

INSPECTION REPORT

QUEEN ELIZABETH GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Penrith

LEA area: Cumbria

Unique reference number: 112428

Headteacher: C P Birnie

Reporting inspector: W S Walton
1210

Dates of inspection: 6 – 10 March 2000

Inspection number: 187170

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar
School category:	Foundation
Age range of students:	11 - 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Ullswater Road Penrith Cumbria
Postcode:	CA11 7EG
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	R L Good
Date of previous inspection:	4 March 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
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			Teaching and learning
			Management
M G Hackney	Lay inspector		Students' welfare
			Partnership with parents
J N Hedge	Team inspector	English	
		Equal opportunities	
J A Seed	Team inspector	Science	Post 16
D M Green	Team inspector	Mathematics	Curriculum
P Sellwood	Team inspector	Art	
		Design and technology (DT)	
D Harris	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
F Earle	Team inspector	History	
		Religious education (RE)	
J Webster	Team inspector	Geography	
D Wigley	Team inspector	Music	
B Hodgson	Team inspector	Physical education (PE)	
		Information and communication technology (ICT)	

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The Registrar
Inspection Quality Division
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The school has grown by 10% since the last inspection and has 760 students making it a little below the average size of a grammar school. It has a very extensive rural catchment area covering about 400 square miles around the market town of Penrith. About half of the students live in Penrith and the remainder travel to school by bus from villages and hamlets. Some travel substantial distances. The school is oversubscribed and selection is determined on the basis of where the student lives and his/her ability to benefit from the type of education offered by the school. The average attainment of students entering the school at 11 is above the national average but below that of the average grammar school. Over the last three years the attainments of 14% of the intake have been below the national average. In general students come from supportive backgrounds. The numbers taking free school meals is well below the national average. There are very few students with special educational needs or from minority ethnic groups. Last year more than 94% of Year 11 students chose to remain in full-time education post 16 and a similar percentage went to higher and further education at the age of 18. The school aims to encourage students to strive for excellence to maximise their potential. It seeks to provide an environment which is caring and encourages creativity, enterprise and initiative. It aims to prepare students for useful, active citizenship. The school has been recently invited to apply for Beacon school status.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school with considerable strengths and no major weaknesses other than the condition and standard of some of its accommodation. The commitment of staff and students to all-round excellence is outstanding. It is very well led, uses its resources prudently and effectively and gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- Students make good progress and attain high academic standards.
- The quality of teaching is very good across all key stages – there are no areas of unsatisfactory teaching.
- The attitudes and behaviour of students and the quality of relationships are exceptionally high.
- Academic and pastoral support for students are very good.
- It has very good relationships with its parents.
- Levels of attendance are very high.
- The provision for and take up of extra-curricular activities and the standards achieved in sport, drama and music are very strong.
- There is excellent liaison with primary schools in science, design and technology (DT) and information and communication technology (ICT).
- The school is very well led and there is a very high correlation between the aims of the school and its work.

What could be improved

- The provision for religious education (RE) in the Post 16 curriculum.
- The quality of accommodation for indoor physical education, English and music.
- The provision and use of resources, assessment and staff training for ICT.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in March 1996. Since that time standards in national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 and in GCSE have improved at a faster rate than the national trend. Standards are also much higher at A Level. Standards, provision and teaching are stronger in modern languages. Standards in GCSE in mathematics have improved very significantly. Standards and the quality of teaching are much higher in art. Teaching is uniformly strong – lessons proceed at a good pace and student involvement is very good. Provision for and standards of attainment in RE at Key Stage 4 are much better. Standards in English are higher. Much better provision is made for field studies in geography. Improvements have been made in the establishment for non-teaching staff and an ICT co-ordinator has been appointed.

The code of practice for students with special educational needs has been introduced, the delivery of sex education has improved and better use is being made of review and evaluation information. The quality of liaison with primary schools in science, DT and ICT has improved remarkably. New accommodation has been provided for science, DT, ICT and most of mathematics. Resources for ICT are better than they were.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 14, 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests, GCSE and A-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	All schools			Similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
End of Key Stage 3 tests	A*	A	A*	D
GCSE	A	A	A*	C
A Level	A	A	A*	N/A

Key

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

Standards in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 and over the past few years were much better than national averages in English and mathematics and very high in science. Standards of attainment assessed by teachers against national criteria at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 in history, geography, DT, ICT, French and German were much

higher than national averages. The proportions of students working at or beyond expected national standards in art, music and PE respectively were very high. Overall there is little difference between the attainments of boys and girls at the end of Key Stage 3.

Taking account of the relatively low levels of attainment of students on entry to the school compared with those of other grammar schools, the proportion of students reaching the highest levels in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 was below the average for grammar schools. Students continue to make good progress, however, in Key Stage 4 and in GCSE in 1999 the proportion of students obtaining five or more passes at the higher grades A* - C and the average points score were in line with those of grammar schools. The results were very high compared with national averages. 97% of students achieved five or more passes at grades A* - C and the proportion obtaining A* grades was double the national figure. Over recent years girls have out-performed boys in GCSE. In 1999 the gap between them closed considerably. The school attributes the change to its selection procedures and changes in the curriculum.

The average points score of students taking two or more A Levels has been much better than the national average over the last three years. Last year it was very high – the pass rate was 93% and 40% of passes were at the highest grades A and B.

Standards observed in the inspection were never less than satisfactory. Overall standards were good at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4. There was a significant difference between the standards of work in Years 12 and 13. Standards in Year 13 were satisfactory compared with those expected of A Level students whereas they were very good in Year 12. Standards of work of Post 16 students in art and of Post 16 and Key Stage 4 students in geography were very high.

The school has targets for attainments in 2001. The targets set by the local authority are modest and should be well within the capacity of students whereas those set by departments and the school are more realistic and should prove more demanding.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Students have very positive attitudes. They are enthusiastic, like school and expect to work hard.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	In class behaviour is excellent – students respond quickly and sensibly to their teachers. Around the school they are lively but they show consideration for others and for property. Behaviour is very good.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships between students and with staff are excellent and based on mutual respect. Students mature perceptibly into responsible young adults as they progress through the school.
Attendance	Levels of attendance are much higher than national averages and unauthorised absence is very rare.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
177 Lessons seen overall	Very 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 and commitment of teachers to their work and to students are major strengths of the school. There is no unsatisfactory teaching and more than half of teaching is very good or better. Nearly 90% of teaching is at least good. Standards of learning very closely match those of teaching. Relationships in classrooms and standards of classroom management are very strong, creating very strong learning environments. Teachers know students very well and provide them with challenging work which stimulates a very good response. Good attention is given to the teaching of basic skills although the potential of ICT as a tool for learning is not yet fully realised.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements except in respect of RE at Post 16. The time available for DT at Key Stage 3 and for the separate sciences at Key Stage 4 is very tight and ICT is not fully integrated in the curriculum. There is a good programme for personal and social education (PSE) in Key Stage 3 and 4 and arrangements for general studies Post 16 are very strong. Provision for careers education is sound and work experience programmes are carefully designed. The range, quality and take-up of extra-curricular opportunities are excellent. Mutual benefit comes from the very strong links the school has with the community. Curriculum links with primary schools in science, DT and ICT are exceptional.

Provision for students with special educational needs	There are very few students who fall within the remit of the code of practice for students with special needs. Students who do have such needs are very well known to staff. They are fully integrated into normal classes and are making good progress academically and socially. They feel happy and secure in the school.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Excellent provision for moral and social development which stems from the values of the school with emphasis on consideration and respect and the role models provided by staff. Arrangements for cultural development are fully integrated across the curricular and extra-curricular programmes and are very strong. There are good opportunities to develop spiritual awareness, aesthetic appreciation and experience awe and wonder within many curriculum areas including PSE, general studies, RE and assembly programmes.
How well the school cares for its students	Students feel very secure. They have confidence in staff and know that their views will be respected and treated seriously. Staff know students very well. Pastoral and academic support systems are sensitive and very well developed. Students feel they are kept well informed about their progress although some students in Year 10 would welcome more target setting against GCSE grades.
Working in partnership with parents	The school is very strongly supported by its parents. The selection procedure for entry to the school lays emphasis on the importance of working in partnership in order for the student to gain maximum benefit from the education offered by the school. In the great majority of cases the partnership is sustained and the aims and objectives of the school are supported at home. The school seeks to keep parents fully informed about the progress of students and school plans and events. Parents appreciate the information although there are a few who would like to have more.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The quality of leadership and management is very high. Leadership provides clear direction for the school and is very ambitious for the quality of its work, its provision and the opportunities it offers to students. Lines of communications are short and responsibilities are clearly delegated. Managers have significant freedom but are accountable. Leadership has generated considerable commitment among staff for the aims of the school.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors have a good understanding of their role and responsibilities. They are committed to the school and its objectives. They work hard to represent the interests of the school in the community. They keep themselves well informed and play a full part in developmental and financial planning. They fulfil their statutory responsibilities.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Continuous evaluation at all levels from individual members of staff, departments and full school is built into the management structure. Clear lines of communication allow managers to be very sensitive to indications of change. Formal reviews of departmental performance and appraisal of staff enable managers and governors to evaluate effectively the overall work of the school.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are used prudently and effectively. The school continually seeks to improve its cost effectiveness and has very good arrangements for financial control. Careful planning has allowed the school to make considerable improvements in the quality of the accommodation. Some accommodation is very good but facilities for indoor PE, music and English are poor. Effective financial planning and co-operation from the local authority have allowed the governors to maintain the teaching staff establishment through a financially difficult period. Teaching staff are very well deployed and non-teaching staff effectively support the smooth running of the school. Educational resources are adequate although present provision for ICT does not adequately meet all the needs of the school.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The expectations that students will work hard.• Students make good progress.• The school helps students to become mature young people.• The behaviour of students in school is good.• The school is well led and managed.• Teaching is good.• The school is approachable.• Students like school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Homework.

More than 600 parents returned the questionnaire and more than 100 attended the meeting with the Registered Inspector. The great majority of these parents are pleased about the work of the school. Inspectors share their positive views. A small percentage of parents are concerned about the amount of homework given to students but there is no consensus among them as to what the requirement should be. Generally, students feel that the homework requirement is about right although sometimes, especially in DT, it is very time demanding. Some students spend more than the expected time on homework but say that teachers will accept uncompleted homework provided the right amount of effort has been given to it. Students feel that the content of homework is worthwhile and inspectors share that view. The evidence of the inspection is that homework is set and marked regularly and contributes to the standards which students achieve. The school works hard to maintain a partnership with parents by providing information on the progress of students and welcoming feedback. Although the great majority of parents are happy with the present arrangements there are a few who would welcome more information and more opportunities to work closely with the school. School reports have been revised recently and provide adequate information and progress. There are satisfactory opportunities for parents to discuss progress on parents' evenings and parents can make separate arrangements if necessary. There are good arrangements to contact parents and seek their support where teachers have a particular concern about the progress or welfare of a student.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1 Academic standards at the end of all key stages have improved since the last inspection. The rate of improvement has exceeded the national trend in tests at the end of Key Stage 3 and in GCSE. A Level results in 1999 were the highest achieved by the school and much higher than reported at the last inspection.

2 Standards in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 and over the last four years were much better than national averages in English and mathematics and very high in science. The average levels of attainment of students entering the school are below those normally found in grammar schools and the proportion of students reaching the highest levels of the tests in the core subjects was below the average for grammar schools. Over the last three years about 14% of admissions have had levels of attainment which were below the national averages for 11 year olds. Overall there is little difference between the respective performances of boys and girls in the national tests. Girls do better than boys in English and the position is reversed in mathematics and science. In 1999 teacher assessments against national criteria of attainment of students in each of history, geography, DT, ICT, French and German at the end of Key Stage 3 were very high compared to national averages. The proportions of students working at or beyond expected national standards in art, music and PE respectively were very high.

3 The school achieved its best ever results in GCSE in 1999. Average points score, the proportion of students obtaining five or more passes at the higher grades A* - C and the proportion obtaining five or more passes in grades A* - G were all very high compared with national averages and much better than them over the last three years. Average scores and the proportion of students obtaining five or more passes at grades A* - C were in line with those of other grammar schools in 1999 and much better than them on five or more A* - G passes. Students obtained 100% passes at grades A* - C in English, German, music, RE and drama and more than 75% of passes were at the higher grades in all subjects. Standards in German and art were very high compared to those reported at the last inspection. The proportion of students obtaining A* - C passes was better than national averages in every subject. Over recent years girls have out-performed boys at GCSE. In 1999 the gap between them closed considerably. The school attributes the change to its selection procedures and changes in the curriculum; the performance of boys has improved in modern languages since the school adopted modular courses.

4 The average points score of students taking two or more A Levels in 1999 was very high compared with the national average and has been much better than over the last three years. The A Level pass rate last year was 93% and 40% of results were at grades A or B. The proportions of A/B passes were above national averages in art and design, general studies, 16th century history, food technology, French, music, English literature, politics, DT, economics and business and geography.

5 Students are good listeners. In modern languages concentrated listening produces students with good accents and pronunciation who understand their teachers and native speakers. Auditory skills are very well used in the appraisal of music and good listening leads to confident and spontaneous discussion in English. Students enjoy opportunities for debate, presentations and role-play and reach high standards of oral work. Standards of

dramatic presentations by Post 16 students are very good. Students read fluently and when asked to read aloud do so expressively. By the end of Year 9 students have a good command of spelling, punctuation and grammar. They have a broad vocabulary and write fluently with interesting use of language. Students have good note taking skills which they use in almost all areas of the curriculum. Some examples of very good poetry written by students were seen during the inspection. Some exceptional written assignments were produced in art and well argued and presented essays in economics. Standards of numeracy are high. Students make good use of their skills in many areas of the curriculum. Year 7 students use graphical skills to interpret results in science. At Key Stage 4 and Post 16 they make good use of a range of skills in chemistry and physics. The use of practical mathematics is very evident in DT and graphical work and data manipulation are well handled in geography. Although there is scope for further development in the use of ICT, particularly in English and music, it is well used in many subjects. Students employ CD Roms to develop language skills in modern languages and for investigative work in history and art. The Internet is also well used as an investigative tool in RE and for much Post 16 work. Students are familiar with spread sheets image scanning and importing and desk top publishing. They manage CAD CAM machinery to produce work to their designs in DT and make extensive use of Photoshop scanner in art. Many students use word-processing to improve the presentation of their work.

6 Standards of work observed during the inspection were good in Key Stage 3, very good in Key Stage 4 and good overall at Post 16. Work in Year 12 is stronger than that in Year 13 reflecting the difference in the original intake in these years. There are no areas of work in which attainment is weak and there are many strengths. Overall, standards observed reflect those of examination performance. Students make good progress through Key Stages 3 and 4 so that by the end of Year 11 standards are well in line with those expected of grammar schools. Standards are at least good in all subjects at Key Stages 3 and 4 except ICT where it is average. Standards in ICT represent the present level of opportunity and organisation of the work. Standards are well above average at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 in English, mathematics and science. Post 16 standards are good in English and mathematics and average in science although standards in Year 12 are relatively higher than those in Year 13. Work in the use and application of mathematics is less well developed than work in other areas of the subject. Standards of attainment are very good in art in Key Stages 3 and 4 and exceptional at Post 16. In geography work is of a high standard in Key Stage 3 and very good at Key 4 and Post 16. Standards are high at the end of all key stages in modern languages and in Key Stage 4 in history. In music whole class ensemble work is very good and there some very talented senior students. The instrumental work of a Post 16 flute trio was of a high standard. Overall, the work at Key Stage 4 and Post 16 in music is very good. Students reach high standards in some areas of PE. Levels of individual and team skills in rugby are exceptionally strong. Standards of work are good in Year 12 in politics and economics. Attainment is very good at the end of Key Stage 4 in RE. Standards in RE, art, DT, modern languages, English, mathematics and science have improved since the last inspection.

7 There are very few students with SEN. Those on the SEN register are fully integrated in mainstream classes and make good progress. The system of banding and setting works well and allows students of all levels of attainment to achieve well.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

8 The attitude of students to their work and to the school is exceptionally good. All

students interviewed were proud of the school and pleased to be there. Levels of attendance are high and much better than found in most schools. Unauthorised absence is rare and very much below the national average. Students are exceptionally mature in their attitudes towards work. They arrive at lessons prepared and expecting to work hard. Levels and standards of completed work, including homework, are high. Students take pride in their work and its presentation. They are proud of the high quality of students' work displayed around the school and show respect for it. Their commitment is unusual; in many subject areas students work enthusiastically in breaks, lunchtimes and after school to reach high standards of work. Workshops, art studios and computer rooms are very well used by students who treat equipment and books with care. The enthusiasm and motivation of students is shared by staff who show considerable respect for students and provide work which is interesting and challenging.

9 Behaviour in and around the school is very good. Exclusions are rare. Students are lively but respond promptly and positively to staff. They show consideration for each other. People behave very sensibly in the congested circulation areas at breaktimes. Students show respect for property. There is no graffiti and the site is relatively litter free. Students can be trusted to work with minimum supervision and follow safe practice in workshops, laboratories and the gymnasium. They work very productively in groups. They listen attentively to each other, respect the views of others and are able to reach a consensus when required. The quality of teamwork and responsibility to the group are very high in dance, music and PE.

10 Relationships are very mature and make an important contribution to strong learning environments. Relationships between students and teachers and among students are positive and productive. Relationships between older and younger students and between boys and girls are excellent. Younger students appreciate the support they receive from many senior students. Many letters have been received by the Registered Inspector from employers and schools praising the work and the attitudes of students they have had on placements. Senior students enjoy good relationships with adults and primary school pupils in lessons conducted under the Barclays New Futures scheme. Students take a very mature attitude towards responsibility. The work of the school councils is seen to be important and taken seriously. All year groups involve themselves in charitable work. Students discuss contentious issues maturely and are ready to listen to consider different points of view. Senior students are mature, confident young people with well-informed, balanced views and a well-developed sense of personal and social responsibility

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

11 Standards of teaching and learning across the school are very good. They are more consistent than at the last inspection with little difference between standards in the three key stages. Areas of criticism at the last inspection – lessons which were too narrow in scope, lacking pace or teacher dominated – have been rectified. There is no unsatisfactory teaching, more than half is very good or excellent and almost 90% is at least good. There are no areas in which teaching is weak. It is at least good in all areas of the curriculum except ICT. Some teachers lack the knowledge and confidence to make full use of the technology. Teaching of art and drama at Post 16 is of an exceptional standard. Teaching and learning are very good in science, music, DT and geography. They are very good in English at Key Stage 4 and Post 16, at Key Stage 3 in mathematics and at Key Stages 3 and 4 in history. There is much very good teaching in PE and modern languages.

12 The very high standards stem from the commitment to learning shared by teachers and students. Teachers are very enthusiastic about their subjects and for students to do well; they enjoy working with students who want to learn. The quality of relationships between staff and students are exceptional and based on mutual respect. Students respond positively to encouragement to become actively involved in lessons. They are confident to express opinions knowing that their views will be valued even though they may be at variance with those of the teacher. Independence and individuality flourish in an environment governed by consideration and respect for others. From their early days in the school independent working and learning skills are promoted as in the PSE programme and group analysis of text and presentation in English. In art, music and drama students are encouraged to be imaginative and develop individual styles. Experimentation is welcomed in art as are projects which reflect personal interests in DT. Post 16 students are independent learners who organise their own work to a large extent and take responsibility for research and course work. At the same time they welcome the tutorial support which is available to them. Tutors are very skilful in guiding progress. The successful development of independent learning is built upon a strong emphasis on the teaching of basic skills. Generic study skills are a continuous theme in PSE and general studies but are continuously reinforced in the other subject areas. English and mathematics are particularly concerned with literacy and numeracy and both departments make effective provision to support students who have problems in these areas. The work of the core subjects is well supported across the curriculum through a strong emphasis on oral work, good quality writing, use of correct terminology reading and application of number. Investigative skills are well promoted in science and the humanities. The practical subjects are very strong on teaching basic skills and safe procedures. In an excellent PE lesson, Year 7 students were successfully introduced to the basic skills of badminton. Time was very well used in this short lesson and by the end students had mastered the short and long serve and were able to analyse their performance.

13 Classroom management is excellent. Students arrive prepared for and expecting to work. There are clearly understood and respected expectations of students and teachers. Students respond quickly, listen carefully, concentrate on the set tasks and work productively. Teachers arrive well prepared, set out the objectives of lessons clearly, are ready to provide clarification and keep students well informed of their progress. The quality of the learning environment is very good. Planning of individual lessons and modules of work is good. In individual lessons time is used well. Introduction, explanation and/or demonstrations, questions and class discussion, individual and or group work, whole class review and conclusions form a common and effective pattern to many lessons. Full class, group and paired discussions are strongly promoted. Students grow in confidence to take part in discussion and to make presentations on behalf of their colleagues. Reticence to join in discussion, as observed among boys in a Key Stage 4 lesson in RE, is rare and teachers are very skilful in ensuring that all students actively participate in lessons. There is good progression in modular planning and teachers are very effective in providing themes which sustain motivation. There is an interesting choice of projects in DT. The survival project successfully involves both food technology and graphics. Mathematics makes good use of practical work, puzzles and extension work beyond that found in textbooks. Lessons in politics begin with a review of topical events. Sometimes students investigate a particular issue in some depth. Not only are students kept abreast of current topics but lessons start in an interesting and thought provoking way. Discussions in groups, debate, presentations and role play are all employed effectively in English to involve and interest students whilst at the same time developing basic skills. There are well presented case studies in geography which draw upon field study experiences to provide relevance for classroom work.

14 Work sheets, copies of articles, newspapers, videos, tapes and ICT are widely used to stimulate learning. Lessons proceed at a good pace and productivity is high. The PSE course is very content heavy. Sometimes too much is attempted in a single lesson and insufficient time is allowed to consolidate learning. Necessity requires that many PE lessons are conducted outdoors regardless of weather. Students are kept fully involved and work at a strong pace. The high standards of games play are the result of skilful teaching and considerable enthusiasm and dedication on the part of staff and students.

15 Staff have a very good command of their subjects. Specialist subject knowledge is extremely strong in the examination courses in drama and is being used to develop drama programmes for English at Key Stage 3. Teachers of music and art are, respectively, practising musicians and artists. Teachers of modern languages have a good command of their first language and often of a second language. Most lessons provide plenty of opportunity for students to listen and practice speaking. Students are encouraged to read in the target language. Interesting themes are chosen for lessons and students join enthusiastically in the work. Progress would be improved in some lessons, however, if there was greater insistence on students using the modern language.

16 Teachers know students very well. Classroom feedback is positive and good work and effort is encouraged and praised. The quality and use of ongoing assessment is very good overall. It is thorough in history and marking is constructive. There is good day-to-day assessment in art and students are aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Work is regularly marked in English and students find the comments helpful. Most, but not all students feel they have a good understanding of how well they are doing in English. Students from across the school who were interviewed during the inspection felt they received very good feedback on a day to day basis. With the exception of students in Year 10 who said they would like more information, they felt they had a good understanding of how well they were doing. Homework is set and marked regularly. It is well used to introduce new work, consolidate learning, for course and project work and to extend the range of work. Students feel that it is useful and, overall, manageable, although occasionally the load is heavy. Homework in DT can be very demanding. Students say, however, that help is always available if homework is difficult and teachers are understanding about unfinished homework provided the required level of effort has been made.

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

17 The school has an excellent statement of its curricular aims. It provides a firm basis for the management of the curriculum and is designed to preserve opportunities for progression whilst giving students as much freedom as possible to pursue their special interests and to develop their aptitudes. The framework for options both at Key Stage 4 and Post 16 is restructured every year after student choices have been made in order to provide for the requirements of each individual student to the greatest possible extent. The success rate in terms of meeting the preferences of all students is very high.

18 The structure of the curriculum is strong and straightforward. There is impressive breadth of provision at all three key stages. At Key Stage 3 all students study two modern foreign languages; at Key Stage 4 all have a choice between dual award science and the three separate sciences. At Post 16 more than twenty A Level subjects are available, with some also at AS Level. Flexibility is evident in the eight period day, which allows for short

single periods where necessary. Waste of time and disturbance are minimised by movement mainly at break times or lunchtime.

19 The pastoral and academic work of the school is integrated as far as possible through form teachers who teach their forms for their specialist subject and for PSE at Key Stage 3. All teachers are encouraged to contribute to the very extensive programme of extra-curricular activities. Homework is seen as an integral part of learning.

20 The school has a good policy statement in relation to equal opportunities. This addresses the need to eliminate bias from teaching materials and displays, and also the need to avoid stereotyping in option choices and work experience placements. The PSE and general studies programmes include such issues as the position of women in society and the world population problem. Care is taken to ensure equal access and opportunity for students to participate in all curricular and extra-curricular opportunities.

21 The school makes very good arrangements to meet the individual needs of all its students. It has adopted the Code of Practice for SEN and has designated one of its two deputy heads to act as co-ordinator for this aspect of work. At present there are only two students on the school's register of SEN, both of whom are well supported and are making good progress. Broad banding at Key Stage 3 allows all students to progress at a comfortable pace. Setting in mathematics from Year 8 and in science from Year 9 provides for fine tuning in these subjects. Mathematics and English "clinics" are held to provide extra help and opportunities to catch up on missed work. Well-developed strategies for teaching the basic skills of literacy and numeracy are employed across the curriculum. All students in Year 7 and older students with an aptitude for mathematics are entered for the National Mathematics Challenge. Extra lessons are provided in preparation for Oxbridge entrance. A very wide variety of other enrichment activities is delivered through extra-curricular clubs and activities.

22 The school provides effectively for personal and social education. The form tutor plays the major role in interpreting, delivering and evaluating the programme at Key Stage 3. As yet there is no map of this work and an audit would reveal overlaps and potential for links. The pastoral programme reinforces students' sense of their own worth and provides them with a basis for sound decision making. It makes good provision for sex and drugs education. The PSE programme attempts to do too much in the limited time available to it. This should be taken into account in the forthcoming review of the programme which will seek to give greater emphasis to citizenship.

23 There is a sound programme for careers education and guidance. It is well sequenced and moves from a general introduction delivered by form tutors in Years 7 and 8 to a more specialised approach from Year 9. Students are well informed about choices in Key Stage 4 and Post 16. Limited support is available from the careers service but the available time is effectively used for individual and group interviews and to support careers conventions. The careers service gives good support to students who leave school at the end of Key Stage 4. The work experience opportunities in Year 10, Year 11 and Post 16 are very organised and monitored. The school co-operates with Ullswater Community College to inform students of vocational opportunities available Post 16. Post 16 students are very well prepared for higher education. Students value the careers guidance they receive and speak well of it. At the time of the inspection careers library facilities were limited but this situation should be improved soon by the provision of a careers section within the main library. Students are encouraged to use the facilities of the nearby careers service office.

24 The RE curriculum makes a significant contribution to spiritual development. Students' growing awareness of the teaching and practices of other religions helps them reflect on their own beliefs and values. Other areas of the curriculum recognise that they have a role in this area. A spiritual dimension is evident in the awe and wonder approach to the teaching of some natural and physical processes, in project work for art, display in English, the content of drama, especially Post 16, in the programme of visits such as those in Key Stage 3 history, and the inclusion of the Dachau concentration camp in the itinerary of the expedition to Germany. Church services allow a shared spiritual experience for the whole school within a Christian context.

25 Assemblies are occasionally led by visiting speakers who contribute a Christian dimension. An assembly reminded students of the meaning of Shrove Tuesday and challenged them to consider whether abstinence has a place in contemporary society. Others included an opportunity to reflect on the dangers of hero worship or the perils of smoking. Awareness of moral issues was addressed through an account of the work of Amnesty International. An anecdote about a Romanian boy led to consideration of friendship and the need to enrich each other's lives. Assemblies are varied and valuable experiences which capture the interest and often the imagination of students, but the school continues not to meet the requirement for a daily act of collective worship.

26 Strategies for promoting the moral development of students include a clear code of conduct, a pastoral system which supports all aspects of student progress, and the wide ranging programme of PSE, life skills and general studies. These strategies are enhanced by the example set by staff. There are very high social and moral expectations which are respected by all members of the school community.

27 Students willingly respond to the many opportunities for them to show responsibility. All Post 16 students undertake some form of community service either in school or in the community. There is an active and effective School Council and all tutor groups choose to support local or national charities. Social development is strengthened through collaborative group and paired working in class and through the impressive range of extra-curricular activities. There are numerous opportunities for social interaction on group visits, in particular through the residential experience at Buttermere Valley offered to all members of Year 8, the Year 10 trip to Blackpool, and the outings organised more locally by form tutors. Students respond to each other with care and consideration. There is a strong programme to help students recognise their own culture, and to appreciate the richness and diversity of other cultures. Theatre, music, literature and the arts have their place as do the two annual modern languages exchanges, the Key Stage 3 trip to France, the Post 16 art and history trip to Venice, the Year 9 history outing to Beamish, and the school's links with St. Columba's higher secondary school in India. Geography and RE recognise their implicit role as developers of cultural awareness, and there is much in PSE and general studies and elsewhere in the curriculum. Art provides a typical example of a strong cultural dimension pervading the department, with excellent studies in Japanese woodcuts, Chinese art and Egyptian textile design.

28 The quality of the school's links with the community is very good. Considerable mutual benefit comes from involvement in the Barclays New Futures Scheme, organised by Post 16 students. Adults speak very highly of the ICT courses held in the evening and several letters have been received by the Registered Inspector from the headteachers of primary schools praising the science, DT and ICT courses held at the school for their students. Students take a leading role in the organisation and teaching, and are very enthusiastic and committed to the scheme. There are two successful Young Enterprise groups which give the opportunity to work with people from business, show initiative and develop

presentational and commercial skills.

29 In addition to the Barclays New Futures Scheme there is good provision for liaison with the neighbouring secondary school to maintain curriculum continuity with contributing primary schools which are spread over an area of 400 square miles.

30 Overall the school continues to provide a broad and balanced curriculum which meets the needs of its students well. Since the previous inspection it has maintained the high quality of provision for the cultural, moral and social development of students, and has maintained its efforts to maximise opportunities for their spiritual development. Statutory requirements are met in most respects though not in all. The length of the teaching week at 24 hours and 35 minutes remains below the recommended 25 hours at Key Stage 4. RE now meets statutory requirements at Key Stage 4 and progress has been made towards extending this Post 16. Requirements for ICT are met at Key Stage 3, though provision needs to be developed further at Key Stage 4. All students were advised to choose at least one practical or creative subject at Key Stage 4 but not all have chosen to study DT. The time available for the study of the separate sciences in Key Stage 4 and for DT in Key Stage 3 is very short to provide full cover to the courses of study.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

31 Students and parents speak highly of the support systems available to students. They feel secure and confident; there is a high level of trust between students and staff and students feel able to approach staff with academic and personal problems in the knowledge that help will be given and their concerns respected. There are very good lines of communication between class teachers and tutorial staff and matters of concern are picked up quickly and dealt with sensitively and effectively. Staff know students very well indeed. Students are aware of, and some take advantage of, the drop-in clinic offered by the school nurse where students may seek confidential advice or counselling.

32 The deputy headteacher (pastoral) ensures that all teachers are fully aware of the procedures for child protection. Any cause for concern is quickly identified, followed through and well documented. Health and safety procedures satisfy the requirements of the school's policy and regular risk assessments are carried out.

33 The school has very good procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance and punctuality in all year groups. Registers are completed consistently and accurately. Procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour are implemented consistently throughout the school and result in a very orderly environment where students show very mature and responsible attitudes. Through the teaching of the PSE programme and the attitude of students bullying or harassment are rarely in evidence and when they do occur are dealt with quickly and effectively. Success is celebrated by the school. Students are given much encouragement in class for good work and effort and a merit system rewards students with house points and certificates of commendation.

34 The school has strong links with feeder primary schools, and very good induction arrangements for parents and the new Year 7 students. Through the Barclays Primary Liaison New Futures Project many primary school students visit the grammar school regularly for ICT, science and DT courses when they work with Post 16 students. As part of their community service and personal development Post 16 students provide good support

in lessons for younger students experiencing difficulties. Students in the current Year 7 speak highly of the support they received to help them to settle in quickly.

35 Procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are good. Much of it is on-going and on an informal basis. Assessment is used well to guide curricular planning. All subject departments have adopted their own arrangements for assessing students' progress, and day-to-day monitoring is generally good. In most areas of the curriculum students feel they have a good understanding of how well they are doing but in ICT and music marking lacks clarity. There is little evidence of formal target setting but on an informal basis this is a very strong feature of most subject areas. Individual action plans with target setting are incorporated well into the programme of tutorials. All students from Year 7 onwards build up a Record of Achievement file, and are regularly encouraged towards self-assessment. Progress is closely monitored through very good communication between form tutors, subject tutors and heads of year.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

36 The school is held in high regard by the vast majority of parents who speak very positively and appreciatively about their partnership with the school. Parents are very satisfied with the high quality academic and pastoral support provided and the standards achieved. The involvement of parents has a very positive effect on teaching and learning and the progress made by students. Many parents are currently attending evening classes at the school linked to the Barclays New Futures project where they learn ICT skills from Post 16 students who organise and promote the courses themselves. Parents are regularly consulted about new school policies, issues raised by the School Council, and they support the Young Enterprise projects by buying the products which are marketed by students. A few parents assist the school by acting as rugby referees and helping with netball matches. Many others help support activities by providing transport and supporting charitable events such as sponsored walks. The successful annual Grandparents' Party organised by Year 7 students helps to cement good relationships between home and school. The Parent Teacher Association is a very active and supportive group of parents who raise considerable funds for the school every year through social activities that involve the whole community. The efforts of the Association make a strong contribution to the standards achieved through the financing of additional educational resources.

37 The quality of information which the school provides for parents is very good. There are regular helpful newsletters from senior staff, a half-termly newsletter from the Parent Teacher Association and a school magazine. Parents may contact the school at any time to discuss a problem or other issues. Student planners are used well as a means of communication. Good arrangements are made for the induction of new students and parents attend a meeting in July when they are provided with clear documentation about the school and its policies. The school selection procedures for the admission of students place particular emphasis on the importance of a strong partnership between school and parents. Regular consultation evenings are held for each year group which are always very well attended. Concerts, lectures, drama productions, sporting events and awards evenings are popular events and often oversubscribed. Parents were consulted about the Home/School Agreement and most have signed it.

38 Reports to parents meet statutory requirements and provide helpful information about attainment and progress related to effort and attitude. Students write their own

evaluations of their progress and parents are invited to give written comments. At the end of Year 9, parents receive the results of Key Stage 3 tests and assessments in National Curriculum subjects. Parents of students in Year 7 receive a review of progress at the end of the Autumn Term which provides very welcome interim information on early progress. A small number of parents responding to the questionnaire prior to the inspection would like to receive more information from the school.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

39 The headteacher and senior staff have been very successful in creating an atmosphere in which it is 'cool' to learn and do well. They believe students should be encouraged to think for themselves, question and form their own opinions rather than be submissive and accepting. Their commitment to this view is shared by staff and consequently there is a very close correlation between the aims of the school – high standards, a caring, creative environment and strong social values – and its work and achievements. A flat management structure, short lines of communication and a strong presence around the school enable the senior managers to be very well informed. They know staff and students very well. Authority and accompanying responsibility are well delegated to a strong team of departmental heads. Evaluation arrangements for curriculum, staff and students are effective, particularly so on an ongoing daily basis. The daily meetings of staff and the senior team allow staff to be very sensitive to changes in the school. More formal evaluations allow managers and governors to appraise curriculum and standards within departments. There are good arrangements for the review and formulation of development plans and the school has been very successful since the last inspection in realising its major developmental objectives. Managers are regular visitors to classrooms and there is on-going appraisal of staff but, given the strength of teaching in the school, it would be helpful to take a more developmental approach to this work.

40 The governors believe strongly in the school and are proud of its achievements. Some of them take an active public relations role in the catchment area. They have a good understanding of the school and its work. They take their statutory responsibilities very seriously. They are closely involved in the evaluation of the school's performance and in development planning. They have been particularly active in fund raising which has resulted in major building improvements. Their financial regulations and practice meet the requirements of external auditors. Governors have been concerned with the difficult financial planning decisions which will carry the school through the next few years. Successful negotiations with the local authority have resulted in a financial plan which provides for a short term budget deficit but allows the school to maintain its staffing establishment. Governors and managers continually pursue the objective of best value in the purchase of goods and services. Resources are allocated very equitably between Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and Post 16 work. Having regard for the level of income, the quality of education provided and the achievements of students, the school gives good value for money.

41 With the appointment of a specialist teacher of RE staffing will be adequate to meet

the current and projected needs of the curriculum. Staff are effectively deployed. They are very committed to the school and its students and give very generously of their own time to extra-curricular and other activities. Teaching staff are very well supported by technical and administrative staff. The appointment of an ICT co-ordinator will facilitate the development of ICT skills of staff and the integration of ICT across the curriculum. There are good arrangements for staff development and for the induction of new staff.

42 The new building has brought considerable improvements in the standard of accommodation for science, ICT, DT and mathematics. It has also released very suitable accommodation for art. In some areas, however, the unsatisfactory conditions reported at the last inspection continue. Facilities for indoor PE and music are inadequate and accommodation for English is of poor quality and depressing. Cramped conditions place limitations on teaching styles, especially group work, in modern foreign languages, history and geography. There are a number of health and safety issues:

- The placing of circular saw and planes within the main DT workshop is not considered to be safe practice although control of the machinery is properly isolated.
- There is a broken handrail and an insecure glass door at the entrance of the English block.
- There are several areas of damaged tarmac and broken surfaces.
- Motor cars drive through the centre roadway of the school between teaching blocks.

43 Teachers make the most of the conditions in which they teach and many classrooms and circulation areas have attractive displays of students' and other work. Overall provision of resources is adequate. There has been an improvement since the last inspection in the provision of textbooks for RE at Key Stage 3 and in artefacts to support the study of world religions. Resources are very good for examination work in drama. The modern languages department is equipped with a very good sound reproduction system but there is a need for curtains, carpets and sufficient OHPs for all classrooms. The provision of ICT for use in art is inadequate and there is no Internet connection. Resources for music are barely adequate. The school has adequate resources to support the teaching of geography, history, mathematics and PE, but an insufficient number of computers to support the ICT curriculum. There is a limited range of text books for use by students in English at Key Stage 3. The number of books in the library is good, but there is no network link or computerised cataloguing system.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

44 The school should now raise standards further by:-

- (1) introducing its proposals for RE in the Post 16 curriculum;
- (2) improving accommodation for indoor PE, music and English;
- (3) providing more resources for ICT, in-service training to enable teachers to become more familiar with the equipment, and extending the use of ICT across the curriculum.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	181
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	48

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
9	43	35	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 students

Students on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Post 16
Number of students on the school's roll	610	150
Number of full-time students eligible for free school meals	13	-

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Post 16
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	1	-
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	2	-

English as an additional language

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

Student mobility in the last school year

	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	2
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	2

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	4
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	1999	48	67	115

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	44	46	46
	Girls	64	64	65
	Total	108	110	111
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	94 (99)	96 (96)	97 (95)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	70 (69)	83 (77)	78 (83)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	44	47	47
	Girls	66	67	67
	Total	110	114	114
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	96 (100)	100 (98)	100 (99)
	National	64 (61)	64 (64)	60 (61)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	70 (85)	83 (85)	90 (89)
	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	48	62	110

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	46	48	48
	Girls	61	62	62
	Total	107	110	110
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	97 (64)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	46.3 (44.6)	90.7 (89.8)	95.7 (95.2)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	61 (45.7)
	National	37.8 (36.8)

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

Attainment at the end of the Post 16

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	32	31	63

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	20.9	26.8	23.9 (18.7)	8	N/A	8 (2.7)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (17.6)	2.7	2.8	2.8 (2.8)

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

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	760
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

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

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	46.2
Number of students per qualified teacher	16.4

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	6
Total aggregate hours worked per week	144

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78.39
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	24
Key Stage 4	20

Financial information

Financial year	1998/99
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	£
Total income	1,761,208
Total expenditure	1,853,390
Expenditure per student	2,603
Balance brought forward from previous year	206,902
Balance carried forward to next year	114,720

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1,520
Number of questionnaires returned	593

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	54	41	4	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	56	42	0	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	47	48	1	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	27	58	11	2	2
The teaching is good.	46	49	3	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	38	51	9	1	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	58	37	4	0	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	72	27	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	34	54	8	1	3
The school is well led and managed.	47	46	2	0	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	55	40	2	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	50	40	5	1	4

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

ENGLISH

45 When students enter the school attainment is higher than in most schools. Results in the 1999 National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Key Stage 3 were very high in comparison with the national average although when compared with results of other grammar schools results were below average. Taking the last four years into account, results have been well above the national average. Girls do better than boys in the test. Results at GCSE in both English and English Literature were very high in 1999. All students were entered and all gained A* - C grades in English. More than 90% reached that standard in English literature. Boys did much better than girls in comparison to national figures for boys and girls in the literature examination. Results were much improved on the previous year. Students did well in A Level English literature in 1999. All students passed and half achieved an A or B grade. A small group was entered for English language - results were disappointing in 1999.

46 Standards in English are well above average at the end of Years 9 and 11. Overall standards at Post 16 are well above average though the present Year 13 is less likely to do well than Year 12. The department places much emphasis on speaking and listening and there are many good opportunities for students to engage in discussion either in pairs, in groups or in response to the teacher. There are opportunities for debate, presentations and role-play. Students enjoy participating in these activities, make very good progress and reach high standards. They are able to sustain and develop their ideas confidently and with enthusiasm. They listen carefully. In Year 8, for example, students working on a prioritising exercise based on an extract from 'Gulliver's Travels' made lively and confident contributions to their group's deliberations, were able to justify their thinking and were able to report back to the whole class. Another Year 8 class debating control of the press were able to express complex ideas confidently and develop a line of thought in a logical way. In a Year 11 lesson on 'Far from the Madding Crowd' students made very good progress in developing their understanding of character through role play where they were required to think quickly and explain their actions. At Post 16 students benefit from carefully structured opportunities to exchange and develop their ideas. Students read fluently and when asked to read aloud do so expressively and with evident understanding. As they move through the school students are encouraged to examine text carefully and to support their opinions with quotation. Standards of writing are well above average. Most students write competently and accurately. Very few students have difficulty with spelling, punctuation and grammar by the end of Year 9. Students produce writing in a range of different styles. Creative writing is often original and of a high standard. By the end of Year 9 writing shows good command of vocabulary and fluent and interesting use of language. Students are able to make good notes and sift and categorise information. They are beginning to support their ideas by close reference to text. In Key Stage 4 and at Post 16 many students write at length. They are able to consider Orwell's purpose in writing 1984 and to examine the character of Eddie Carbone in 'A View from the Bridge'. They are able to emulate the style of established writers as in a unit of work on travel writing. At Post 16 students have a good grasp of literary terminology and understanding of genre. There are very good displays of students' writing in classrooms and in corridors. Some particularly good poetry written by students at all stages was displayed. Students take pride in their work and standards of presentation are high.

47 Standards of literacy in the school are high and very few students encounter difficulties. A small number of students in Year 7 receive good support with spelling and punctuation from their English teacher and also attend a once weekly 'clinic' for additional help. Students read clearly and with confidence in history and in RE. Year 10 listen attentively to group presentations in history and at Year 12 students show impressive confidence in speaking to the group. Students make good progress through discussion and expression of opinion in small group activity in history in Year 13. In art students produce some exceptional personal assignments which are well written, illustrated and presented. They use ICT well in this context, for example, a Year 13 student's study of stained glass windows designed by Edward Burn Jones in a local church.

48 The quality of English teaching is never less than satisfactory. Teaching at Key Stage 3 is good. At Key Stage 4 and at Post 16 it is very good. Teaching rests on very sound subject knowledge particularly evident at Post 16 and Key Stage 4. Teachers are secure with the content of lessons and are often creative in devising interesting and stimulating ways in which to present material to students so that a high level of interest is generated and sustained and students develop their ideas well. Tasks are frequently very challenging and expectations are generally high. In a Year 10 lesson, for example, students were analysing a difficult newspaper article for emotive words and phrases, which demanded careful thinking. In a Year 9 lesson, groups of students were finding quotations from an early scene in Romeo and Juliet, consolidating their knowledge and understanding of the text and finding evidence to support their views. Since the last inspection the department has made efforts to ensure that lessons provide more opportunities for active learning. This is now a strength of teaching in this department. In the best lessons teachers plan carefully to provide tasks in which all students must participate so developing confidence and independence. There is a high level of involvement in discussion and debate and students, especially boys, respond very well. Relationships in the classroom are very good, teachers know students well and treat them with sensitivity so that they feel their ideas and opinions are valued. Students expect to work hard and enjoy lessons. Most lessons proceed at a good pace and students are kept busy and interested throughout. Work is carefully and regularly marked and students find that the comments on their work are constructive.

49 The department provides a broad range of opportunities. Drama is taught in Key Stage 3 and the department is working with the drama specialist to develop new approaches. There is a library induction programme for all students in Year 7 and the new library is used for private reading and for research. The librarian provides very good support for various initiatives to promote reading including monitoring and guiding reading especially in Key Stage 3. The department has made efforts to make greater use of ICT following the last inspection and many students use computers well to present their work. The place of ICT as a part of the curriculum, however, will need further integration into ongoing and more formal curriculum planning for Key Stages 3 and 4, as access to computers improves. Extra-curricular provision is very good. There are drama clubs for Key Stage 3 which lead to an annual production and theatre trips including a three day visit to London theatres. A 'clinic' runs at lunchtime to help students in Key Stage 3 with particular difficulties with literacy and to provide more intensive support for GCSE candidates on the C/D borderline – this additional support would also benefit those students who might achieve the very highest grades at GCSE. The subject makes a very strong contribution to students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. As the focus of discussion and debate students in all year groups are asked to consider a range of

topics, for example, experiments on animals in Year 9, young people's rights and responsibilities in Year 10 and the view of good and evil portrayed in 'Lord of the Flies'.

50 Performance in examinations is monitored and teachers know students and their work well. Most but not all students have a clear idea of the standard they are achieving and how they might improve the quality of their work. New target setting strategies have been introduced. The department should further develop its use of assessment and recording to embed these into its good practice, in particular more opportunities for critical reflection and self-evaluation by students.

51 This is a strong department, which is well led and managed. Teachers are enthusiastic and committed and there is a good measure of agreement on principles of teaching. The department fulfils its aim to provide 'enjoyment and rigorous study'. It has addressed issues raised at the last inspection. Since then standards have improved at Key stage 3 and 4. A new A Level course in English language has been recently introduced. Learning has improved in Key Stage 4 and at Post 16. The quality of teaching has improved. Accommodation for the teaching of English is poor. Classrooms are shabby and unattractive despite heroic efforts by teachers with displays of work. The two outside classrooms provide a particularly depressing and derelict environment, which affects both teachers' and students' perceptions of the status of the subject. The entrance to these classrooms is not safe. Resources for the teaching of English are inadequate. There are too few books to support the curriculum in Key Stage 3. Many books are in poor condition.

DRAMA

52 Standards of attainment are excellent at both GCSE and Advanced level, with large numbers obtaining significantly higher results than the national average. Drama is taught as a discrete subject at Key Stage 4 and Post 16, and standards are very good at both levels. The quality of teaching is very good at Key Stage 4 and is excellent in the Post 16. Students have excellent attitudes to their drama studies, and consequently their quality of learning is very good. At both key stages, they are gaining a thorough training in stagecraft and are assimilating and using the concepts and principles of Stanislavski and Brecht, among others. During the inspection, demanding presentations of work by Ionesco, Moliere, Godber and Ayckbourne were given to the public by Year 13 students. These were of a very high standard. The teacher responsible for the subject has an excellent subject knowledge and a wide experience of conventions of the theatre: the school would profit enormously by using her expertise across Key Stage 3 and taking advantage of this valuable resource. The specialist drama studio serves as an excellent catalyst for the subject, and the area frequently bubbles with activity. The quality of work both within the curriculum and through extra-curricular productions attracts great credit to the school, and reflects very favourably upon the senior students who clearly enjoy the challenges of the subject.

MATHEMATICS

53 Standards of attainment in mathematics for the school as a whole are high. Students enter the school at the beginning of Year 7 with overall standards of attainment above the national norm, though not as high as the average for selective schools nationally. They make good progress during Key Stage 3, so that at the end of the key stage their attainment is very good. This is confirmed by the results of national testing in

the summer of Year 9. In 1999 the performance of students was well above the national average for the age group. For the four years 1996 to 1999 the performance of boys and girls was very high in relation to national averages. However, in 1999 performance was still below the average for students in similar schools nationally.

54 By the end of Key Stage 3 students have developed considerable facility with the use of the four rules of number. They are familiar with fractions, decimals and percentages and the equivalencies between them. They can use a calculator appropriately and accurately for a range of straightforward operations. They are accustomed to the use of letters to represent numbers in algebra. They can simplify algebraic expressions, rearrange formulae and solve simple equations. They are familiar with a variety of shapes in two and three dimensions, with angles and with symmetry. They can tabulate data and represent it appropriately, and they have been introduced to the concept of probability.

55 On this good basis students make very good progress during Key Stage 4, so that at the end of the key stage their attainment is high. In 1999 all students in the year group were entered for the GCSE examination in mathematics, and all obtained a grade in the full range A*-G. Almost nine out of every ten students obtained a grade in the higher range A*-C, and one in three obtained the highest grades A and A*. The attainment of both boys and girls considered separately is very high in relation to the national averages A*-C. However for grades A and A* the performance of boys is considerably stronger than that of girls, with almost half of all boys in the year group reaching this standard compared with only a quarter of the girls. Compared with the average for all other subjects within the school, the performance of students in mathematics was significantly stronger than is the case nationally.

56 By the end of Key Stage 4 students can solve numerical problems involving calculations with numbers of any size. They are familiar with graphs of algebraic functions, and can use a variety of strategies to solve equations. They can calculate perimeters, areas and volumes for shapes in two and three dimensions. They have been introduced to trigonometry and can use a scientific calculator for an extended range of operations. They can use more sophisticated techniques for the display and analysis of data, and for calculations of probability. Starting from problems or contexts that have been presented to them, they can introduce questions of their own, can consider alternative approaches, and justify their generalisations or solutions.

57 Post 16 students follow a modular course leading to A Level mathematics, with additional modules for further mathematics for students who choose this very demanding course. There are modules in statistics and mechanics as well as in pure mathematics. Students choosing A Level mathematics usually begin the course on the basis of grades A*, A or B from the higher tier of GCSE. They make good progress during the two years of the course so that their standards of attainment at the end of the key stage are good. In 1999 almost all students entered for the A Level examination passed, a result well above the national average. Almost half gained a grade A or B which was very close to the national average.

58 Over the four years since the last inspection there has been very significant improvement in the attainment of students in mathematics. At Key Stage 3 the overall improvement over this period is stronger than the trend nationally. At Key Stage 4 the improvement in the results of GCSE examinations is spectacular. In 1996 almost seven out of every ten students entered gained a grade in the higher range A*-C; in 1999 almost nine out of every ten students did so, representing an improvement of a full twenty percentage points, far in advance of the national trend. Performance in GCSE examinations over the

period has caught up rapidly with that of the average for selective schools. At A Level the performance of students has remained high over the period of four years since the last inspection, though the proportion of students gaining the highest grades A and B has been variable.

59 There has been a great improvement in the accommodation for mathematics. A block of four new classrooms adjoining the science block has replaced the old huts. This new accommodation is of excellent quality and also includes an office and a stock room. It provides all four full time teachers of mathematics with a teaching base of their own. This greatly facilitates their work. Unfortunately the accommodation for mathematics remains insufficient, as on the increasing number of occasions when five classes are taught simultaneously one class cannot be accommodated there.

60 All teachers of mathematics are well qualified, well experienced and work well together as a team. They all have good subject knowledge and mathematical technique. Their exposition and whiteboard work are clear and accurate, and skills of questioning good. They set suitable homework, and ensure that students' work is conscientiously marked and assessed in accordance with departmental policy. They know their students well and organise teaching groups and lessons to meet their needs. There is a maths clinic at lunchtime on Wednesdays for students who need extra help or an opportunity to catch up with work missed. Students are entered at appropriate levels of the national Mathematical Challenge and have done very well. Relationships between teachers and students are very good.

61 Students themselves respond to their teachers very well. They pay attention to what is said and follow the whiteboard work closely, immediately identifying any minor errors. They respond politely and usually accurately to direct questions and are willing to raise questions of their own. They sustain their concentration well and take a pride in the standard of their written work. Generally the quality of their learning is very good, though occasionally pace and application flag in the long double lessons. Behaviour is always very good.

62 Students make very good use of their proficiency in mathematics in other areas of the curriculum. In science students as young as those in Year 7 are able to draw a line of best fit in graphical work. By Key Stage 4 they are very competent in the calculations needed for working with equations in chemistry. They have all the skills needed for science subjects at A Level, with mathematics particularly helpful to the study of physics. In technology students have many opportunities for practical mathematics, and are particularly successful with the design and production of a survival bar in Year 8. Conversely the ICT lesson observed with a half class in Year 9 was very effective in helping students with their mathematics, in this case by developing and comparing graphs of functions at speed.

63 In mathematics lessons good practical work was seen in Year 8 leading to the calculation of the value of Pi. Good use of a puzzle was also observed in Year 8, encouraging students to develop speed and facility in the use of non-calculator mathematics. Very good practical work seen in Year 12 helped to establish the concept of power very clearly. Examples were seen of excellent extension of students' thinking and competence beyond the range of the textbook. However there was a general absence of good oral work; students were rarely invited to explain their thinking or to suggest alternative approaches to a problem. Work in the use and application of mathematics is less well developed than for the other attainment targets, so that investigative approaches to the work of the lesson are not used as often as they could be. The same applies to challenging mental mathematics as a tool for "warming up" and introducing new theory.

Despite these shortcomings the standard of teaching was at least good in all the lessons seen and very good in more than half, representing a general improvement in teaching since the last inspection particularly at Key Stage 3.

SCIENCE

64 Standards achieved by the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 are well above average. Post 16 students achieve standards in line with course expectations and attainment levels are higher in Year 12 than Year 13. The results of the 1999 National Curriculum tests and teacher assessments for all 14 year olds were very high compared with national averages. The test results were similar to those of grammar schools. There was no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls. Over the past four years the average points score has been very high in comparison with national averages and has followed the national trend. The GCSE results in 1999 were well above the national averages of all maintained secondary schools with again no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls. The proportions gaining A*-C grades in biology, chemistry and physics were in line with those of selective schools and below average in double award science. The proportions gaining A* or A grades were below the averages of these schools particularly in biology and double award science. The average level of attainment on entry to the school, however, is below that of most selective schools and the time allocated for the separate sciences is significantly less than in most schools. Students were entered for separate sciences at GCSE for the first time in 1999 and the results achieved are a clear indication of the success of the policy. The average points score at GCSE in 1999 was in line with that predicted from the performance two years previously, indicating that expected progress was made overall. However, students did not do as well in biology and double award science in comparison with national norms, as in other subjects. The 1999 GCE A Level results in biology, chemistry and physics were broadly in line with those of maintained secondary schools and just below those of selective schools. The chemistry and physics results were similar to those of 1998 and the biology ones improved significantly. There has been a significant improvement in public examination results since the last inspection.

65 Students enter the school with attainment levels above average. They make good progress and by the ends of Key Stages 3 and 4 standards are well above average. They have a very good knowledge and understanding of science across the curriculum. Year 9 students explain the process of respiration and photosynthesis, make connections between electricity and magnetism and calculate amounts of work done and power. They use their knowledge of metal reactions to make accurate predictions of other chemical reactions. Year 11 students competently use inheritance rules to explain how some diseases are genetically acquired. They have a secure knowledge and understanding of atomic structure and bonding and use it to calculate energy changes in chemical reactions. They interpret speed-time graphs, calculate accelerations and describe how an electrostatic precipitator functions. Those studying biology at Post 16 skilfully manipulate microscopes while investigating plasmolysis. Chemistry students know how the structure of benzene is deduced from evidence and interpret rate equations to work out mechanisms for reactions. Those studying physics know how radio waves are used in astronomy and features of radio telescopes. Skills required in investigative work develop to high standards and Year 7 students soon learn how to observe and measure accurately and record appropriately. Older students do very high quality interpretations and evaluations of experimental work. Students have the numeric skills to enable them to process their experimental results and display them graphically. Year 7 students draw graphs with lines of best fit and Year 10 students competently calculate quantities from chemical reactions. Students carefully use correct terminology both orally and in written work.

66 Good learning and progress results from the high quality teaching and the very positive attitudes of students. The quality of teaching is a particular strength. It has improved significantly since the last inspection and is always good and in two thirds of lessons very good or excellent. Teachers know students extremely well and skilfully question and challenge them to draw out information and to check understanding. Very occasionally questioning is not sufficiently targeted on individuals. Lessons start promptly sometimes by using a quick revision test to immediately focus students. Lively and informative exposition often accompanied by varied activity keep students interested and fully engaged. In one lesson a purposeful class practical activity involving analysis proved very challenging and interesting and successfully reinforced understanding of chemical calculations. Teachers have a very good knowledge of course and examinations board requirements and use it to effectively prepare students for examinations. There is much use of past examination questions. These are marked promptly with detailed informative comments. Other homeworks provide opportunities for students to show initiative and develop their research skills. Teachers plan lessons well, make objectives clear at the start and use a variety of strategies. There has been a significant increase in the use of ICT facilities since the last inspection although some teachers need further training to gain confidence. In two lessons observed computer programs were used very effectively to accelerate learning. Year 11 students competently used a program to learn about logic gates and Year 13 biology students used one to further their understanding of kidney function. Traditional methods would have taken much longer to achieve the same result. Class management is excellent throughout with students responding extremely well to the high expectations of behaviour and effort. Students enjoy their lessons. They willingly and confidently put forward ideas and seek further help when required. They co-operate extremely well in groups discussing sensibly, safely and productively. Year 12 chemistry students showed much team spirit while undertaking a challenging investigative exercise for their entry in a national competition. The quality of student-teacher relationships promotes a partnership approach to success.

67 The curriculum has good breadth at Key Stage 4 with GCSE courses in the separate sciences and double award science. Liaison with feeder schools has much improved and ensures good continuity over the two key stages. Students from primary schools come in for lessons and in one observed they were using ICT facilities when learning about electrical currents. The headteacher of the primary school commented on the effectiveness of these lessons in raising standards at Key Stage 2. Assessment procedures are comprehensive and accurate. Much more use is now made of the information obtained in evaluating performance of students and the department and appropriateness of courses. Students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Extra help is given to individuals at lunchtimes and after school. Particularly gifted and talented Post 16 students have extra lessons.

68 Teachers are well qualified with a good balance of experience and are deployed effectively. All are extremely conscientious and hard working with a commitment to high standards. There is strong leadership and effective management by a competent and enthusiastic head of department supported by two very able subject heads. Technicians provide high quality support. A team spirit is much in evidence with much mutual help and support on a day-to-day basis. The new accommodation has successfully addressed the inadequacies reported at the last inspection. The department has successfully addressed the issues raised in the last inspection and is in a strong position to sustain improvement.

ART

69 Teacher assessment at the end of Key Stage 3 shows students have achieved above average grades. Standards are particularly high in National Curriculum Attainment Target 2 - knowledge and understanding of art and artists. The most recent GCSE results show students are achieving results that are significantly above the national average. Standards attained by Post 16 students are high. A Level results in the higher grades A/B are significantly above average.

70 At Key Stage 3, standards of attainment are very good. Students are provided with a curriculum that encourages the development of research, investigation, observation, interpretation and recording skills. In Year 7, students use festivals as a theme and show their ability to research and study various cultures and the symbols used by them in their art. Students work co-operatively in groups of three or four on large posters. For example, one group made a poster as a celebration of the Chinese New Year. Drawing skills are developed through thoughtful observation. In Year 9 students studied the drawings of Honoré Daumier, a 19th century French artist, before making quick sketches based upon one of his works. Students' line drawings show an ability to see and understand the balance, proportion and dynamics of the human figure. At Key Stage 4 students have a good mastery of colour, shape, tone and composition. This was seen in Year 10 class where students are capable of using watercolours in their still-life paintings; they use this difficult medium with maturity. Three-dimensional work in ceramics is equally impressive in its concept, making and construction techniques. Year 11 students were seen working on a project based on natural forms. They have good insights and skills of interpretation; for example large sculptural dishes developed from the study of shells, and leaf and bark patterns. Students' three-dimensional work shows an understanding of both the visual and tactile use of textures. Post 16 students' work is of exceptional quality. They understand the role of artists within society and have considerable depth of knowledge about them. Written assignments are well researched. Students use ICT resources to develop their written projects and manipulate images as illustrations, for example, when modifying a ground plan of Brampton Church for a study of its stained glass windows. Students have good skills in photo-screen printing techniques and use this skill when designing textile prints.

71 The department has made extremely good progress since the last inspection. At that time, standards of attainment at Key Stage 4 were below average in GCSE, and results were broadly in-line with the national average at Key Stage 3 and Post 16. They are now significantly above average at the end of Key Stage 3 and very high at Key Stage 4 and Post 16. Textiles, mixed media and sculpture were weaknesses at Key Stage 3 last time; these aspects of the department's work are now very strong. The use of ICT continues to be a major strength, particularly for research using CD-ROM, scanned images and PhotoShop software. Lack of hardware and an Internet connection prevent further development. Accommodation problems reported in the previous report have been resolved and the department enjoys the use of good-sized art rooms and a Post 16 studio space which is an excellent resource for the department, which has a growing A Level group.

72 Teachers are well qualified. Both are practising artists, and the head of department is an art historian; this expertise is used effectively within the department. One of the benefits is the frequent use of visiting artists as a resource for learning; such as the use of a local artist to help Year 7 students build dragons for the Penrith Dragon Festival on May Day. The head of art's expertise in the historical aspects of the subject has contributed to many successful school visits to Italy. Curriculum time at Key Stage 3 and Post 16 is limited, however, there is strong motivation within classes and the time available is used effectively. Teachers give freely of their time and many students make use of the facilities during lunchtimes. The high quality of teacher expertise has a direct and measurable effect

upon students' progress and development. This was evidenced in Year 12 where the teacher encouraged students to experiment with surface texture. They used oxides to stain the clay and to darken the marks etched into the surface of the clay. In large sculptural pieces, students experimented by adding paper-pulp to clay to give it a lighter structure. Classes are totally committed and apply themselves to the tasks they are given; they research ideas and have mature attitudes towards work. Sketchbooks are of an excellent standard and are used to gather information and to develop ideas. Teachers encourage students to make individual choices concerning their chosen areas of study. Personal assignments are broad in range; one student has researched Gretchen Discovering Faust's Jewels by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, a Pre-Raphaelite painter. Her short essay based on her observation of the work is beautifully descriptive. Day-to-day assessment is used to make students aware of their strengths and weaknesses and to set targets for further improvement. There are excellent displays of art throughout the school.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

73 Teachers' assessment at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 shows students' attainment above the national average with most achieving Level 6. GCSE results are significantly above the national average and a large proportion of students gain the highest grade. Girls perform better than boys. High achievement is maintained into Post 16 courses where students gain 100% high grade passes in home economics and 66.7% design and technology, both significantly above the national norm.

74 At Key Stage 3 the broad curriculum provides tasks and projects that develop both designing and making skills. Students use research skills in all areas and projects have relevance to the industrial world. In food technology, Year 9 students research and plan the manufacturing process of a food product they have designed following an industrial visit. Students understand the properties of a wide range of materials and use tools, machinery and equipment safely. This was observed in textiles where Year 8 students have developed skills in the safe and accurate use of sewing machines. In resistant materials students demonstrate an understanding of mechanisms, such as cranks, axles and gears when designing and making a mechanical toy. Design skills are developed within each of the design and technology areas throughout the key stage. Students acquire good research and design skills, as in Year 9 where students plan and construct a package to hold survival food. They develop logo designs and plan the shape of plastic mouldings to hold the food bar. Students have good ICT skills, for example, Year 8 students are able to write procedures to control switches that operate mechanisms. At the end of Key Stage 4 students have developed a thorough understanding of the process of design, folders are well presented and include hand-drawn and computer graphics. Students make individual designs that vary across the group, as in resistant materials where one Year 11 student has designed a bed with a metal headboard based on a spider's web. Another student has used good woodwork skills in the design and manufacture of a showcase to house model racing cars. Students are able to analyse a need, brainstorm ideas and develop a product, as in textiles where students show themselves to be creative in their designing and pattern-making skills. ICT is regularly used in many aspects of students' work. Students are able to programme CAD CAM machinery to cut and sew their designs. Post 16 students work to a demanding design brief and work independently, as when designing a robot machine as part of a regional competition. They researched suspension systems that could cope with rough terrain, and designed components and mechanisms to fit into a limited space. A Level designs are broad in concept, well planned in portfolios, and manufactured using good technical skills. This was shown in the design of a golf target structure where a range

of materials have been incorporated into the design, and in the design and modelling of a large sports complex where scale and modelling skills are used effectively.

75 Standards have greatly improved at all key stages since the last inspection, when they were broadly in-line with the national expectation. Textiles; reported to be below the national norm, is now a strength. The need to extend the range of materials has been fully addressed. Accommodation was poor at the time of the last inspection; now there is a new science and technology block. Accommodation in food and textiles is excellent and architects working with members of staff have created spaces that meet the demands of the subject, for example in textiles where space and the shape of the room allows for layout and pattern-making. Accommodation in resistant materials is less successful and there is no designated graphics area. One of the resistant materials workshops is small and has a planer/thicknesser and a circular saw sited in the centre of the workshop. This is a health and safety risk. The department has very good safety procedures and the machines are not used during the school day, but potentially dangerous preparation machinery should be housed in a designated preparation area. Time at Key Stage 3 was limited last time; although there has been a small improvement, it is still well below the national average and does not allow sufficient coverage of all four subject areas.

76 The standard of teaching within the department is very good. Teachers are well-qualified and use their skills to promote good learning at all levels. Projects are well considered by teachers and provide challenge and relevance. For example, the 'Survival Project' in Year 9, where students research and design a survival bar in food technology and plan and make packaging for it in graphic products. In food technology they research ingredients that will provide good nutritional value and then combine them to provide good flavour. The bar must not crumble and must fit set packaging dimensions. Students are then set the task of designing a package during their graphics module. Their package must protect their food bar from knocks and contamination, they must also invent a product name and logo. Teachers use a balance of teaching strategies and develop good problem solving skills through open ended questioning techniques. Students have a good attitude to learning, they take notes without having to be told and contribute to discussion with enthusiasm, as in food technology when Year 7 students discussed the historical development of convenience foods in a lesson based on the sandwich. Assessment procedures are designed to support students' learning. Teachers provide students with a guide to show how levels and grades are judged. In Year 11 the teacher used the guide when discussing progress with a student during the lesson. Students are mature and work independently. They are encouraged to take part in regional and national events, as Young Engineer for Britain and Young Chef of the Year. The department has produced three Arkwright Scholars in recent years. There are excellent links with local industries such as Stead McAlpine textile printers and the Eden Valley Mineral Water Company. The 'robot' project in Year 12, demonstrates the way teachers and students work together. The teacher guides students towards solutions through an investigative process. Students are challenged to come up with working solutions, test their ideas and then make modifications if necessary. Teaching skills are central to students' learning and have made a major contribution to the improvement in standards since the previous inspection.

GEOGRAPHY

77 Students enter the school with a range of prior experience of geography but all make very good progress so that, by the end of Key Stage 3, teacher assessed levels are significantly above national averages and students have a growing body of geographical

knowledge and the skills to interpret it. They use terminology easily and appropriately and have a strong locational awareness. Geography is a popular option in Key Stage 4. In 1999, 94.3% of the 71 candidates achieved grades A*-C compared to a national average of 57.4%. More than a quarter gained the highest grade and, atypically, boys' grades were marginally higher than girls'. Overall, grades in geography at GCSE were nearly a grade higher, on average, than grades achieved by the same students in their other subjects revealing very good progress through Key Stage 4. They have a deep understanding of the subject and apply difficult concepts with alacrity. A level results have risen faster than national trends. In 1999, aided by a modular course structure and the readiness of teachers to offer individual support, 41.1% of students achieved grade A and a further 23.5% grade B. Attainment is excellent.

78 Students are courteous and receptive, participate eagerly, make incisive contributions to lessons. They are very productive and show deep commitment to learning. Written work is of a very high standard. Coursework for GCSE and A level is impressive. Students display a readiness to accept initiative, strong enquiry skills and familiarity with a wide range of cartographic, representational and statistical techniques. Project work is thorough. A project on Kenya in Year 9 was well used as a valuable vehicle for strengthening literacy as well as for fostering research and understanding.

79 The overall quality of teaching is very good. Teachers have high expectations of students. They give good attention to detail and insist on proper use of terminology. Well-chosen examples bring reality to learning. The teacher provided examples to reinforce learning in a Year 9 class on volcanoes. Skilful traditional teaching used well-presented case studies to inspire students to participate with enthusiasm in role play situations. Some other teaching on the same topic, however, did not provide students with sufficient information to understand fully the processes which cause eruptions. Study is enlivened by anecdotal material and with frequent references to local geography. A Year 13 lesson on the effects of the Common Agricultural Policy on the Yorkshire Dales gained much from students' first hand experiences of similar landscapes and the strength of the interaction between teacher and students. The value of shared field work experiences was evident. A well pitched Year 12 lesson built on and reinforced students' knowledge of global air circulation and cloud recognition. They were required to think for themselves about the formation of convectional rainfall and how such rainfall might be linked to periods of drought in temperate latitudes. The precise and accurate subsequent presentations by students testified to the impact of high expectations on the quality of learning. There is much planned variety in methodology that sustains student interest through modules, progressively developing skills and understanding. Many of the teaching resources are stimulating and have been carefully adapted.

80 The department has responded positively to the previous report. Lessons are well planned with clear learning targets. High quality of learning pervades all three key stages. A comprehensive programme of fieldwork supports the curriculum. Resources and accommodation are improved although some classes still work in cramped learning environments. The quality of classroom and corridor display is impressive. The department is under relatively new but very experienced and effective leadership, with very high standards. Further development of the use of ICT is recognised as a priority for development. The arrangements for monitoring and evaluation of teaching should be developed to strengthen them further, to share good practice and celebrate the quality of the present work.

GEOLOGY

81 Geology is a long established component of the School's Post 16 curriculum and is taught within the auspices of the Science Department. Very good traditional teaching well supported by a comprehensive fieldwork programme tapping the rich local resources is characterised by well handled interaction so that students acquire knowledge and understanding at a rapid rate and are encouraged to think for themselves. A lesson on bulk construction materials, for example, drew on students' knowledge of the geomorphological origins of sand deposits, grain size and shape. Regular reinforcement is built into lessons. Student numbers vary and geology often accommodates students with relatively low attainment as measured by their overall performance at GCSE. In 1999, four A Level and one AS level candidates all passed with grades broadly in line with their performance in other subjects.

HISTORY

82 Attainment by the great majority of students at the end of Key Stage 3 is above average and that of some students is well above average. The majority of students have secure knowledge of the themes and periods studied, can express their views clearly and understand how to use historical sources in making judgements about the past. They have good factual recall, can make links between the various periods studied and are able to put forward their own views and interpretations confidently. Attainment of many students in Year 7 is above average and is especially noteworthy in this early part of the key stage. Many of them have good historical knowledge of the periods studied and are beginning to produce written work which shows a good grasp of basic history skills. Higher attaining students in all years in the key stage are reaching standards well above average. Their written work is often of a very high standard, indicating real insight into historical issues and a good measure of independence in the organisation and presentation of their work. Students with special educational needs in this key stage are making very good progress. Teachers provide effective support and challenging encouragement which helps these students to achieve well in the subject.

83 Attainment by the great majority of students at the end of Key Stage 4 is well above average. Many students have very good historical knowledge and enquiry skills. Course work in particular is of a high standard; the use of source material in the local study indicates that students know how to organise and present research, and in the special study of Ireland many express and support their views with good use of language and historical understanding. They have good recall of previous learning and very good study skills. Examination results at GCSE are excellent and have been well above the national average over the past seven years. In the most recent examination ninety-four percent of candidates gained a pass in the grades A*-C. The percentage of students gaining the higher grades of A* and A was almost twice the national average and points score per student was also well above the national average. The performance of boys is very much better than the national average for boys and at the last examination school results for boys were slightly better than those for girls at A*-C. The performance of girls is consistently better than the national average for girls. In the past seven years all students entered for the examination have gained a pass in the grades A*-G

84 Attainment at the end of Post 16 is above average. Most students have a good grasp of the main developments and themes of the periods studied, can use appropriate specialist terms, have good inquiry skills and write well. Students may choose to study a course in either twentieth century or sixteenth century history for A Level. Students studying the sixteenth century option understand the need to relate political, economic and

religious factors together in offering explanation of cause and consequence. They are also familiar with the views of leading scholars of the period. Students in Year 13 studying the twentieth century are less secure in their knowledge of the period and less confident in expressing opinions in class. Those in the first year of this course have a good understanding of the themes so far studied and, in a class debate on the Treaty of Versailles, their understanding of the issues was based on sound factual knowledge and they expressed their views with confidence. Examination results at A Level have matched or exceeded the national average for A-E grades over the past six years. Results in the most recent examination were above the national average for both courses. All students entered for the examination in sixteenth century history gained a pass in the grades A-C, with half of these candidates gaining the highest grade. Girls' results have been better than boys' over recent years.

85 The quality of teaching in Key Stage 3 is very good. Good subject knowledge, high expectations and teachers' own enthusiasm for history stimulates very good responses from students, the great majority of whom clearly enjoy lessons and work with concentration and understanding. In a small minority of lessons opportunities to encourage inter-change of views between students are undeveloped. Very good teaching in a Year 9 lesson on Hitler's rise to power was characterised by confident style, good organisation and effective use of video material which helped students understand the inter-relationship of social, economic and political factors in the period. Teaching of high quality in a lesson on medieval religion in Year 7 gripped the imagination of students and offered many opportunities for them to respond to the theme of the lesson. A significant contribution is being made to students' cultural development and to their understanding of their own cultural inheritance throughout the Key Stage 3 programme of study.

86 The quality of teaching at Key Stage 4 is very good. Lessons have clear objectives, students make discernible gains in knowledge and in their understanding of methods of historical enquiry. Most lessons are well -planned and use a variety of teaching methods. In a minority of lessons conclusions are rather hurried and restrict opportunities to reinforce learning or clarify difficulties. Very good teaching in a Year 11 lesson on living conditions in the nineteenth century set clear objectives which encouraged students to settle quickly to work on a range of source materials. The teacher encouraging them to link this to relevant aspects of their earlier study of the history of medicine.

87 The quality of teaching Post16 is good. In many lessons students are encouraged to present their own research and to develop independence and self-confidence. Teachers' good subject knowledge enables them to help students understand some of the complexities of historical debate and their own evident interest in history encourages students to apply themselves diligently to their study of the past.

88 Assessment of end of key stage tests, examinations and course-work is thorough and helpful. Assessment of work in exercise books in Key Stage 3 is often encouraging, though the focus on improvement of history skills is not always consistently applied across the department.

89 The attitude of students towards the subject is positive in all stages. The very good display work, collaborative assignments and special topics which many of them research in great detail are evidence of this, as is the take-up at GCSE and A Level which is very much higher than the national average.

90 Effective and enthusiastic management is a strength of the department. Curriculum planning and departmental schemes of work are informed by high quality professional

thinking and an evident desire to engage students in interesting and meaningful historical enquiry. An extensive range of visits to sites of historical importance in Britain, Italy and France enriches the experience of students and makes a significant contribution to their cultural and social development. This is a very good department. The enthusiasm and commitment of teachers creates a very positive and purposeful atmosphere in which teachers and students alike share their enthusiasm for the study of history.

91 All the good features reported at the last inspection have been maintained. Improvement in the consistency of comment in students' exercise books in Key Stage 3, encouragement of more inter-change of views between students in lessons in Key Stage 3 and management of the conclusion of lessons in Key Stage 4 will strengthen further a very strong department.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

92 The standard of students' work seen was average at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4. There is 100% pass rate in the RSA Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) course taken by the majority of students in Year 12.

93 Students in Year 7 have a satisfactory understanding of how to access computers using their password, and do so during lessons and at other times such as break and lunchtimes. Students are able to use 'Paintbrush', and 'Publisher', they can import images from a variety of sources such as Encarta and can use basic word processing to produce their work. In German students in Year 7 make good use of CD Roms in developing their language skills. In Year 8 students are able to perform number investigations in mathematics using BBC Basic and Databases. In DT they use Logo in developing their skills and understanding of control systems. They have good keyboard skills when entering data in DT. Year 9 students of mathematics use omnigraph quickly and competently to produce complex graphs. In geography Year 9 students use a variety of ICT skills such as word processing, image scanning and importing for their Kenya project. Making good use of the Internet in RE, students in Year 9 study sites related to the life of St Paul and in history derive information from 'Making of the UK' CD Rom to extend their knowledge. In Year 10 mathematics students increase their skills and understanding of mathematical modelling using spreadsheets. Students in Year 12 take the CLAIT course where they complete a number of assignments in word processing, spreadsheets and data bases. Students in both Key Stages 3 and 4 make extensive use of Photoshop scanner in art. Many students use word processing skills to improve the presentation of their work. There is a need to develop opportunities to use ICT skills in English and music.

94 Teaching is always at least satisfactory, often it is good. Teachers who are using ICT in their own subjects are confident to use this technology, but many others are aware of their own limitations. In ICT rooms teachers expect high standards of behaviour and create a positive working atmosphere enabling students to learn effectively. Students work individually and stay focussed on the tasks set. This allows teachers to offer help and advice where needed. There are good relationships between teachers and students with a shared work ethic. Where students have to share computers because of class size they are patient and cooperate well. Work proceeds more slowly, however, in these lessons. A number of Post 16 students provide valuable help both in lessons, at break and lunchtimes in supporting younger students in their work on computers.

95 In ICT lessons in Year 7 students learn new skills and increase their knowledge and

understanding in lessons as a result of well planned and structured teaching. In other subjects such as art, design and technology and modern foreign languages, they learn how to use the technology available to develop their knowledge, understanding of the subjects. In Year 11 physics the use of computer technology enabled students to learn about logic gates in much less time than by the conventional methods of physically assembling a circuit. The curriculum opportunities for students are in line with National Curriculum requirements in both key stages and an accredited course is available to Year 12, however, there are no opportunities for students to take GCSE and A Level courses. Apart from a limited amount of discrete ICT in Year 7 all other ICT occurs in other subjects as a tool to improve students' knowledge and understanding. This cross-curricular provision is being monitored by the newly appointed head of ICT, to ensure that all students receive their entitlement in the subject. The shortage of hardware both in ICT rooms and in subject bases limits the amount of progress which can be made.

96 Since the last inspection satisfactory progress has been made in the provision of ICT in Key Stages 3 and 4. However, the assessment of students capabilities in ICT continues to require development. In ICT/mathematics lessons there is accurate assessment of students' levels, but this does not occur in other subjects. To take full benefit of ICT, teachers of all subjects need further INSET to develop their skills in the use and assessment of ICT.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

97 Since the last inspection GCSE results in French and German have improved significantly. In 1999 nearly all students achieved at least a grade C in one language or both, and of these almost half obtained the top two grades A* and A. These very strong results were higher than the average for state maintained grammar schools with most students achieving better in their foreign language than in other subjects. Contrary to the national picture, boys' results in 1999 were as strong as those of girls. Numbers of students taking A Level in the last few years have not been large enough to make useful comparisons with national averages. However, most students have passed and those capable of the highest grades have achieved them.

98 In lessons, too, standards are high at all key stages. By the time students reach the end of Key Stage 4 their attainment is generally well above national expectations. Many have very good accents and pronounce French or German accurately, using the language with fair fluency to describe their own circumstances or to request information. In a Year 11 French lesson, for example, students made very fast progress in speaking about the benefits and disadvantages of part time work. Very demanding teaching ensured that by the end of the lesson all students were confident in expressing themselves without reference to a text. Standards in Year 12 French are also good, promoted in part by uniformly strong teaching and in part by the students' very mature positive attitude. In spite of mostly strong teaching in German, however, the approach of some of the Year 12 students is not as committed and standards are accordingly lower.

99 By the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is better than expected. Where students hear the foreign language spoken consistently for most of the time their comprehension of native speakers on tape and of their teachers is often well developed. Students' written work, also, is good, particularly in the case of higher attaining linguists who can adapt the foreign language well and often use it accurately in continuous pieces of writing that show a grasp of verb tenses and a good use of idiom. Students' reading skills in Key Stage 3 are

encouraged by opportunities to read freely and at their own pace in the foreign language.

100 These high standards are promoted by teaching which is predominantly good or better. In half of the lessons observed teaching was very good or excellent, and in the remainder it was mostly sound. Teachers are very proficient in the languages they teach, even in their second language. This generally results in consistent and sensitive use of the foreign language in the classroom leading in turn to a confident use of it by most students. In rare cases, where the language is used inconsistently or very little, students are less confident at speaking. Most of the teaching is rigorous and well planned with a varied and engaging use of method to gain and keep students' interest. In a Year 9 German lesson, for example, all students made effortless gains in fluency when speaking about places to visit in their local area. They responded positively to very skilful and well managed teaching that gave plenty of opportunity to practise language and kept them busy at all times.

101 Students' attitudes and behaviour at such times are exemplary. They rise to the challenge of demanding teaching, co-operating with the teacher and each other, listening attentively when appropriate and working independently without needing to be reminded. Restlessness or lack of concentration are rare. They occur only when teaching lacks variety of method and gives students too little to involve or challenge them.

102 In a few cases the effectiveness of teaching, and students' learning, would be even further enhanced if all members of the department had a similar approach to certain items of good practice: a greater variety in the use of method and visual resources; a fuller use of listening texts for teaching as well as testing comprehension; more orderly starts and ends to lessons; a rigorous insistence on students using the foreign language for simple requests in the classroom; more open-ended tasks, in class and for homework, to stretch those who work quickly.

103 The modern foreign languages department is very effective. Leadership is clear sighted and supportive, encouraging good relationships and the sharing of ideas and resources. Staff are all committed and well qualified professionals. However, the head of department, who is also the school examinations officer, currently has no-one in a promoted position to whom certain key responsibilities can be delegated. There would be considerable benefits to students and staff in employing a foreign language assistant once again.

104 Much has been achieved since the last inspection in raising the quality of teaching and the standards that students attain. ICT is now used regularly and to good effect. All students throughout the school have access to the learning of two foreign languages. Good numbers opt to study a second foreign language in Key Stage 4 and subscribe to the excellent programme of visits and exchanges to Germany and France. In these, and in other respects, the department makes important contributions to students' social, cultural and linguistic development.

105 The department makes good use of its suite of three specialised teaching rooms and one office/store room. Attractive displays of students' work are in evidence in all of the classrooms. These rooms, however, are too small to accommodate larger groups of students and are frequently overcrowded. Standards are affected when students cannot properly see the teacher or move freely between rows. Two members of the department have to make use of several other rooms in the course of the week. This discourages frequent communication or the use of resources which need carrying to and from lessons. Resources overall are adequate and up to date. However, the department would benefit

from an additional overhead projector and, when funding allows, computer hardware to extend the use of ICT. All rooms need good blackout facilities and the quality of sound reproduction would be enhanced by carpeting on the floors. The only reservation mentioned in the last report that has not been specifically addressed is the need for more systematic monitoring of students' performance, particularly the few who are not attaining appropriate standards. In view of the department's effectiveness and its openness to change, it is very well placed to make further improvements.

MUSIC

106 Standards of attainment in GCSE and A Level examinations are consistently excellent and significantly higher than the national average. End of Key Stage 3 assessments show almost 80% of students at expected national standards, 12% beyond it and 8% with exceptional talent. Standards of attainment are good at Key Stage 3, good and often very good at Key Stage 4 and very good at Post 16.

107 By the end of Key Stage 3, students have acquired a wide range of musical skills and are familiar with many different types of music. Most can use traditional notation competently, write it down accurately from aural dictation on the treble clef, and use it efficiently for both composition and performance. Students know how to write and play ostinati, and use challenging chromatic passages and complicated syncopated phrases when working on keyboards or on their own orchestral instruments. They have well-developed powers of identifying instrumental colouring when listening to, and analysing, music, and their judgements are usually accurate. Most have a secure knowledge of musical literacy, being able, for example, to effectively use both simple and compound times for composition and performance purposes. Whole-class ensemble work is of a very high standard and is particularly effective because it is usual for those learning orchestral instruments to use them in the classroom: this raises the expectations and standards of everyone in practical work, and is excellent practice. In practical terms, at Key Stage 4, all students are at least competent and some are very talented. Composition work demonstrates their creative abilities: they write fluent melodies, modulate through major and minor keys, add a wide range of appropriate chords and scan words accurately. Standards of performance in ensemble work are very good, with careful attention being paid to balance and co-ordination. Research skills are well developed, so that students are able to talk authoritatively when analysing music and discussing trends in musical development. A Level students are all very good practical musicians. They have very good skills when score reading, and can comment with assurance on matters relating to form, key relationships, orchestration and historical relevance. When studying a nineteenth century romantic score, for example, they demonstrated perceptive and original views about the complexities of the music.

108 The attitudes of students to music at Key Stage 3 are good, very good at Key Stage 4 and excellent at Post 16. At Key Stage 3, students particularly enjoy the practical work. The prepared topics for modules of work such as the "James Bond" themes appeal to them and focus their attention. Their powers of concentration while listening to and analysing music are good, and they work together very well in group and ensemble work. At Key Stage 4, students demonstrate a mature attitude. They are in hand with their course work, and are responsible in the way they research and work on it in their own private time. They work together most collaboratively in practical work. Post 16 students display an alert approach to their studies, demonstrating the right amount of curiosity and interest.

109 The quality of teaching is very good. Members of staff are fine music practitioners and they have a secure grasp of teaching methodology for the demands of all key stages. This is exemplified in the carefully planned targets set for practical work which are sufficiently varied and graded to extend students of all levels of musical ability. Teachers have high expectations of what students should achieve, and introduce them to challenging projects. The planning and organisation of lessons are good, and are particularly successful in catering for the very long afternoon lesson. Very appropriately Year 12 and 13 students are being prepared for A Level through different boards as the students in each year have different strengths and interests. Assessment is on-going in lessons and at the end of modules of work. Assessment procedures should be reviewed in order to incorporate the students' views about the progress they are making and to give them examination targets for improvement. The quality of students' learning is very good across the school. This is because lessons are tightly structured in a developmental way, which ensures that students have gained further knowledge or skills by the end of lessons. Students have positive attitudes to lessons, and want to gain musical skills.

110 Information technology has not been sufficiently developed since the last inspection. Although electronic keyboards are successfully used in classwork, there are at present no computers in the department, despite the acquisition of specialist software. This situation continues to have an adverse effect on the breadth of opportunity at all key stages. Accommodation is still inadequate for the needs of the department. There is only one main teaching room for two music teachers: the room is too small for extended group work, and there are too few practice rooms available, particularly when visiting instrumental teachers are present. Book and music resources need to be improved. The provision of instrumental teaching by visiting teachers should be reviewed and the demands for percussion and guitar tuition investigated as a further strategy for attracting boys to the subject. The department contributes well to the social and cultural life of the school.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

111 The standard of work at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 and Post 16 is above the national level. The proportion of students gaining passes at grades A and B in A Level physical education in 1999 was below that of selective schools. However, all students achieved a pass grade, and for the majority taking this examination it was their highest grade compared with their other subjects.

112 In Year 7 students have a good understanding of and good basic skills in a number of games. In soccer they are able to retain possession when under pressure and pass effectively, in rugby they have high level individual and team skills, well above the standard for their age. Year 8 girls have good stick work in hockey and in rugby boys have good handling skills and tactical knowledge of the game. In netball in Year 9 girls have a good understanding of the rules and tactics of the game. They pass accurately and effectively and are working above the level expected for their age.

113 Girls in Year 10 have a good understanding the rules and formations and patterns of play in hockey and can organise their teams for short corners. In soccer in this year there is a wide range of attainment but the majority of boys are working at expected levels, Girls in Key Stage 4 have good standards in netball, in Year 10 they have a good understanding of tactical formations for centre and baseline plays and in Year 11 they have good individual skills of passing and shooting and are able to use these effectively in

games. In A Level physical education theory students have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of anatomy and physiology, acquisition of skill and contemporary issues such as the development of excellence in sport. The quality of dance in all year groups is high, with students in Key stage 3 and 4 showing good performances in a range of both modern and traditional dance.

114 Teaching is never less than satisfactory, often it is good or very good. Teachers, including those who make a small but significant input into the physical education department, have very good subject knowledge and they give clear explanations and demonstrations. Teachers make good use of question and answer sessions to make students more aware of skills and tactics in games. All lessons are well planned with challenging practices for the full range of attainment of the students particularly in Year 8 netball and Year 10 soccer. Progressive tasks with increasing challenges developing from small group games to full sided games in Year 9 netball show thoughtful and careful planning to develop students' individual and team skills. Students are well managed and teachers insist on and get exemplary standards of behaviour. Dynamic and enthusiastic teaching in Year 9 basketball generates considerable enthusiasm in student response. Teachers create many learning opportunities through good planning. In gymnastics the use of partner work in Year 7 enables students to be creative in their use of movement. Students in Year 10 hockey learn how to delay their passes so that they become more effective. In A Level physical education in Year 13 students learn advanced concepts such as 'frontier spirit' and 'pluralist policy' in USA sport .

115 Students are very positive about the subject and there are excellent levels of participation. They take responsibility for their own warm ups in all lessons and stay focused on tasks set, working with interest and enthusiasm with little need for teacher intervention to motivate them even in extremely poor weather conditions. They work well in pairs in gymnastics, in small groups in Year 8 netball and in full teams in Year 9 netball.

116 There is a broad and balanced curriculum in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, in spite of the very poor indoor accommodation for the subject. Year 11 and Post 16 are combined for games where there is a wide variety of options ranging from team games to activities such as climbing and golf. There are no opportunities for students to take accredited courses such as GCSE in KS4, however 'A' Level physical education is available to Post 16 students even though they are disadvantaged by not having experienced an examination course in Key Stage 4.

117 Extra curricular activities are a strength of the school, with an outstanding commitment not only by the department but by other staff running teams. There are very high percentages of students involved in school clubs and teams and this is matched by the exceptionally high standards of performance in major team games, athletics and cross country. Many students gain representative honours for their area, county and region.

118 The department is very well managed with a shared departmental commitment to promote the subject and encourage maximum student participation. High standards of attainment have been maintained since the last inspection, teaching and learning continue to be good, and the curriculum for boys in Key Stage 3 has been broadened to include dance. Two issues from the previous inspection, GCSE physical education in Key Stage 4 and extremely restricted indoor accommodation for the subject are beyond the control of the department and remain unresolved.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

119 The attainment of the majority of students at the end of Key Stage 3 is above average. They have a good knowledge of the key beliefs of the religions studied and can relate religious beliefs and practices to their own experiences. They understand that religious beliefs have moral and social consequences and their written work especially shows insight into the central concerns of religion. Students in a Year 9 class studying the idea of “inner change” in Christianity were able to draw upon their previous study of Buddhism to explore the idea of spiritual development and to relate the teachings of the religious traditions to their own experiences.

120 Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is above average. Students have a good knowledge of the beliefs and practices of the religions studied and can relate this to moral and social issues such as euthanasia and abortion and to ultimate questions such as belief in life after death. The written work of many students is of high standard and indicates that they are aware of differences within religions as well as between them. They use specialist terms and concepts well and understand their meaning. They are stronger in their written than their oral work; in some lessons oral contributions are undeveloped and answers to questions not extended. In 1999 students were entered for GCSE for the first time in several years. Results were excellent. The full cohort of Year 11 was entered and all students gained a pass in the range A*-C. with forty two percent of candidates gaining A* grades. Whilst the average point score of girls was higher than that of boys, boys’ average point score was significantly higher than the national average for boys and forty per cent of boys gained the highest grade in the examination. The issue of underachievement in this key stage reported at the last inspection has been successfully addressed.

121 The quality of teaching in Key Stage 3 is good. Teachers’ secure knowledge of the subject enables them to plan lessons in ways which help students to develop their knowledge and understanding and encourage personal responses to the issues studied in class. An imaginative introduction to a Year 9 lesson on Christianity used the idea of “masks” to engage students’ interest and involvement and provided them with ways of thinking about spiritual development which related to their own experience. In a minority of lessons observed, however, slow pace restricted opportunities for student involvement in varied activity.

122 The quality of teaching at Key Stage 4 is good. Well-planned lessons and confident command of subject matter by teachers enables students to make good progress in developing the understanding of religion which they have acquired in Key Stage 3. Good teaching in a Year 11 lesson on the Christian idea of charity drew upon a range of ideas to extend students’ understanding of how Christian worship relates to moral and social action. In most lessons students were actively engaged and were encouraged to express their own views. In some lessons in both key stages, boys were rather passive and not effectively drawn into the lessons.

123 Teaching in both key stages is reinforced by good assessment of students’ work. This gives encouraging and supportive comment, together with clear indication of strengths and weaknesses and how improvements may be made.

124 The great majority of students have a positive attitude to the subject and work hard, especially in written exercises, the quality of which indicates commitment and a willingness to make an effort to succeed. This was especially evident in a Year 10 class in which students were using the Internet to research the life of Martin Luther King. They remained concentrated on the task, even when they experienced some difficulties with accessing web-sites. The confident and helpful manner with which the teacher dealt with these

problems encouraged students to persevere. Students with special educational needs are making good progress and achieving well in the subject.

125 The curriculum at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 meets statutory requirements. Improvement has been made in provision at Key Stage 4 since the last inspection; all students follow a GCSE course and can opt to take either a full course or short course, leading to examination in the subject. Currently there is no provision for religious education Post 16, and statutory requirements are not being met at this stage. The curriculum is based on the locally agreed syllabus and is very well planned to give students opportunities to learn about a range of religious traditions and to express their own responses to religious belief and practice. Thoughtful and informed leadership of the subject is given by an experienced and committed teacher. A scheme of work for Key Stage 3 provides good professional guidance on day-to-day teaching of the subject. The scheme of work for Key Stage 4 has less detailed guidance on teaching than that for Key Stage 3; long term planning is undeveloped. Resources are adequate at Key Stage 3 and there has been improvement since the last inspection in the provision of textbooks at this key stage and in artefacts to support the teaching of world religions. At Key Stage 4 textbook resources are insufficient for the numbers of students taking the short GCSE course. The subject makes a significant contribution to students' spiritual, moral and cultural development. Many themes discussed in class call for reflection by students on their personal beliefs and values; visits to local churches, a Buddhist community and a Hindu temple enrich the classroom experience of students, contributing to their understanding of their own cultural heritage and raising awareness of the diversity of contemporary society.

126 Improvements have been made since the last inspection in the statutory provision at Key Stage 4, in the provision of resources at Key Stage 3 and in the achievements and commitment of students in Key Stage 4. Further improvements need to be made to meet statutory requirements at Post 16. The pace of some lessons in Key Stage 3 and students' oral contributions to lessons in Key Stage 4 require improvement. This is a good department making a significant contribution to the personal development of students and the ethos of the school.