personal development well prepare pupils and students for their lives after school. Discussions with them demonstrated that the staff successfully relate to them at levels which are perceived to treat them with appropriate degrees of maturity for their ages.
99. Pupils are provided with a good range of opportunities to exercise responsibility. Members of the sixth form in particular are actively involved helping younger pupils as well as assisting and leading assemblies. The sixth-form students and Year 11 pupils co-ordinate sports day activities. There are active year group councils and a recently established whole School Council. However, there are relatively fewer opportunities for pupils at Key Stage 3 to take responsibility, exercise leadership or develop skills in managing others as part of their preparation for citizenship.
100. The school's arrangements for the welfare and support of pupils provide a very good caring, nurturing and developmental environment. These are very major strengths in the successful promotion of the culture of achievement and responsibility which permeates all school activities.
101. The school provides effective care for pupils with special needs. Those with statements of special educational needs are well monitored and supported and interim and annual reviews meet statutory requirements. There is effective use made of local education authority, social services and careers services expertise to support the good progress of pupils and students. There are very good procedures for their assessment at all stages of the register. Learning support staff visit primary and middle schools, attend pupil progress meetings in Year 7 and arrange induction days for new pupils before they enter Year 8. Individual education plans and interviews with parents identify targets that are appropriate to pupils' needs. However, these are interpreted imprecisely in different subjects.
102. Procedures for assessing pupils and students' progress and the standards that they reach are very good at each key stage and in the sixth form. They are particularly strong in English, history, design and technology and art, and in these areas staff show a very high level of awareness of how well individual pupils and students are doing in their work. They also have a very good knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses. As a result, pupils and students are well aware of how well they are doing, how much progress they are making and what they need to do to improve further. The school did not meet the requirements to report information and communication technology at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 because it judged the basis for those assessments to be insufficient.
103. Taken as a whole, assessment is well used by many teachers to guide the progress of the pupils and students they teach and shows a sound understanding of the statements of the National Curriculum that describe its standards. However, until

1999 the rigour and consistency of these assessments was uneven. It is now improving. Particularly successful steps have been taken in design and technology to improve the accuracy of statutory teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3.

104. The strategic development plan has identified as a priority the need to close the gap between girls' and boys' results in a considerable number of GCSE subjects. The school undertakes thorough monitoring of how well boys and girls are doing but does not evaluate why success has been uneven to date.
105. There are effective systems to ensure that assessment information is used to guide planning of the curriculum. The school's practice overall in this area is good. It is a strong feature in a number of subjects, including English, drama and modern foreign languages. In these subjects assessment contributes strongly to the drive to improve teaching and raise standards. Information from a wide range of sources, including the regular progress checks, is thoroughly analysed by the leadership team. From this analysis trends and themes are identified, and these are discussed with heads of departments.
106. Subjects are grouped into four faculties. The headteacher and his deputies have the role of heads of faculty. As a result they work very closely in monitoring the effectiveness of the subject departments they manage. This enables them, in effective consultation with subject leaders, to support changes or adjustments in, for example, teaching and learning strategies or in the organisation of the curriculum.
107. A strong feature of the school is the very regular monitoring of pupils' and students' academic performance and personal development. This is very good and much valued by parents. The school has a very effective mentoring system. It has a very strong impact on raising achievement. Pupils and students have regular meetings with senior staff in the school to discuss their progress and to plan how they can improve the standard of their work, including the setting of targets that cover both their academic and personal development. Success in reaching targets is celebrated in a number of ways, including the use of progress checks. This creates a culture where success and achievement are valued. In this way the school is successfully meeting one of the three main aims of its current strategic development plan.

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

108. The school has established very good links with parents and carers. They provide very good general and financial support to the school and value highly what it provides and achieves. The school places great value on this partnership with parents and has very good relationships with them. Taken as a whole, the quality of information provided to parents is good.
109. The school works on a continuous basis to maintain good relationships with parents and wherever possible to develop parental involvement in their children's education. The approach adopted is based on regular communications and ready availability. The school communicates frequently with parents. The quality of information is good. There is an informative governing body's annual report to parents and an attractive, well-produced prospectus. There are regular general newsletters and the well presented 'SP Press'. There is a regular programme of curriculum-related meetings for parents that deals with subject information and also covers study skills and organisation, preparing for the examinations and the operation of the mentoring

system. There are also formal consultation meetings, that are geared to the needs of particular year groups. All these meetings receive very strong parental support.

110. Parents value the school's openness. This was reflected in the very high proportion of very positive responses to the parental questionnaire. Its effectiveness stems from the availability, anticipation and responsiveness of the teaching staff. Telephone enquiries by parents are returned quickly and staff make considerable efforts to maintain close links with parents. Parents are given good support and advice on their children's work and how they may help them to learn well. Advice and information are also offered when the need arises for a pupil or student to change a teaching group or a particular academic difficulty occurs. They are positively encouraged to work in partnership with the school on such matters as consistency of expectations, completion of homework and sharing in the celebration of achievements. The school's 'open door' policy successfully encourages regular and broad parental contact.
111. The annual reports to parents are satisfactory. They provide clear indications of pupils' attainment with practical comments in relation to strengths, weaknesses and areas for development. Teachers' good knowledge of their pupils and students helps them to provide detailed information through termly progress checks and discussions with parents.
112. Parents of pupils and students with special educational needs are kept fully and regularly informed about their children's progress and are involved in annual reviews concerning the stage at which their child should be placed on the special educational needs register. These arrangements are carried out fully in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Practice. Parents are invited to make comments and fully participate in meetings with school staff and outside agencies. These meetings are very well supported. Parents of pupils and students for whom English is an additional language are invited to see support staff if they have any concerns and if necessary interpreters are provided at parents' meetings.
113. Parents make good contributions to their children's learning. There are systematic and well-organised homework arrangements. Each pupil has a booklet called a 'pupil planner' in which parental comments are encouraged. This provides regular and frequent opportunity for two-way communication with the school and promotes parents' active participation in their children's education.
114. Parental perceptions of the school are very good. Parents feel that the school is receptive, that they are welcomed and that the staff are approachable. Parents give good support to school activities and there is an active Parent-Teacher Association that provides valuable financial support to the school.
115. There are good links with the parents of pupils who have English as a second language. These are well promoted by the language support staff.

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

116. The leadership and management of the headteacher and his leadership team are very good. The findings of the inspection fully support the parents' view that this is one of the major strengths of the school. At the time of the previous inspection many of what are now very strong features were just starting to grow. They are now flourishing as a result of the very good progress made since then. The headteacher shows an excellent degree of skill in ensuring that the powerful Christian values of the school, expressed in its very clear mission and aims to 'fulfil your ministry', find

expression in raising standards, promoting unity of purpose and improving the quality of teaching and learning.

117. The most significant factors amongst many strengths include a much greater emphasis within very good development planning on defining priorities to bring about further improvements in teaching and learning; the excellent teamwork and strong links between the leadership team and heads of subject departments that support the increasingly rigorous monitoring of standards and quality; and the very good partnership with governors in shaping the future direction of the school.
118. There has been a great improvement in development planning since the previous inspection. The flaws identified then have been fully rectified. The long-term strategy is now very clear and good use is made of available financial data to define the longer-term picture and set planning aims and decisions within them. The sharp definition of what needs to be done and by whom provides a very clear set of manageable steps by which the school and its governors seek together to build a 'culture of achievement' in which values and results are equally prized. The links between the objectives to improve provision and the targets expressed in terms of standards and results are very clear. The current priorities to develop a culture of achievement, close the gap between the performance of boys and girls and improve pupils' basic skills have identified clearly how this very good school intends to become even better.
119. The monitoring and evaluation of performance is required and supported by this approach to planning. The leadership team has been particularly effective in monitoring the quality of teaching and supporting its improvement through very effective staff development arrangements. The monitoring of standards is also rigorous with a strong emphasis on target setting across the school. The heads of subject departments are increasingly involved in these arrangements. Leadership in this respect has been particularly strong in English and modern foreign languages and very good support by the leadership team has helped the science department to improve its monitoring of standards of teaching and learning. Taken as a whole, the school's arrangements extend beyond current statutory requirements for appraisal and provide an excellent foundation for performance management.
120. A useful start has been made this year to analysing more fully patterns of attendance. Pupils' behaviour is very well monitored and the number of exclusions is much reduced from the levels at the time of the previous inspection. They are now low for a school of this size and type. Very good management of pupils' behaviour promotes very good attitudes to learning and the pastoral curriculum is well managed.
121. Satisfactory use is made of new technology to support the management of the school. The leadership team makes use of it as necessary and plans are in place to provide all teachers with laptop computers.
122. The leadership and management of subject departments are very good and sometimes excellent. Whilst there has been a significant number of staff changes since 1996, most staff with responsibilities for subject leadership have remained in post during this time, affording effective continuity during a period of impressive, well managed improvement. Leadership in English and modern foreign languages is outstanding. It is very good in physical education, music, history, design and technology and art. There is good leadership in mathematics and drama. It is satisfactory in geography and science and in information and communication technology.



123. The major management strengths of the heads of subject reflect closely those of the leadership team. Because the headteacher and his leadership team act as heads of faculty, each member has very close links with a group of subject departments. This results in very good communication of expectations and provides very good levels of support, encouragement and recognition of what has been achieved. Subject leaders are given every encouragement to take the initiative and readily accept the accountability that accompanies this.
124. At present, heads of subject departments have had insufficient opportunity to develop their skills in longer-term financial planning and the analysis of statistics. As a result, there is an insufficiently strong emphasis on longer-term strategy in their development planning. Except in the English department, the analysis of results in national tests and public examinations is insufficiently rigorous and detailed to inform decisions about how to raise standards even further.
125. The strong professional trust and 'generosity of spirit' required of all who apply to work at the school promotes a very high degree of common purpose. That strong partnership between pupils and adults was very frequently seen in lessons throughout the inspection. The commitment to make things even better is excellent and the capacity to do so very good.
126. The governing body fulfils its many responsibilities very effectively. A small number take a particularly active role and they ensure that the full membership is kept fully informed of developments. The termly meetings of committee chairs promote a good degree of well-coordinated decision making. Delegation to these committees is very good. In addition to the formal programme of committee meetings there are frequent informal contacts. As a result governors know the school well and have a clear picture of what it needs to do to get even better.
127. All statutory duties are fulfilled except that the requirements for information and communication technology are not fully met. This is because there is currently insufficient time and resources for aspects of sensing and data logging to be covered. However, the work of the curriculum and staffing committee in all other respects is very good indeed and governors were closely involved in the decision two years ago to re-organise the teaching of geography and history as separate subjects in order to raise standards at Key Stage 4 and more recently in the review and changes in the provision for information and communication technology so that it is now taught more effectively as a separately timetabled lesson. The governing body also identified a need to improve the quality of displayed work across the school and this is now a strong feature celebrating achievement in many subject areas.
128. Financial planning is very good. Governors are kept fully informed by the headteacher about the longer-term funding profile of the school and the finance committee monitors the budget rigorously and regularly. The annual development planning and financial cycles are closely matched. The funding of departmental development plans is very carefully considered by the headteacher and his leadership team and is always linked to the results that expenditure is intended to produce. There is a rigorous review of what results expenditure has produced in each subject department in February of each year. The allocation of the overall budget is carefully considered by the finance committee of the governing body. Attention is given to the profile of expenditure in other local schools. The school maintains a minimal financial balance and monitors its expenditure most carefully.

129. The school operates its own cheque book and has established very secure financial controls. Day-to-day financial procedures are very good and all the issues raised in the 1998 auditor's report have been fully addressed. The administrative staff provides excellent support to the headteacher and governors in managing the budget. Governors have set levels up to which funds can be transferred from one budget to another and authority to spend money is delegated to others. There is a well-maintained school inventory that is checked by the site manager.
130. Care is taken to apply the principles of best value by seeking several quotations for major expenditure, comparing prices in the case of minor expenditure and keeping a close eye on the pattern of expenditure and resultant outcomes at other local schools. The principles of best value have been particularly well applied in the decision to appoint a maintenance team to support the site manager. This has resulted in highly cost-effective premises' maintenance. Similarly, best value principles have been applied in the appointment of support staff who deal with many administrative matters such as public examination entries and cover arrangements for absent staff. As a result, the leadership team is able to devote all its time to the key issues of teaching, learning and raising standards.
131. The school makes excellent strategic use of its resources and its expenditure plans are now very closely linked to its planning objectives. The funding for pupils with special educational needs is very carefully managed and the school makes additional budgetary provision for those for whom English is an additional language. The highly effective deployment of resources in these areas helps to ensure that these pupils are fully included in the life of the school. The standards fund is very well managed to ensure that staff development is closely linked to the priorities of departmental plans. The funding of the sixth form is cost-effective with expenditure in this area currently running at two per cent below the allocated level. This bonus is spent at Key Stage 4 and is helping to support the more expensive provision of vocational courses entirely from within the school's own budget.
132. The management and leadership of provision for pupils and students with special educational needs are excellent. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and the performance of special needs pupils are very good. Pupils are proud of the calm, reflective learning environment due to the commitment of the learning support team to the school's policy of inclusion. Very good progress has been made in addressing achievement of special needs pupils since the last inspection.
133. Provision to support pupils and students who have English as a second language is well managed and effective use made of the available additional support. The school has demonstrated its strong commitment to its aims and values by employing a full-time teacher from its own funds to support the language development of these pupils. This is in addition to the part-time teaching provision funded through the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG). The links between the school's own staff and the external support agency are very well co-ordinated. This results in effective and efficient use of available provision.
134. Taken as a whole, the adequacy of staffing, accommodation and learning resources is good.
135. There is a very good match in terms of number and experience of staff to the needs of the curriculum in all subject areas. There is a good balance between full-time male and female teachers and there is a balanced representation of men and women in middle and senior management. Teachers are very well qualified and very well deployed. The leadership is good or better in nearly all departments; in two

departments it is excellent. There is a good balance between experienced teachers and those new to the profession.

136. The school has no difficulty recruiting new staff. Movement of staff from the school is frequently for promotion. Support staff make a recognised and positive contribution to the work of the school. 'Investor in People' status confirms that all staff are equally valued and their training needs recognised. The systems and procedures for induction, mentoring, and teacher development are very well documented and have contributed much to the improved quality of teaching since the previous inspection. The school is currently reviewing its mentoring structure with a view to adapting it into a sharper judgemental tool to be used for performance management.
137. Training needs are identified in a number of ways: through management initiatives linked to school development; through departmental needs; and through individual career needs. The school meets these needs in a number of ways including workshops on the craft of teaching, induction courses for newly qualified teachers and courses for middle managers. Additionally, some staff attend specific courses externally. The school is a very efficient provider of initial teacher training in modern foreign languages.
138. The quality of accommodation is good. It enables the curriculum to be taught effectively in all subjects. Rooms are designated for specific subject use and are mostly grouped together apart from the rooms for science and art. The accommodation for pupils with special educational needs is excellent. It has appropriately sized and designated rooms and a resource area. The physical education accommodation is good. It includes a new gymnasium and large sports hall. However, the tennis courts are in poor condition and limit the type of activity undertaken. The library and sixth-form areas are spacious and well organised with facilities for information and communication technology.
139. The school provides a pleasant environment. The buildings are interspersed with gardens and courtyards often with seats and tables. The pupils appreciate these areas and use them with respect at break and lunchtimes. Some litter was seen around the paths and gardens despite the numerous bins. However, it is regularly removed and there is little evidence of graffiti. Most of the buildings look clean, attractive and well maintained but there is some evidence of discarded chewing gum, worn carpets and poor decoration in parts of the school. The quality of display in all public areas of the school is very good. Display in most subject areas is good and very good in English, mathematics and modern foreign languages. The school is accessible to pupils in wheelchairs. There is a lift to the upper floor and ramps to all the teaching blocks. The accommodation has improved since the previous inspection with the addition of the new sixth-form area, mathematics classrooms and the gymnasium. Overall, the pleasant and spacious accommodation makes a positive contribution to the ethos and quality of teaching.
140. The resources for learning are good and well-matched to the school's curriculum and range of pupils and students. The quality of computers is good. Despite improvements in provision since the last inspection there are still not enough computers for all subject departments to use them when they want to. The school library is very effective in promoting literacy and in supporting effective and challenging teaching in individual subjects. The provision of resources is very good in music, good in art, English, geography, history and physical education and satisfactory in all other subjects. The school also makes good use of resources beyond the school through educational visits.

141. St Paul's Catholic School is a very effectively managed school. Standards in work seen during the inspection at both key stages and in the sixth form are above expectations. Public examination and national test results are rising. Its pupils and students show a very good attitude to their work, to each other and enjoy coming to school. The quality of teaching is now very good and a significant proportion is excellent. Its very good leadership and management has produced very good progress since the previous inspection. The socio-economic circumstances of its pupils are broadly average. Attainment on entry has been slightly below average but is rising; however, the proportion of pupils with special educational needs or for whom English is an additional language has also risen over the last three years and the proportion of higher attaining pupils remains below average because many of those pupils attend grammar schools in a neighbouring county. When all these very positive factors are weighed against the money the school receives to educate each of its pupils, it is very clear that St Paul's Catholic School gives very good value for money to its pupils and students, their parents and the wider community of Milton Keynes.

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

142. St Paul's Catholic School is a very good school. To become even better the headteacher and governors should:
- 1) Raise the standards of boys in those subjects where they are doing less well than girls by:
    - a) analysing where the standards of boys have improved and where they have not over the last three years and identifying the possible reasons why;
    - b) analysing the preferred learning styles of boys and girls in these subjects;
    - c) identifying the links between these learning styles and the required teaching methods;
    - d) seeking the views of the pupils and students about how they learn best;
    - e) using the results of these analyses to adjust teaching styles to match learning styles;
    - f) seeking links with schools in similar circumstances that have been successful in rectifying this issue;
    - g) including this issue within the programme of personal, social and health education;
    - h) enlisting the involvement of parents and external, specialist agencies;
    - i) monitoring and evaluating the impact of changes in teaching styles on the quality of learning of boys and girls and its effect of raising standards.

Paragraphs: 9, 15, 16, 19, 23, 104, 175, 184, 192, 203, 204, 213, 214, 222, 240, 252, 260, 272

  - 2) Develop pupils' and students' skills in numeracy and information and communication technology and still further in literacy to support even higher standards across all subjects and particularly in those subjects that are currently not above the national average at both key stages and in the sixth form by:
    - (a) identifying where these skills are needed in each subject;
    - (b) identifying the opportunities to apply and develop the key skills further in each subject;

- (c) identifying how each subject will enable pupils and students to think more clearly and logically;
- (d) stating objectives clearly in the schemes of work of all subjects to develop these skills;
- (e) promoting the wider use of information and communication technology across all subjects of the curriculum in order to apply and develop their skills still further;
- (f) developing activities that promote numeracy within English and literacy within mathematics;
- (g) monitoring and evaluating the impact that the development of all these skills have on raising standards in each subject of the curriculum;

Paragraphs: 30, 31, 33, 62, 72, 73, 74, 81, 141, 151, 169, 171, 173, 174, 183, 186, 206, 207, 208, 209, 212, 225, 245, 246, 250, 265, 279

- 3) Ensure that the legal requirements for the teaching of information and communication technology are fully met by:

- (a) identifying where and when sensing and data logging will be taught;
- (b) identifying clearly in subject schemes of work specific objectives and
- (c) activities for information and communications technology.

Paragraphs: 78, 79, 228, 229, 230, 232, 233, 236

- 143. In addition, the inspection team recommends that attention be given to the following:

- 4) Make the learning targets clearer for pupils with special educational needs in their different subject lessons by identifying more precisely the skills they need to develop or practise.  
Paragraphs: 26, 75, 101, 154
- 5) Provide more opportunities for pupils at Key Stage 3 to exercise leadership and take responsibility as part of the school's promotion of citizenship.  
Paragraph: 99
- 6) Train subject leaders in the skills of longer-term financial planning and statistical analysis.  
Paragraph 124
- 7) Rectify the condition of the outside courts in order to raise standards in games within physical education.  
Paragraphs: 138, 266

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	190
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	45

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
6	29	52	12	1	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	Y8 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	926	238
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	84	

Special educational needs	Y8 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	28	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	143	2

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	82

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	31
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	40

### Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	7.2
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.9
National comparative data	1.1

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	131	115	246

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	99	93	77
	Girls	94	82	67
	Total	193	175	144
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	80 (72)	71 (64)	60 (60)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	47 (45)	42 (38)	21 (31)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	98	99	100
	Girls	94	87	85
	Total	192	186	185
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	<b>78 (71)</b>	<b>76 (70)</b>	<b>75 (71)</b>
	National	64 (61)	64 (64)	60 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	<b>41 (40)</b>	<b>46 (43)</b>	<b>23 (30)</b>
	National	31 (30)	37 (37)	28 (30)

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	124	106	230

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	57	119	123
	Girls	66	97	102
	Total	123	216	225
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	53 (40)	94 (93)	97 (96)
	National	46.6 (46.3)	90.9 (87.5)	95.8 (93.4)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	45 (41)
	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	54	91
	National		N/a

### ***Attainment at the end of the sixth form***

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		1999	38	46

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	16.8 [ n/a]	18.6 [ n/a]	17.7 (19.1)	2.2	4.9	4.0 (4.3)
National	17.7 [ n/a]	18.1 [ n/a]	17.9 (19.0)	2.6	3.3	2.8 (2.7)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	52	85
	National		N/a



### ***Ethnic background of pupils***

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	45
Black – African heritage	15
Black – other	14
Indian	14
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	6
Chinese	50
White	943
Any other minority ethnic group	77

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

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	4	
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	15	1
Other minority ethnic groups		

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

### ***Teachers and classes***

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y8 – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	66.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.4

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

#### **Education support staff: Y8 – Y13**

Total number of education support staff	22
Total aggregate hours worked per week	636

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y8 – Y11**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y8 – Y13**

Key Stage 3	26.5
Key Stage 4	24.6

### ***Financial information***

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	2,920,179
Total expenditure	2,898,649
Expenditure per pupil	2,473
Balance brought forward from previous year	-17,377
Balance carried forward to next year	4,153

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1,164
Number of questionnaires returned	231

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	45	43	7	2	2
My child is making good progress in school.	55	39	4	2	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	36	51	6	2	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	29	52	13	2	3
The teaching is good.	42	53	2	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	50	42	7	1	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	67	29	2	0	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	74	26	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	47	45	5	0	2
The school is well led and managed.	61	33	3	0	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	53	42	3	0	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	34	41	12	2	11

### Other issues raised by parents

There were no significant issues raised.

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

### **ENGLISH**

144. In National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999, standards were well above the national average. The performance of girls was above average. That of boys was well above average so that although they attained less highly than girls the difference was much less than that found nationally. In recent years, the trend of improvement has been much greater than the national trend, particularly in the proportions obtaining the well above average standard indicated by Levels 6 and 7. There are too few schools nationally with pupils in the age range 12-19 and with similar characteristics to make a valid comparison with similar schools.
145. Standards in English at GCSE in 1999 matched the national average for grades A\*-C and A\*-G. Accurate comparison with similar schools is not possible because there are very few 12-19 schools nationally with similar characteristics. Results in English literature were above the national average and well above for boys, with an unusually high proportion of pupils being entered. In both subjects, pupils' standards were significantly higher than for the other subjects. Results show a considerable improvement since the time of the previous report, especially in recent years, in the attainment of boys.
146. At GCE A-level, all candidates gained grades in each of the last two years. The proportion gaining higher grades, A-B, has increased. Results are much improved since the previous report and are now in line with national figures.
147. Results of tests and examinations at the end of each key stage indicate significantly improved attainment from the time of entry when standards were below the national average.
148. Evidence of the inspection confirms that pupils attain good standards compared with their previously assessed levels of skill. This is particularly evident at the end of Key Stage 3 where pupils speak clearly and confidently when working in groups or contributing to class work. They use widening vocabularies and, in increasing numbers, can speak at length, giving reasons for their opinions. They listen attentively to teachers and each other with quick understanding. If unsure, they ask for clarification. Almost all read aloud confidently and accurately. They are usually able, without assistance, to correct errors in reading. From early in Year 8, they begin to identify significant details in the texts they read. Higher attaining pupils recognise implications and pupils at all levels of attainment begin to recognise how writers achieve their effects and to use similar techniques in their own writing. Pupils develop good skills of note-making. In a very good lesson, a class of pupils aged 13 developed good understanding of how the media presents issues linked to the eating of meat. They demonstrated good skills in identifying the major arguments, made effective notes and considered how writers and film-makers influence consumers. The quality of written work is more variable. Most pupils are able to write appropriately for a variety of purposes including a very good range of creative writing. Lower attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, read and spell with improved accuracy because of the quality and range of the additional help provided for them. Higher attainers are able to organise lengthy pieces without undue reliance upon teachers' guidance and suggested outlines for their writing. Lower attainers become more confident and write in recognisable sentences and paragraphs using an increasing range of vocabulary. The quality of the work of a

significant minority, including some with otherwise good writing skills, is reduced by the continuing errors of elementary grammar and spelling, despite regular marking. Pupils have good understanding of how their work is assessed by teachers and in end of key stage examinations so that they know what is needed to improve levels of attainment. Pupils make effective use of information technology for the presentation of their work and to undertake research.

149. Standards in work seen were above national expectations at the end of Key Stage 4. They are now higher than those indicated by the GCSE examination results for 1999. The good foundations in speaking and listening, reading and writing established in Key Stage 3 provide the basis for this improvement. A particular strength is the quality of pupils' ability to explore challenging literature to gain good understanding of themes, characters and relationships and to support their ideas with evidence from the texts. Very good examples were observed in a number of classes of pupils at the end of Year 10 studying either Steinbeck's 'Of Mice and Men' or 'Daz 4 Zoe' by Robert Swindells in which pupils were also able to describe how the writer uses language to gain particular effects.
150. In the sixth form, standards are broadly in line with national expectations for GCE A-level English Literature. Students are confident in using a range of strategies to analyse texts being studied when working as a class, in groups or as individuals. Higher and average attaining students are confident and articulate in expressing their perceptions and arriving at well considered judgements. Lower attainers are more dependent upon the guidance of teachers, sometimes do not recognise the full implications of questions and some have difficulties in organising written answers and expressing them accurately.
151. The school is developing a range of strategies which involve all subject departments in contributing to raising standards of literacy. Improvements are resulting from the identification by subjects of lists of words that pupils need to understand, use and spell correctly in the work they do. Such words are displayed prominently in many classrooms and frequently reinforced in lessons. A start has been made, particularly in English, history and geography, to help pupils to organise lengthy pieces of written work through the provision of outlines and guidance, known as writing frames. In English and history, a start has been made in developing research skills so that pupils learn to read printed and electronic text quickly, identify significant material, make effective notes and then re-present material in extended form. The school recognises the need to extend these developments more widely and to monitor progress towards this aim.
152. Improvements in standards of attainment at the end of each key stage since the previous inspection result from several factors. Schemes of work have been improved and there is very good guidance to teachers about the aims of each section of work and how to achieve them. Very good curriculum planning provides very good opportunities for the development of good understanding and skills. Assessment of pupils' attainment and progress is very well used to identify needs for changes to provision, for example the successful introduction of some teaching groups for boys only. Pupils have good understanding of the standards they are achieving and the means of further improvement. Linked to whole-school developments, there is a sharper focus upon issues of teaching and learning and the quality of teaching has been considerably improved.
153. The overall quality of both teaching and learning in English is very good. Occasionally it is excellent and in all lessons seen was never less than good. Lessons are very well planned and provide rigorous challenge for pupils and students

at all levels of attainment. Teachers identify clearly what is to be learned and guide pupils and students at a demanding pace. They understand the need to sustain effort and concentration so that the efficiency and quality of their learning is enhanced. Teachers have very good understanding of how work is assessed within the National Curriculum. They share this with pupils so that they understand how they might improve. Teachers skilfully use a very good range of questioning techniques both to confirm understanding and, more especially, to extend it and increase clarity of expression. This encourages pupils at both key stages to feel that they are partners in their learning. In an excellent lesson involving an all boys' class at the end of Year 10, the teacher established a high level of critical dialogue with the pupils. The excellent quality of relationships and very demanding pace led to a well-motivated group making excellent progress and achieving good standards. Relationships between pupils and teachers and amongst pupils are very good so that pupils are confident in making suggestions and exploring possibilities without fear of seeming to fail. At both key stages and in the sixth form, pupils and students respond positively to high challenge because they understand the relevance of tasks and usually because they arouse their curiosity. Sixth-form students exemplified these responses when asked to rewrite Alexander Pope's account of the journey to the Cave of Spleen from 'The Rape of the Lock' as a description of a modern theme park ride. This quality of response supports the learning of all pupils and especially those at the extremes of the range of attainment.

154. Teachers have good knowledge of the difficulties faced by individuals, especially those with special educational needs. Their support is sometimes less effective because targets written in individual education plans are imprecisely stated. Additional in-class support for pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language effectively supports their progress.
155. Pupils at all key stages are well motivated and respond positively to teachers' expectation that they will accept increasing responsibility for contributing to their learning. They demonstrate good levels of interest, sustain good levels of concentration and work hard. Behaviour is usually very good and never unsatisfactory so that learning is not disrupted.
156. Departmental management is excellent. Outstanding leadership has produced a considerable improvement in standards of attainment since the time of the previous report. There is a good degree of sharing and delegation of responsibilities and a strong sense of shared aims to achieve high standards of teaching and learning. Because of these strengths, the department has very good capacity to improve standards still further.

## **Drama**

157. The proportion of pupils obtaining grades A\*-C at GCSE in 1999 was well above the national average. Standards have been consistently well above the national average over the last three years. The attainment of pupils was significantly higher than their average in other subjects for which they were entered. At GCE A-level, the proportion gaining grades A and B was above the national average and all candidates have been successful in recent years.
158. Some pupils have had experience of drama before they enter the school but many have not. The pace and quality of their learning enables a high proportion of pupils to match national expectations by the end of Key Stage 3. Pupils quickly become confident in group work. They are able to practise techniques such as 'hot-seating' as they explore themes such as 'runaways' and work towards performance. A recently

formed class of Year 9 pupils beginning GCSE work demonstrated a very wide range of skills and understanding. As passengers on a bus segregated according to race, pupils made very good progress as they entered into role and improvised responses to changing circumstances. A minority of higher attainers demonstrated very good imaginative engagement and lower attainers, helped by a support teacher, made increasingly good contributions. All pupils made very good progress in developing skills of collaboration and in learning to use a range of demanding techniques.

159. The technical skills learnt at Key Stage 3 are well developed by those pupils who choose to study this subject at GCSE in Key Stage 4. This was evident in a class working towards a performance linked to the theme of heroes. Pupils made good use of a range of dramatic conventions and demonstrated a good awareness of audience so that they achieved effective stylised representations. They are confident in working with each other in planning and can explain reasons for making decisions. They understand how their work is assessed and are able to evaluate their own work and that of others.
160. At GCE A-level, students show skills in planning a performance with good technical understanding. They recognise and make appropriate decisions on technical matters, for example when considering how to stage the masque from 'The Tempest'. Their work is purposeful and efficient. They can enter into role and demonstrate sensitive understanding of characters in 'Top Girls' in dramatic monologues. Standards match and sometimes exceed course requirements.
161. The quality of teaching is good, sometimes very good and never less than satisfactory. Teachers have very good understanding of course requirements and identify clear learning outcomes for their lessons. They conduct lessons at a brisk pace and set testing time limits for the completion of tasks that support the efficiency of learning. As pupils gain in confidence and experience, teachers require them to make their own decisions. Increasingly teachers act as guides and consultants rather than as directors. They make effective use of questions to help pupils to clarify their thinking and to explore a suitable range of possibilities. When performing in role they provide very good models for pupils. Teachers show that they value pupils' work and are concerned for their spiritual, moral, cultural and social development. Their attitudes and the interest pupils and students have in their work lead to progressive improvement in standards.
162. The work of the department benefits from committed and supportive leadership. The subject is a popular option especially at the end of Key Stage 3 and the department has very good capacity to raise standards even further.

## **MATHEMATICS**

163. Between 1996 and 1999 the performance of pupils in the National Curriculum tests at Key Stage 3 has been above the national average. During this time the performance of boys, in terms of average National Curriculum points, has been consistently 1.0 points above the national average but girls have improved steadily moving from below average to above average by 0.6 points in that time. The proportion of pupils gaining National Curriculum Level 7 has doubled in the four years and is now in line with the national average with no significant difference in achievement by boys or girls. Overall standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are above the national average with no significant variation between boys and girls. This reflects the pattern of performance in mathematics by boys and girls nationally. The small number of comparable 12 to 19 schools with similar characteristics makes comparison with similar schools impracticable.

164. The proportion of pupils achieving A\*-C grades in the 1999 GCSE examinations was in line with the national average at 46 per cent. Girls performing slightly better than boys. In the previous two years boys performed better than girls with the overall A\*-C grades at the national average in 1997 but below average in 1998. Standards at GCSE in terms of the proportion of pupils reaching the highest grades A\* and A, although fluctuating, have remained below the national average for both boys and girls during this time. Overall achievement of grades A\*-G was at the national average for both boys and girls in 1997. It was below average in 1998 but improved in 1999 to just below average. Taken as a whole, standards at Key Stage 4 are in line with national averages with no significant variation between achievement of boys and girls, reflecting the pattern nationally in mathematics.
165. In the 1999 GCE A-level examinations standards were below the national average in terms of both achievement of the higher grades A-B and the pass grades A-E. Results were similar but close to the national averages in 1998. Although the number of students studying GCE A-level mathematics has increased in the last two years it remains small for national comparisons. The school advises potential mathematics students that an A\* to B grade at GCSE on the higher papers is a recommended minimum, but it does accept students with an entry qualification as low as a grade C in mathematics on the intermediate GCSE papers. In the past three years approximately a quarter of students have not had the higher qualifications advised. With this level of access to the GCE A-level programme the standards achieved are much more in line with national averages. It is not possible to draw any significant conclusions about the relative performance of boys and girls at this level because numbers fluctuate and are too small.
166. Standards on entry, based on pupils' Key Stage 2 test results the year before they enter Year 8 are below average but show a rising trend over the last three years. National Curriculum levels based on teachers' assessments twelve months later at the end of Year 8 show that most pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, have improved by at least one level. This good progress is confirmed by the above average proportion of pupils who reach the national expectation, Level 5, in the national tests at end of Key Stage 3. The proportion achieving above this is broadly in line with the national average. At the end of Key Stage 4 the achievement of pupils is satisfactory but as in the previous key stage the most able are not achieving the highest grades. In the sixth form achievement is at least satisfactory with some of the less able students performing well above expectations.
167. Standards of work seen were above national expectations across both key stages and broadly in line with them in the sixth form. At Key Stage 3 they were broadly in line with the 1999 national test results but at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form the standards of work achieved this year are higher than those indicated by the 1999 GCSE and GCE A-level examination results. In the sixth form the good and very good work seen is a result of the efforts the department is making to address the needs of those students with the minimal entry level qualifications, to build confidence and reinforce theory with practice.
168. There is a strong emphasis on developing number skills, both with and without a calculator, at Key Stage 3. A middle attaining group of 13 year-olds solving equations using the trial and improvement method demonstrated these arithmetic skills. Many pupils show a very good command of the basic rules of algebra. Investigative work underpins the work across the curriculum and pupils develop well their skills in collecting and recording data and recognising and explaining patterns.

Some challenging work relating visual patterns of dots and lines to corresponding number patterns was seen in a middle attaining group of 14 year-old pupils who had just started their Year 9 timetable. Towards the end of the lesson pupils could begin to explain their hypotheses very well but only at this stage were the most able fully challenged.

169. At Key Stage 4 there is a good level of challenge in the work in algebra for pupils of all abilities. As a result, the majority of pupils can handle linear and simultaneous equations with reasonable confidence. Ideas of functions and their graphs are also well developed. A group of higher attaining 15 year-olds who had just started their Year 11 timetable showed a very good understanding of exponential growth and decay resulting in some very well drawn graphs by both boys and girls. Investigative work builds effectively on work in the previous key stage and all pupils write well when describing their work and explaining their results. There is, however, very little evidence of the appropriate use of information and communications technology in any of this work. More able pupils write well and at length about their work. The writing of one of the more able pupils, whose first language was not English, was only distinguishable from others by the brevity of the text.
170. In the sixth form, work seen in function notation for transformation and rotation and in calculus builds well on the above average ability in algebra that most students have on entry. Students can explain their work with confidence.
171. Greater and more effective use of information and communication technology and other strategies to encourage independent learning would promote the achievement of higher standards, particularly by higher attaining pupils.
172. The quality of teaching is very good or better in over half the classes seen and never less than good. It is good at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Teachers have secure knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, mathematics and a detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their pupils, including those with special educational needs. Relationships in the classroom are excellent with pupils eager to participate in answering questions or explaining their ideas. In the best lessons this combination of teachers' knowledge of pupils and pupils' positive attitudes to learning result in very effective learning at Key Stage 4. With a GCSE group of lower attaining pupils who had just started their Year 11 timetable, the teacher used questions addressed to pupils by name to maintain an excellent challenging discussion on the names and properties of regular polygons. This produced some fine detailed illustrations by all pupils later in the lesson. Lessons are well planned and good classroom management ensures that pupils learn well even when they are reluctant to do so at the start of the lesson. The good level of individual support provided by the teacher in many of these lessons is, however, often at the expense of promoting independent learning and providing challenge for the most able in the class.
173. The department is well managed and teachers work well as a team sharing resources and good practice. There is a clear focus in the department to continue to raise the quality of teaching and the achievement of pupils. General resources are satisfactory but the provision of computers to develop skills in information and communication technology is inadequate.
174. Since the last inspection an emphasis on developing teaching strategies has resulted in much improved teaching and an increase in the quality of learning, particularly at Key Stage 3. There is now a strong and progressive development of investigative work for using and applying mathematics to underpin other areas of



the National Curriculum from Year 8 onward. There is a consistent policy for the marking of pupils' work and feedback to pupils gives a clear indication of current attainment and targets for improvement. However there remains the need to identify in schemes of work how the skills of information and communications technology will be taught and to indicate more clearly how higher attaining pupils are to be challenged to achieve still higher standards at Key Stages 3 and 4.

## SCIENCE

175. Standards in the 1999 national tests for science at the end of Key Stage 3 were broadly in line with the national average for all schools. Since 1996 the proportion of pupils attaining Level 5 or above has been slightly above the national average with a small improvement each year. The proportion of pupils attaining Level 6 or above has not been so consistent with a drop in 1999 from previous years. Over the last four years, the proportion of girls attaining Level 5 or above has been lower than the proportion of boys but this difference is not now so marked. Differences in the attainment of boys and girls at Level 6 and above do not follow any pattern over the last three years. An accurate comparison of Key Stage 3 science results with similar schools is not possible because there are very few schools nationally with pupils in the age range 12 to 19 years and with similar characteristics.
176. Results in GCSE dual award science between 1996 and 1999 have been below the national average for both boys and girls, but there is a definite trend in improvement. In 1999, unlike the previous two years, girls attained more of the higher grades than boys. The proportion of pupils attaining the higher A\*-C grades in the science subjects as a whole is rising apart from a drop in 1998 which recovered in 1999. The introduction of the optional three separate science subjects in 1996 produced the first results in 1998 and in following year results in biology were above the national average with physics and chemistry just below. At GCE A-level students attained 100 per cent pass rate in biology since 1997, with similar results in physics and improving results in chemistry with a well above average proportion of students obtaining grades A and B.
177. Standards in science when pupils start at the school in Year 8 are rising. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils' achievement is good with many pupils making good progress. This was evident in a class of 14 year-olds who had just started the GCSE course. They were able to understand difficult concepts such as the formation of charged particles and the subsequent formation of gas molecules during an electrolysis experiment.
178. Taken as a whole, standards of work seen at Key Stage 3 were above national expectations and higher than the 1999 national test results indicate. They reflect the improvements in teaching and learning that have taken place, particularly in the last twelve months. This was well illustrated in a Year 9 lesson where pupils were able to describe and name the processes involved in the formation of rocks and on another occasion when they made links between magnetic phenomenon and ways of improving the strength of a magnet. At Key Stage 4 the standards of work were above national expectations and significantly higher than the 1999 GCSE results would indicate. Standards of work seen in the sixth form were above those typically to be found in the work of GCE A-level science students nationally. This was well demonstrated when students presented to others their research findings about the effects of humans on their environment.
179. Pupils achieve well at Key Stage 3. Students achieve well in the sixth form. Achievement at Key Stage 4 is satisfactory.

180. The department and the school has worked hard to improve those areas highlighted as weaknesses in the last inspection. The improvement in the standard of teaching has been particularly significant. The quality of teaching was good or better in 80 per cent of the lessons seen during the inspection. This degree of improvement is having a very significant impact on raising the standards and increasing the rate of pupils' progress at Key Stages 3 and 4. The last report highlighted the variable and sometimes unsatisfactory learning by pupils and this is now much improved. In lessons seen, learning was good or very good in eight out of ten lessons. The other aspects of teaching which were identified in the last report as significant weaknesses have now all improved. The intended outcomes of lessons are now clearly stated and shared with pupils. Teachers now have higher expectations of pupils at both key stages in terms of concentration, application and behaviour.
181. The standard of teaching is good at both Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in the sixth form. The very good teaching was characterised by teachers using their subject expertise to present pupils with challenging questions designed to test their understanding and give them opportunities to learn independently. An emphasis on encouraging independent learning was a feature of the very good teaching in the sixth-form lessons. It was a much less frequent feature at both Key Stages 3 and 4.
182. The good teaching seen at both key stages and in the sixth form had many consistent features. Teachers plan the lessons well, make their expectations clear to pupils and explain how the lesson is linked to previous work. The team of technicians aids planning by providing effective and unobtrusive support for practical sessions. In the best lessons pupils are kept on task throughout and are presented with a variety of activities which aid and reinforce learning such as worksheets and a card sort following a practical microscope session on cell structure. Where pupils are challenged with work matched to their needs, they behave well, maintain interest in their work and apply themselves fully. In the very few instances where individual pupils did not apply themselves it was because they were unsure of the tasks or the work was not sufficiently matched to their attainment level. Specific support staff present in some lessons were used effectively to help those pupils with special educational needs. Pupils of all attainment levels responded to the good questioning techniques used by many teachers. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly but the department's marking policy is not applied consistently. The department has not developed a sufficient range of methods to assess pupils' levels of attainment in the National Curriculum during Key Stage 3. It makes insufficient use of short-term targets to support the further raising of standards.
183. The department has moved a long way since the last inspection and particularly in the last twelve months with the appointment of key staff and the restructuring of responsibilities. There is now a firm foundation on which to build the future development needed in the areas of assessment, marking and information technology. The newly appointed co-ordinator has produced a thorough evaluation and action plan for improving information and communication technology in science but there are insufficient computers at present to support the plans.

## ART

184. Standards in the 1999 statutory teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 were broadly in line with the national average, with approximately one-fifth of pupils exceeding the national expectation. At Key Stage 4 standards at GCSE were above the national average in 1999, with nearly three-quarters of candidates obtaining grades A\*-C compared with a proportion of three-fifths nationally. At grades A\*-G all pupils achieved success. This was above the national average of nine-tenths. Girls achieved better results than boys overall, with a pass rate of nearly nine-tenths at grades A\*-C. Over the last three years the GCSE results show an upward trend, with the proportion of passes at grades A\*-C steadily increasing to its present very high level. In the sixth form standards are very high, and in the 1999 GCE A-level examinations all students achieved success at grades A-E. Over the last three years, standards show an upward trend.
185. Teacher assessments of how well twelve-year-olds perform on entry indicate that standards in drawing are below national expectations. When set against results at the end of each key stage, this shows that at Key Stage 3 achievement is good, and very good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Overall, achievement in art is very good when compared to other subjects in the school.
186. In the work seen at Key Stage 3 standards were broadly in line with national expectations. Pupils are able to work in a variety of materials, including pencil and coloured pencil, paint and collage. All work seen is supported by the study of a range of artists and art movements, including Picasso and Braque, and the Impressionists and Surrealists. Some of the work exceeds national expectations and there are some sensitive colour studies to be seen which are based on observation of still life and natural forms. However, drawing, particularly line work, in twelve-year-olds is weak. There is insufficient use made of information and communication technology and not enough emphasis on the development of drawing skills. This is preventing standards rising beyond national expectations.
187. At Key Stage 4 standards in work seen were well above average, with some very good constructions seen which demonstrate a very good understanding of positive and negative shape. Some very good pencil drawing, based on observation of hands and reflections, was also seen. At Key Stage 4 there is still insufficient opportunity for pupils to work on large-scale assignments that require a wider range of materials.
188. In the sixth form standards in work seen was well above average. There was some exciting work that used mixed media, including painting on mirrors and using coloured light to explore personal themes. This work is of a very high quality rarely seen at this stage, and in the sixth form further development of the very good level of personal involvement with the work would be beneficial.
189. Since the last inspection improvement overall has been good. There has been very good improvement in GCSE standards at Key Stage 4 and at GCE A-level in the sixth form. Improved planning and better schemes of work have contributed significantly to this. Teaching and learning has also improved at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, and the consistently high quality of teaching has played an important part in raising standards. Sketchbooks have been introduced which support well planned creative work and promote the personal involvement that is a strong feature of pupils' work. This has contributed greatly to the raising of standards in the subject.

190. Teaching and learning are very good overall. In the lessons seen, four-fifths were good or very good, and there were no unsatisfactory lessons seen. At Key Stage 3 teaching and learning is good, and in the best lessons there is a brisk pace to the lessons, with a number of drawings completed to timed deadlines that promote good learning. This was seen in a lesson on drawing technique, based on the work of Henry Moore, where pupils were encouraged to use vigorous lines to describe forms seen in direct observation of the human figure. At Key Stage 4 teaching and learning are very good and a key feature is the use of teachers' workbooks as exemplars for the students. This has a positive effect on modelling student practice, building good levels of motivation and setting high expectations by direct example. This was seen in a lesson where pupils were working on developing figure drawings as a series of geometrical shapes. The teacher's sketchbook was freely available for them to pick up and use as a reference, and they made good gains in learning as a result. Good instruction and guidance sheets produced by the teacher are also in evidence, and are given to pupils to support their learning, as seen in a lesson based on the study of cubism. These sheets allow them to learn at their own pace, as the next stage is there in front of them. In the sixth form teaching and learning are very good. A strong feature of the teaching is the development of very good teacher-student relationships. This results in the creation of a very confident and positive atmosphere within which challenging tasks can be undertaken, and standards rise steeply. This can be seen in a project based on the study of twentieth century American art, where experiments in paint handling are vigorous and exciting, and a wide range of possible outcomes is generated.
191. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. There is a high degree of shared commitment to success and improvement. A strength in the management of the subject is the emphasis on the monitoring and evaluation of the work of the department. For example, regular review of the curriculum has led to improvements in the planning of schemes of work and in teaching methods used. This has led to higher standards through using sharper learning objectives, and by encouraging lively and imaginative use of sketchbooks. Art also makes a significant contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils and students. Themes exploring these aspects can be seen regularly in their work. For example, a very good exploration of moral issues in relation to football hooliganism was seen in the work of one student. This was linked to the work of Caravaggio, and explored and communicated ideas in a very effective way. In the work of another pupil, strong symbols were used to explore spiritual themes through the journey of life, demonstrating a deep level of reflection on personal experience.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

192. Standards recorded in the 1999 statutory teacher assessments were well below the national average. Girls did better than boys. The proportion of pupils obtaining GCSE grades A\*-C in 1999 was above the national average as it has been in each of the last three years. There is a rising trend in results since the last inspection and each year has shown improvement on the previous year's results. Girls attain higher standards than boys but the gap is narrowing. In 1999 pupils did significantly better in design and technology than in the other subjects for which they were entered.
193. There is a rising trend in GCE A-level examination results. In 1999, the proportion of students gaining grades A and B matched the national average.
194. In work seen during the inspection, standards at the end of Key Stage 3 were above national expectations and significantly higher than the 1999 statutory teacher assessments would indicate. This is because assessments in 1999 were too severe

and since then pupils' graphic skills have improved. As a result pupils can now communicate their ideas more successfully and present their work more attractively and clearly. They have a good understanding of the design process and produce a good range of ideas from which they choose to develop products of good quality, such as mechanical toys. Because they understand the importance of measuring and marking materials accurately, parts fit together well and they take time and are patient in finishing work to a high standard. Pupils respond well to teachers' expectation of high standards because they enjoy opportunities to work creatively. In food technology lessons, pupils demonstrate good practical skills in food preparation and they have a sound understanding of nutrition. In textile lessons, they have good basic skills for hand and machine stitching and use quilting and other forms of surface decoration to make attractive cushions. In electronic products lessons, pupils have a good understanding of electronic components and circuits that they use to make moisture detectors, contained in novelty vacuum formed plastic cases. Pupils evaluate their products and make sensible suggestions about how they might improve them.

195. In work seen at the end of Key Stage 4, pupils reach standards that are above the national expectations. They reach high standards in designing and making products which fit given criteria for consumer needs and wants. They produce good creative designs, for example for acrylic clocks, and they make them to a high standard. Finishing skills are very good because they know this is expected and pupils are taught how to achieve the best possible results. Opportunities for pupils to work independently result in their producing original work of good quality. Talented pupils are encouraged to develop their creativity, for example in textiles when a boy produced a skilful and highly decorative fabric picture inspired by images seen in a fish restaurant. In food lessons, pupils know about the ingredients they use and so are able to select appropriately to provide the best colour, texture and flavour. Drawing skills are above average. Pupils communicate ideas clearly with good pictorial representation, and accurate formal drawings. They design and construct products that are well researched and show a good understanding of what appeals to consumers. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of project management and illustrate clearly the development of their ideas and learning about topics. Coursework projects are well organised and well presented. Design ideas often demonstrate flair and imagination in resistant materials and textiles such as in the design of acrylic containers, which are often sophisticated and are constructed and finished to a very high standard.
196. Standards in the sixth form have risen since the previous inspection. The standards of work seen were above national expectations. Students studying GCE A-level courses have a good understanding of the principles of design and recognise good and unsatisfactory features of commercial products. In addition to success in examinations, they learn to be discriminating consumers and to appreciate what constitutes a successful product. In lessons, they engage in mature discussion and have a good understanding of construction of items, for example of furniture and how this affects function and aesthetics.
197. Improvements in standards since the previous inspection are a significant feature of the department in all key stages. The main reasons for this are the understanding of how pupils and students learn and provision for each at a level that matches their prior attainment. The very good relationships in lessons encourage their co-operation. The close monitoring and assessment of their work is used very effectively to plan future work. This motivates pupils and students well and helps them to make progress towards their individual targets.

198. Pupils have limited practical experience in design and technology when they join the school in Year 8. They make very good progress and achievement is very good by the end of Key Stage 3. Pupils learn quickly to use a wide range of hand and machine tools safely and accurately. They make very good progress in learning to design products that function well and to evaluate their effectiveness in relation to what could have been done better. Because they are expected to think for themselves, pupils learn to solve design problems and plan work that is original. Higher attaining pupils are gaining fluency in drawing and making good progress with communicating ideas graphically. In all aspects of the subject, pupils are highly aware of safety issues and they work safely and sensibly in practical lessons. They make good progress with learning about the materials they use and the techniques for using a wide range of textiles, food and resistant materials. They make good progress with learning to plan healthy meals and about foods from other countries such as Italy. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because they are well supported by teachers who have good knowledge of their needs and they are provided with appropriately challenging work. The wide range of experience pupils have in Key Stage 3 prepares them well to undertake the more specialist work in Key Stage 4.
199. Pupils achieve well by the end of Key Stage 4. They quickly establish skills for managing projects and developing coursework folders over the key stage. They improve presentational skills, often enhanced by the use of information technology and learn to research and present their ideas clearly. Higher attaining pupils explore the subject matter in depth and occasionally a talented pupil produces work which goes beyond the requirement of the examination syllabus, for example in textiles projects. Pupils learn to interpret project briefs imaginatively and independently, as in their designs for clocks. They make good progress with drawing skills. Formal drawing and sketching techniques are used effectively to communicate ideas. Pupils increase their technical vocabulary and improve their numeracy skills when they calculate, measure, mark and cut materials accurately.
200. Students enter the sixth form with at least satisfactory and usually good standards of design but not always in the materials to be used in GCE A-level courses. They learn quickly to approach the subject in depth and show ability to justify the design features of their products. They make good progress with learning about commercial product design. Because they develop inquiring minds, they learn more about the reasons for particular designs and the ways, for example, that materials are joined to achieve the best results. For these reasons, students achieve well.
201. The quality of teaching is very good at both key stages and in the sixth form. In lessons seen, teaching was often very good, sometimes excellent and never less than satisfactory. Teachers have very good subject knowledge that they use to plan interesting and motivating lessons. They have a very good awareness of the needs of all pupils and provide them with appropriately challenging work. This leads to raised confidence and good progress. Teachers' enthusiasm for their subject is communicated to pupils who enjoy the work, particularly the opportunities to work creatively on their own ideas. There is a very good partnership between support staff and teachers so that pupils with special educational needs make good progress. This is further enhanced by the effective contribution made by technicians and volunteer helpers from the sixth form. The quality of relationships between teachers and pupils is significantly helpful in raising standards by encouraging co-operation and very good behaviour in lessons. Teachers are very good role models for both the social and moral development of pupils whom they treat with care and respect. Pupils are encouraged to think for themselves and teachers employ effective strategies to engage them in problem-solving activities.

202. Leadership and management of the department are very good. There is clear direction for the work of the subject. An excellent team spirit prevails and all members contribute willingly and effectively to developments with the shared aim to raise standards. There has been very good improvement since the previous inspection, particularly in the improved provision at Key Stage 3, the quality of displays of pupils' work, the achievement of boys, the monitoring of attainment and progress of pupils and the use made of this information to set targets for individuals and to plan lessons and courses. The readiness of the department to review critically what it is doing, the continuous monitoring of provision and recent appointments provide very good capacity for further improvement.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

203. In the 1999 statutory teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 the proportion of pupils achieving the national expectation, Level 5, was broadly in line with the national average. It was well below the national average for those reaching Level 6 or above. The proportion of girls gaining Level 5 or above exceeded that of boys in the same ratio as nationally, but at Level 6 and above the girls' superiority was much wider than the national gender difference.
204. The school has entered pupils for the GCSE examination in geography since 1998. Results have been well below the national average in terms of the percentage pass rate at grade C or better, and just below the national average for those achieving grade G or better. Girls' results have been better than those of the boys by a wider margin than the national gender difference, although the gap is narrowing. Relative subject indicators show that pupils perform less well in geography than in their other GCSE subjects.
205. Results at GCE A-level have been in line with the national average for the last three years, although the proportion obtaining grades A and B has been lower than the national average. There has been no consistent pattern of boys' or girls' superiority in recent years. These results suggest satisfactory progress by pupils in their first four years at the school compared with their ability profile on entry, but good progress by students during the sixth form.
206. In work seen during the inspection the standards reached by the majority of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 were broadly in line with the national expectation with substantial minorities above and below it. These standards are broadly in line with the 1999 teacher assessments. Higher attaining pupils compile accurate annotated maps and diagrams and write fluently in completing their enquiry work. They extract relevant information from a range of source material, including the Internet. They can for example, in work on population trends, identify and explain the effect of the different factors influencing birth and death rates. Some lower attaining pupils are restricted in their ability to write fluently by their limited literacy skills. Most pupils can compile simple graphs to interpret data.
207. Standards in work seen at the end of Key Stage 4 were similarly broadly in line with the national expectation for the majority of pupils, but with small minorities above and below it. Higher attaining pupils produce good quality coursework based on their fieldwork. This includes good descriptive writing and makes good use of computers to enhance presentation of text and graphs. However, pupils do not use correlation techniques for data analysis and there is insufficient emphasis on hypothesis testing. Most pupils make accurate notes and have a good command of the technical vocabulary of the subject, as seen in a lesson on the developing world,

when they used such terms as 'shanty town' and 'rural-urban migration' confidently. As at the previous key stage a minority of lower attaining pupils have difficulty with the writing demands of the subject.

208. Standards in work seen in the sixth form were also broadly in line with national expectations. A minority reach high standards. Students can make clear notes that provide a very good foundation for later revision. Only a minority has achieved the fluency in essay writing necessary for the highest GCE A-level grades. Students with two terms of their course to complete showed admirable aptitude in their first attempt at a decision-making exercise requiring them to decide on the siting of a new superstore. The general level of coursework is very good, but as at Key Stage 4 the work is too descriptive and students do not use the sophisticated statistical methods generally expected at GCE A-level. At none of the three key stages are there any significant gender or ethnic differences in the standards of work seen during the inspection.
209. Most of the issues raised in the previous inspection have been rectified. There are now more opportunities for independent enquiry and pupils' behaviour is now much better. The quality of teaching has improved markedly and tasks are more challenging. Resources have been improved with the acquisition of more textbooks so that most pupils can take them home. These changes have resulted in an overall improvement in standards since the previous inspection, although they still need to be raised further. The range of opportunities to apply and develop skills in information and communication technology remains insufficient despite some improvements since the last inspection.
210. The overall quality of teaching is good throughout the age range. In lessons seen during the inspection it was never less than satisfactory. It was very good in one quarter of lessons seen. All teachers have good subject knowledge. They provide suitable conditions for learning by maintaining good discipline. Potential misbehaviour is dealt with tactfully. On only one occasion did silly behaviour by a small group of Year 11 boys affect the pace of learning. The best teaching is characterised by challenging tasks well matched to the needs of all pupils, a variety of activities, and good management of time. These features were seen in a Year 11 lesson on the quality of life in Kenya, when pupils reached a very good understanding of living conditions there after watching a video clip, responding well to skilful questioning and completing well designed worksheets. Comparatively less successful lessons have overlong introductions, lack variety and stick too closely to the textbook. Teachers' guidance in the use of a range of resources has a positive effect on learning. Most pupils recall and consolidate earlier learning, prompted by their teachers' thorough review of recent lesson content. Learning is further assisted by frequent planned opportunities for pupils to help each other. Lessons that offer a variety of activities enable pupils to maintain concentration and make good progress. These features were well illustrated in a Year 10 lesson on the impact of earthquakes. There was a particularly good balance between the teacher's explanation, a video clip and pupils' activity. There was good guidance given to pupils about how to organise and develop their written work. This helped pupils to raise the standard of their work.
211. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in relation to their prior attainment. Teachers know them well and recognise their needs.
212. The leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. There have been improvements since the last inspection in the monitoring of pupils' progress and in the quality of teaching and learning. Standards have risen as a result. The



rate of improvement is insufficient. Too little use is made of information and communication technology to teach more sophisticated techniques for data analysis and insufficient guidance is given to improve hypothesis testing within course work.

## HISTORY

213. Standards in the 1999 statutory teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 were below the national average. The proportion of girls reaching standards above the national expectation, Level 5, was much greater than the proportion of boys.
214. In the 1999 GCSE examinations at the end of Key Stage 4, the proportion of pupils obtaining grades A\*-C was below the national average. The proportion obtaining grades A\*-G was above it. Pupils have been able to study history as a separate GCSE subject since 1998 and standards are improving. In 1999 the performance of boys was well below that of girls but all the available evidence supports the view that the department have now made good progress in raising the attainment of boys to match that of girls.
215. In the sixth form, GCE A-level results in 1999 were excellent. Half the candidates achieved grades A or B and all passed with at least a grade E. Both boys and girls do well. This overall improvement on previous years, results from improved teaching of the GCE A-level course.
216. Standards in work seen at Key Stage 3 were above national expectations. Given the pupils' overall attainment on entry these standards are good. Pupils demonstrate good historical knowledge and understanding. Their skills in using historical sources are less well developed.
217. At Key Stage 4, standards of work seen in lessons and in written work completed previously were broadly in line with national expectations. This improvement is the result of good teaching that covers the requirements of the examination syllabus very thoroughly.
218. Standards in work seen in the sixth form were above national expectations. Students can explore complex problems such as the themes running through British foreign policy in the period 1871-1902.
219. At Key Stage 3, all pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve well and make good progress. They show good factual knowledge of events and understanding of why those events are significant. They also demonstrate very good writing skills that are the result of well-focused teaching. Many pupils in all groups are keen to respond to teacher questioning and to offer comments.
220. At Key Stage 4, pupils of all levels of attainment who choose to study the GCSE course, including those with special educational needs, are making good progress. In one lesson all pupils made good gains in their ability to use historical sources to build up a picture of why men volunteered to fight in the First World War.
221. Sixth-form students who choose to study GCE A-level history achieve very well and make very good progress in their understanding of the underlying themes in the periods studied. For example, in one lesson students made good gains in their understanding of how the Nazi state was unable to control all young people by studying a range of historical sources on the Swing Kids and the Edelweiss Pirates.

222. The department has made very good progress since the last inspection. Standards at GCE A-level and GCSE have risen and the numbers opting for the subject are very healthy. Good progress has been made on raising the attainment of boys. There has been excellent progress in the teaching of basic skills and thinking skills. As a result, pupils and students in all years are able to write at length.
223. The quality of teaching in history is good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in the sixth form. There are a number of strong features. One is good planning, both long-term and of individual lessons. In a GCE A-level lesson, students' understanding of the complexity of British foreign policy was helped by careful teacher planning. Pupils had covered and grasped the basic factual information, such as treaties and events, in a previous series of lessons. They were thus able to complete successfully a skilfully constructed card sorting activity. This helped them to see the patterns and themes, such as Imperial ambitions. As a result, they were well-prepared to write an essay explaining all this.
224. Another strong feature is the pace and enthusiasm of the teaching. In a Year 9 lesson the pupils were enthused by the lively introduction about the indigenous peoples of North America. As a result they were keen to apply their understanding to discussing the sources available to help them find out more. There was a very supportive and challenging atmosphere in all lessons. As a result more than three quarters of the pupils were keen to participate in teacher-led discussions. They were confident in their own knowledge and prepared to risk giving answers that might be wrong.
225. The leadership and management of history are very good with all efforts being focused on improving teaching and learning. The quality of the assessment and marking of pupils' work in all years is very good and this is having a very positive impact on the progress of pupils of all abilities. The department makes particularly good use of the resources at their disposal. Each pupil has a copy of the book relevant to the period they are studying. There is also a very clear awareness of the need to improve standards at GCSE still further and to exploit more fully the potential of information technology.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

226. Information and communication technology (ICT) is not taken as a separate GCSE subject. In GCSE business studies courses and in GNVQ courses where ICT is a significant element, pupils reach high standards. Since September 1999 it has been taught as a separate lesson at Key Stage 3. Planned opportunities to develop skills in information and communication technology are a legal requirement in all subjects of the National Curriculum.
227. Standards in the 1999 statutory teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 were broadly in line with the national average. Boys and girls reached similar standards.
228. Standards in work seen at the end of Key Stage 3 were broadly in line with national expectations. Pupils showed good word-processing skills and used desktop publishing techniques effectively to present work in subjects such as English. Pupils reach standards above national expectations in the creation of databases and in their use of them to sort and search for information. They understand their purpose and wider use in society. Pupils reach satisfactory standards in entering textual and numerical data onto spreadsheets in order to model business situations. Although pupils perform satisfactorily in comparison to national standards, their

main weakness is in data logging and sensing where there are insufficient resources to enable them to develop their skills fully. Pupils use computers confidently and competently to obtain information from the Internet.

229. The provision of separate ICT lessons for all pupils since September 1999 has contributed significantly to the standards pupils now reach. Although there are good examples of the use of information and communication technology in some subjects, the development and application of these skills are inconsistent overall. Although teachers from each department meet with the co-ordinator of ICT each month to monitor provision, the current level of co-ordination is insufficient.
230. In work seen at Key Stage 4 standards were below national expectations. They matched national expectations in many aspects of the subject but not in data logging. There are insufficient resources currently to enable all pupils to develop these skills. The school is aware of shortcomings in the resourcing of both sensing and control and has plans well in hand to rectify the situation. In the various courses at Key Stage 4, pupils reach high standards for data handling and communicating information. They have good word-processing and desktop publishing skills because they have opportunities to practise them in most subjects of the curriculum and many pupils use computers to good effect to organise and present their coursework projects. Pupils who take the separate course in IT develop relevant skills and knowledge to use computers independently to support their work in other subjects. Teachers provide further guidance and support to help them to improve their work in relevant situations. All pupils study control technology as a separate element and attain satisfactory standards. They can create a set of instructions to control models that activate motors and cause movement. Higher attaining pupils understand what sensors detect and how they are used. They understand the use of control technology in industry to manage production processes efficiently. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress at Key Stage 3 and satisfactory progress at Key Stage 4. They are well supported in lessons by teachers and learning support assistants who successfully use extra resources such as focus cards to maintain pupils' interest and concentration.
231. Students in the sixth form reach standards in line with national expectations. As a result they can use ICT to research and present their work in the courses they study. To provide them with a firm base of experience, students take a basic course in information technology that covers the skills of word processing, desktop publishing, spreadsheets and databases. They use computers competently to research information for their subjects and to find out about possible career paths. Students are also provided with time during which they are supervised by specialist ICT teachers whom they consult about the ICT work they are doing to enhance their studies in other subjects such as English.
232. Pupils enter the school in Year 8 with very different degrees of experience in the use of computers. Few have reached standards in line with national expectations for the end of Key Stage 2. They make good progress and achieve well by the end of Key Stage 3. Since September 1999 the timetabled lessons for Year 8 pupils enable them to make good progress with the basic elements of the subject. In some subjects they can apply their skills well, for example in the use of fitness graphs in physical education and in the use of desktop publishing skills in design and technology, English and history. Not enough progress is made with sensing and control for which there is insufficient equipment.
233. Achievement is satisfactory overall at Key Stage 4. In a range of courses that includes GCSE business studies and GNVQ business, pupils make satisfactory

progress as they further develop their skills and knowledge in the use of ICT to research and present information and to model business situations. They learn to use computers in order to organise and present coursework for major projects in other subjects and effectively use the internet to research information. Through separate provision, pupils learn the basic elements of computer control technology and recognise its use in process control of products in industry. Progress with data logging is hindered by the lack of appropriate equipment.

234. In the sixth form, achievement is also satisfactory. Students make satisfactory progress as they continue to develop relevant ICT skills and knowledge within GNVQ courses and, through separate provision, gain sufficient experience of ICT to research and present their work in other subjects.
235. The quality of teaching is good at both key stages and in the sixth form. It is good in specialist lessons, in business studies and in those subjects of the National Curriculum where teachers provide opportunities for pupils to develop their ICT skills. Teachers communicate information very clearly. This enables pupils to work confidently. They plan lessons carefully to challenge and interest pupils of all levels of ability. Learning support assistants make an effective contribution to the pupils' progress. Teaching methods successfully lead to learning of good quality so that pupils become confident in using computers independently. Teachers use questions skilfully both to confirm and extend learning. The very good relationships teachers have with pupils encourage mutual respect and co-operative attitudes. Teachers have high expectation of both the work and behaviour of pupils. This results in good progress in many lessons. Confidence and expertise are growing in the use teachers make of information and communication technology, for example to enhance the presentation of coursework and fieldwork in geography. They provide well for pupils with special educational needs through appropriately challenging and interesting work.
236. Taken as a whole, the leadership and management of the provision for information and communication technology across the school are satisfactory. The legal requirements to teach sensing and data logging are not fully met. However, the recently appointed co-ordinator has quickly given good leadership in defining a clear direction for the work of the department. Significant developments have taken place in the provision and monitoring of the subject since September 1999. Specialist teachers are well qualified and technicians make an effective contribution to the smooth running of the work of the department. There is a good spirit of co-operation and a strong and shared aim to improve provision and standards.
237. There has been a good degree of recent improvement in provision and how teaching is organised within the timetable. Staff have received training in control technology and guidance in other aspects of the subject to meet individual needs. The department has a good degree of capacity for further improvement.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

238. Standards upon entry in Year 8 of Key Stage 3 are wide-ranging. Some pupils, who have chosen to start a different foreign language from the one taken in their previous school, are complete beginners whilst many other pupils have average levels of attainment. The latter have, for example, a knowledge of basic personal language relating to name, age, family, numbers, colours and leisure interests.

239. Standards in the 1999 statutory teacher assessments were well below the national average. The boys did better than girls. The proportion of boys reaching the national expectation in modern foreign languages, Level 4, or higher was close to the national average. The proportion of girls reaching this standard was well below the national average.
240. Standards in the 1999 GCSE examinations were above the national average in German, below it in French and broadly in line with it in Italian. Girls performed much better than boys in French. However, the proportion of girls obtaining grades A\*-C was only slightly closer than the boys to their age groups nationally. Girls did very much better than boys in German. The proportion of boys obtaining grades A\*-C was broadly in line with proportion of their age group nationally. The proportion of girls reaching this standard was much higher than their age group nationally.
241. Standards in GCSE examinations in modern foreign languages rose between 1997 and 1999. The proportions of boys and girls obtaining grades A\*-C in French rose at a similar rate. Whilst there was a greater degree of fluctuation in girls' results over these three years, their trend of improvement was more marked.
242. Standards in the sixth form in GCE A-level examinations over recent years have remained in line with the national average.
243. Standards in work seen at the end of Key Stage 3 during the inspection were much higher than those recorded in the 1999 statutory teacher assessments. The majority of pupils were working at levels above the national expectation. Most could, for example, understand lessons conducted entirely in French, German or Italian spoken by the teacher at normal speed. They could engage in fairly long conversations on familiar topics and play the role of the teacher, posing questions and eliciting replies from the class. They could also seek information, ask for clarification, give reasons for actions and express personal opinions. Additionally, many pupils of higher ability at Key Stage 3 achieved very high standards, especially in listening and speaking. They could, for example, cope with unpredictable language in unexpected situations, discuss aspects of grammar and usage, negotiate deadlines for homework, and even be humorous!
244. At the end of Key Stage 4 standards in work seen across all three languages was above national expectations. An examination of written work produced by this year's GCSE candidates and observation of a selection of current GCSE pupils performing a range of oral tasks also confirmed these standards. In lessons seen, most pupils at Key Stage 4 could participate actively in lessons conducted entirely in the modern foreign language. They were able to engage in role plays of increasing complexity, demonstrate an awareness of many basic grammatical structures, make oral presentations and write letters and compositions with reasonable accuracy. Some higher attaining pupils at Key Stage 4 were at ease using the foreign language as a normal means of communication on a wide range of topics. They could respond to unpredictable language with confidence and reasonable accuracy.
245. The standard of work seen in the sixth form ranged from below to above national expectations. All sixth-form students are able to follow lessons conducted entirely in the foreign language on topics such as contemporary issues, literary analysis and grammatical patterns. Some higher attaining students develop the breadth of vocabulary and degree of grammatical accuracy to write a range of text types and are also able to talk discursively. However, the spoken language of many students is below the national expectation.

246. Progress since the previous inspection has been very good. There has been a steady improvement in GCSE results over the last four years. The standard of oral work observed in lessons in Key Stages 3 and 4 is now generally very high. Written work at these two key stages is also above average. A number of factors contribute to this improvement: the department identified a clear list of prioritised objectives after the last inspection with an action plan on how to achieve them; a new scheme of work has been created; there have been major improvements in teaching methods and many new teachers appointed; pupils now concentrate on only one modern foreign language at Key Stage 3; there is an effective programme of staff development and the standards and progress of all pupils is carefully monitored.
247. Taken as a whole, the quality of teaching is very good. It was very good in lessons seen at Key Stages 3 and 4 and good in the sixth form. There were examples of excellent teaching in modern foreign languages. There is a clearly identifiable departmental style of teaching used by teachers of all three languages. A high number of different teaching styles is deployed in a co-ordinated approach across the whole department resulting in pupils of different levels of attainment being motivated and challenged to achieve their best.
248. Lessons are conducted entirely in either French, German or Italian pitched at just the right level to match pupils' current attainment levels but also to challenge them to improve further. This results in pupils being accustomed to using the foreign language naturally and with confidence. The planning of lessons is very good. They are divided into a number of appropriately linked elements, leading to a logical conclusion. These are very important features in the much improved quality of teaching that are leading to rising standards.
249. Other strengths in the quality of teaching that have a very strong impact on improving the quality of pupils' learning are the very good use made of a range of resources including video and audiocassette recorders, overhead projectors, cue cards and worksheets. These are used to support oral work in a variety of ways in lessons, sometimes with the whole class and at other times in small groups and pair work. As a result, pupils are well motivated and their interest is sustained throughout the lesson. The sensitive marking and correction of errors helps pupils to improve whilst maintaining their confidence and desire to do well. Teachers also use regular tests and continuous informal assessment to assess and record pupils' progress. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported. Two special educational needs teachers have recently gained modern foreign language qualifications in order to ensure that they can support pupils even more effectively.
250. There are limited opportunities for pupils to manage their own learning by using information technology or published materials. The department is, however, about to introduce satellite television from September 2000 and is currently planning to evaluate how best to introduce information technology in the teaching of modern foreign languages. The department also has plans to examine the role published material could play with certain more able groups.
251. The leadership and management of the department are excellent and has resulted in rising standards and very good teaching. The standards in lessons seen during the inspection were very much higher than those recorded in recent national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 and in GCSE examinations at the end of Key Stage 4. Responsibilities are delegated appropriately and to very good effect. The teachers of modern foreign languages are industrious, enthusiastic and receptive to new ideas. They work hard to hone their already highly developed teaching skills in order

to continue to raise standards and do their best for all pupils. The pupil exchange programmes with Italy, France and Germany, the very good accommodation and very good display of pupils' work and language teaching items all enhance the language learning and contribute to the rising standards.

## MUSIC

252. Standards in the 1999 statutory teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 were broadly in line with the national average. The girls achieved higher standards than the boys. Standards in the 1999 GCSE examination at the end of Key Stage 4 were broadly in line with the national average. In the sixth form, standards in the GCE A-level music examinations have fluctuated and entry numbers are too small to provide valid national comparisons. In 1997, three-quarters of pupils gained A-E grades. In 1998, all pupils gained A-E grades. In 1999 the one candidate gained grade D. This result exceeded expectations.
253. There has been a very good degree of improvement since the last inspection in the standards achieved and an almost three-fold increase in the number of pupils choosing to study music at GCSE. There has been a significant increase in the proportion of pupils who have additional instrumental lessons. This has risen to eight per cent since the previous inspection. In 1997, one-third of candidates obtained grades A\*-C and all obtained grades A\*-G. In 1998, the proportion obtaining the higher grades increased to two-thirds and all candidates again obtained grades A\*-G. Two-fifths of the candidates gained grades A\*-A or higher. In 1999, two-thirds of pupils obtained grades A\*-C grades and all achieved A\*-G. One-third of pupils gained grades A\*-A.
254. Standards in work seen at Key Stage 3 were broadly in line with the national expectations. A significant minority of pupils achieve higher standards. These pupils are supported in their learning by additional instrumental lessons and extra-curricular performing opportunities provided by the school. Standards in work seen at Key Stage 4 were above national expectations and reflected the pattern of rising standards in GCSE results. Standards were also above national expectations in the sixth form.
255. When pupils enter the school in Year 8, many do not have the range of knowledge and skills expected of their age group and are not familiar with the elements of music. They achieve well and make good progress at both key stages and in the sixth form.
256. Taken as a whole, the quality of teaching is good. It is good at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form. At Key Stage 4 it is very good and occasionally excellent.
257. Lessons are taught by experienced musicians who are skilled in adapting music to meet the special and individual needs of the pupils. The content of lessons and activities at both key stages and in the sixth form are chosen with careful regard to what appeals to young people. As a result, pupils respond with enthusiasm and music is an increasingly popular choice at Key Stage 4. They are frequently exposed to a variety of cultural styles and all lessons are effectively planned to include some listening that is related to practical work in Key Stage 3 and to the GCSE and GCE A-level examination requirements. In this way pupils' and students' musicianship increases steadily through both listening and creative music-making. Discipline is very good, firm and friendly, and lessons are orderly. Pupils and students enjoy the self-discipline of practising their keyboards, other instruments

and vocals, individually and in groups. For example in a Year 10 lesson, pupils learned to sing the melody of a song. They then worked individually or in groups developing their ideas of instrumentation and the arrangement of the music. This resulted in a good quality of learning and good standards.

258. There were examples of pupils offering more than one instrument, playing or singing the melody, harmony or counter melody. In most lessons seen, pupils were given the opportunity to explore ideas and realise their capabilities. Teachers generate a lively response from classes through rigorous questioning. This results in good learning because pupils think for themselves in musical terms. For example, in a Year 11 single lesson, pupils listened to a piece of music and were encouraged to work at a brisk pace in order to identify instrumentation, the historical period of the piece and musical devices. This exercise was directly related to their GCSE music course.
259. Several factors have contributed to the improvements in standards and provision since the previous inspection. There have been changes of staff and a new head of department has been appointed. Schemes of work for all years have been revised and include the development of singing. Accommodation is now very good and resources have increased to meet the demands of the National Curriculum and public examination requirements. However, despite the provision of two teachers in each Year 9 music lesson, curriculum time remains limited because more time has to be given to religious education in order to meet diocesan recommendations.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

260. Standards in the 1999 statutory teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 were below the national average. Boys and girls reached similar standards and the teacher assessments show a rising trend in standards over the previous two years. In the 1999 GCSE examination at the end of Key Stage 4 just over half of the pupils entered achieved A\*-C grades. These results were above the national average and girls outperformed boys with results that were well above the national average. In the 1998 GCSE examinations at the end of Key Stage 4 half the pupils achieved A\*-C grades and boys out-performed girls compared to the national average. Taken as a whole, standards in the GCSE examination have risen since 1997. There is currently no GCE A-level course in the sixth form but 21 students gained their Community Sports Leaders Award in 2000.
261. Standards of work seen by pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 are higher than those recorded in the 1999 statutory teacher assessments. The standards of both boys and girls are now broadly in line with national expectations. In athletics, pupils understand how to use equipment and space safely. When playing rounders, boys and girls select and combine good fielding and tactical skills. They play with energy and enthusiasm but a minority of pupils have difficulty organising themselves in small group activities. Pupils are not sufficiently confident in their observations of others and do not yet use this information to improve their own performance. The majority of pupils are reasonably fit and know how to warm up and stretch independently.
262. Standards of work seen at the end of Key Stage 4 are above national expectations. Pupils have a good knowledge of health, fitness and the rules relating to games and athletic activities. Boys and girls have good performance skills in cricket and rounders. They quickly organise themselves into small games and work co-operatively and independently. Pupils in the GCSE groups can devise individual fitness programmes and use correct technical vocabulary to give perceptive



comments on the performance of others. Almost two-thirds of Year 11 pupils have attained above average grades in their GCSE practical activities. The attainment of a minority of individuals and teams is very good, especially in football, netball and athletics. Representative team members are given many opportunities to develop their sporting talents by the wide variety of extra-curricular activities provided by the department, assisted by 13 members of staff from outside the department.

263. Achievement is good at both key stages. Pupils of different attainment levels, including those with special educational needs, make good progress. This owes much to the very good planning of activities and the high quality of support given by the learning assistants to pupils with special educational needs. The equal progress of pupils regardless of their different physical abilities is well supported by the teaching in single gender and sometimes by grouping pupils according to their attainment in the subject. The extra-curricular provision including residential visits, outdoor activities and trips abroad make a very good contribution to the pupils' personal development, and in particular their social and moral growth.
264. There have been many improvements since the previous inspection. The improved quality of teaching now provides more opportunities for pupils to organise their own learning. As a result the standard of pupils' work has improved at Key Stage 4. The new gymnasium with a good range of good quality apparatus has contributed to a better balance between gymnastics, dance, athletics and games.
265. The overall quality of teaching is good. There is good provision for pupils who have special educational needs. Teachers have very good subject expertise. They give appropriate demonstrations and handle pupils' responses effectively. This gives the pupils a clear idea of performance techniques and enables pupils to improve their skills. Relationships between pupils and their teachers are very good. Teachers manage their classes easily and effectively. As a result, pupils are keen and enthusiastic. These attitudes contribute significantly to the good quality of learning at both key stages. All lessons provide opportunities for pupils to extend their knowledge of health and fitness and to show independence in their participation of this element of the National Curriculum. Teachers remind pupils of their previous work and share the lesson objectives at the beginning of the lesson. This is particularly successful in supporting the learning of lower attaining pupils who often need to practice existing skills before progress can be made. The department is developing literacy, numeracy and information communication and technology skills by using pupil work folders and displaying key words. As yet, this is insufficient to meet the requirements of the theoretical aspects of the GCSE examination.
266. The very good leadership and management of the department has successfully addressed most of the issues from the previous inspection but there remains a problem with the condition of the courts. The poor surface, lack of space and damaged netting limits the type of activity and necessitates extensive use of the indoor facilities when the weather is inclement.

## **ECONOMICS**

267. This subject has become an established part of the sixth form curriculum since the last inspection. In 1999 six of the eight candidates achieved at least a grade E pass in the GCE A-level examination. The first results in 1998 were well above the national average. Three of the five candidates achieved the two highest grades and all passed with at least a grade D. At AS-level both candidates passed. This represents a very good start for the subject. The number of students and the short period since the subject was first offered provide insufficient data to indicate a trend.

268. Standards in the analysis of students' work and in lessons seen during the inspection indicate that standards in the current Years 12 and 13 are in line with national expectations. Students can explore complex economic problems such as the role of the accelerator.
269. The quality of teaching in economics is good. There are a number of strong features. Teacher's knowledge is very good, with precise use of economic terminology and explanations of theory that are very clear and helpful in resolving pupils' misunderstandings. Very good use is made of Internet resources to ensure that teaching is right up-to-date. The good range of teaching methods includes a good mixture of explanation and practical tasks. This is successful in creating an atmosphere in lessons that encourages the students to try out their own ideas. This was well illustrated in a discussion of Gross National Product where a student raised the example of a football club and the teacher used this to illustrate the theory. Just under half the pupils studying economics continue to do so in some way as part of their higher education courses.

## **SOCIOLOGY**

270. There was insufficient time and opportunity during the inspection to gather sufficient evidence to inform a valid evaluation of the standards, the quality of teaching and its impact on learning.

## **BUSINESS STUDIES**

271. Pupils and students can follow courses in business studies at both GCSE and GNVQ at Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced level at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
272. GCSE results at the end of Key Stage 4 in 1999 were broadly in line with the national average, an improvement on the results in 1998 but not quite so high as those in 1997. There has been a slight decline in boys' results during this time whilst those of the girls have tended to fluctuate. The gap between the standards reached by boys and girls was particularly marked in 1999, nearly 36 per cent. Standards in GNVQ vocational courses at Key Stage 4 are above national expectations in Intermediate level business. Two-thirds of the pupils gained a distinction. In Intermediate Part One business more than half of the students did so. In the sixth form, results were very good in Advanced GNVQ business where more than three-quarters of the students gained either a merit or a distinction. Business studies is one of the five top subject areas in terms of results over the last three years. Pupils and students achieve well, frequently obtaining better results in this subject than in the others that they study.
273. Standards in the relatively small amount of work seen at Key Stage 4 were broadly in line with national expectations. They were above national expectations in the sixth form. Although the GNVQ course at Key Stage 4 is targeted at pupils likely to reach a grade C standard at GCSE in their other subjects, a small number of lower attaining pupils were observed doing particularly well. High expectations in the teaching and pupils' readiness to work together are two important reasons why they do so well. However, on occasions these pupils did find the work difficult, particularly when in one lesson they were required to select and then interpret information obtained from commercial software about employment law. Occasionally progress is also slowed because older computer equipment does not have the screen capacity to cope with the required software. Standards in the small amount

of work seen in the sixth form were above expectations because students were able quickly to draw out the principles of good communications when studying a business environment.

274. The quality of teaching is very good at both Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Very good subject knowledge enables teachers to set work in a real context and good use of questions, together with clear initial explanations, enable pupils and students to understand quickly difficult concepts. In the very good teaching seen the skilful use of questions not only promoted the interest of pupils who had just started the GNVQ course at Key Stage 4; it prompted them to ask as well as answer questions.
275. There has been very good progress in provision for this subject since the last inspection. Results overall have improved in the sixth form at both Advanced and Intermediate level GNVQ and the proportion of merits and distinctions has increased at Key Stage 4. An important factor contributing to these improvements has been the much tighter monitoring of pupils' and students' work. The improving picture owes much to the very good leadership and very well managed team work in this area.

### **OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES**

276. Standards in the other vocational courses in the sixth form were well above the national average at Intermediate level GNVQ and above the national average at Advanced level GNVQ. In addition to the very good results in 1999 in Advanced GNVQ business, all students achieved at least a merit and half of them a distinction in Advanced GNVQ health and social care. Results were similarly good in this subject at Intermediate level with two-thirds of the students gaining a distinction and no student less than a merit. In Intermediate GNVQ engineering all but one of the dozen candidates gained a merit with a third awarded a distinction.
277. Taken as a whole, in work seen during the inspection standards were in line with expectations at Key Stage 4 in Foundation engineering and above it in some aspects of this subject at Intermediate level in the sixth form. Standards seen in information and communication technology within this subject are close to national expectations. It was not possible to observe lessons of sixth-form students finishing the final year of their Advanced GNVQ and Intermediate courses but a range of work was analysed. There was a small number of opportunities to see pupils at work as they started their courses at Key Stage 4.
278. In GNVQ engineering courses at Intermediate level, the majority of students reach high standards. Students studying Intermediate GNVQ courses in engineering reach standards that are above average in practical aspects of the subject. They produce very well engineered products of high quality that demonstrate the principles of electronics and pneumatics and they explain their work in very good detail. Coursework folders are of an exceptionally high standard. They are well organised and detailed. Students reach good standards in aspects of the course involving mathematics and computer aided design work.
279. Judged by previously completed work, students achieve well in the Advanced level GNVQ courses in business and health and social care. They achieve in line with national expectations currently at the start of the Foundation level engineering course at Key Stage 4. Good use of resources and the effective encouragement of group work are helping pupils to gain early confidence in this subject.

280. Standards in work seen were above national expectations in Advanced GNVQ health and social care where students showed a good level of knowledge and understanding in investigating nervous and sensory systems and a good grasp of complex issues concerning the health service. Previously completed work by students coming to the end of this course was also above national expectations and in line to achieve distinction. The ability of higher attaining students to research, record and then analyse information was a particular strength. Skills in interpretation and evaluation of data and other information were not so well developed. Middle attaining students' work shows slower progress in developing essay skills. Whilst the lower attaining students' work is generally thorough, with sound organisational skills, there is little evidence of systematic development of numeracy and information and communication technology skills in the interpretation and presentation of numerical data to support arguments.
281. The quality of teaching across other vocational courses is very good. It was good in Foundation GNVQ engineering where a particular strength was the careful matching of printed resources to meet the needs of lower attaining pupils. Provision for a pupil with a statement of special educational needs was good and supported good progress. The quality of teaching in the sixth form was in one instance excellent and in the other very good in the Intermediate GNVQ engineering course. Enthusiastic teaching with very high expectations enables students to complete with confidence tasks that initially seemed daunting. This was well illustrated in a lesson where students completed housings for electronic and metal work projects.
282. The quality of teaching is also very good in the Advanced GNVQ health and social care course where very good subject knowledge results in probing questions that promote a good degree of understanding. Complex issues are explained clearly and these help students to grasp the broader issues as well as gather detailed information, relating it well to what they have learned previously. Very good knowledge of students' current strengths and weaknesses is a feature of the effective methods used to review with students their progress to date.
283. Very good leadership and management promote highly effective teamwork and rapidly developing expertise in the teaching of vocational courses. Standards are rising as student and pupil numbers increase in this developing strength of the school.