

# INSPECTION REPORT

**The Chase (Technology College)**

**Malvern**

**LEA area: Worcestershire LEA**

**Unique Reference Number: 1116942**

**Headteacher: Mr D J Fawbert**

Reporting inspector: Philip O'Neill  
3162

Dates of inspection: 31<sup>st</sup> January – 3<sup>rd</sup> February

Inspection number: 187201

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 - 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Geraldine Road  
Malvern  
Worcestershire

Postcode: WR14 3NZ

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Appropriate authority: Governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs H R Williamson

Date of previous inspection: 12<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> February 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Philip J H O'Neill	Registered inspector		Characteristics of the school, standards, teaching, leadership and management.
Terry Clarke	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development, provision for the care of pupils, partnership with parents.
Andrew Blow	Team inspector	Mathematics	Special educational needs
Ann Braithwaite	Team inspector	Physical education	
James Brown	Team inspector	Science	
Helen Feasey	Team inspector	Sixth form courses	
Janet Flisher	Team inspector	English	
Eric Forster	Team inspector	Art	Equal opportunities
Ann Fraser	Team inspector	Religious education	Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
Christine Humphreys	Team inspector	Design and technology	Supporting special educational needs
Robert Isaac	Team inspector	Information technology	
Michael Lafford	Team inspector	Geography	
Anil Sinha	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	English as an additional language
Peter Tidmarsh	Team inspector	Music	
David Wasp	Team inspector	History	

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

The Chase is a mixed comprehensive school with recently acquired Technology College status situated at the edge of the town of Great Malvern in the shadow of the Malvern Hills. It caters for the 11-18 age range. There are 1714 pupils on role including 333 in the sixth form. The school is much bigger than most other secondary schools and larger than it was at the time of the previous inspection. It is over-subscribed, attracting pupils from far afield. Most of the pupils joining the sixth form have been pupils at the school. However, a significant proportion of pupils comes from other schools. The school manages a unit that provides for pupils with hearing impairment that now caters for just a few pupils.

The general attainment of pupils entering the school is average, whilst the students enter the sixth form with overall above average levels of attainment. Pupils come to the school from backgrounds of average social advantage. The percentage of pupils registered for free school meals is below the national average. This represents an increase since the previous inspection. Almost all of the pupils are white and from British backgrounds. Four pupils come from ethnic minority backgrounds with an equally small proportion experiencing English as an additional language in the home. Twenty per cent of pupils have been identified as having special educational needs. This is broadly in line with the national average figure. A statement of special educational needs exists for a below average proportion of pupils.

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

This is a very effective school, achieving overall high standards, particularly in the sixth form. The school is excellently led and managed, providing the pupils with a rich and stimulating curriculum. The pupils experience a very high proportion of good and very good teaching, including a significant proportion of teaching with outstanding features. The climate for learning is excellent and the pupils respond with enthusiasm and commitment to what is provided. The school provides very good value for money.

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

- The pupils achieve very good standards in their work.
- Pupils at all levels of attainment make very good progress in their studies.
- The pupils have excellent attitudes to their work.
- The quality and range of learning opportunities provided are very good.
- Provision for extra-curricular activities is excellent.
- The contribution of the community to the pupil's learning is excellent.
- Provision for the pupils' moral and social development is excellent.
- Procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are excellent.
- The leadership and management of the school are excellent.
- The school has nurtured very good relationships with parents.

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

- The requirement for the provision of a daily act of collective worship for all pupils is not met.
- The provision of religious education for pupils in the sixth form does not meet statutory requirements.

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

## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in February 1996. Three key issues were identified and formed the basis of the governors' action plan following the inspection. The first issue related to the match of the content of lessons to the pupils' levels of attainment. The school has made very significant strides on this front and there is now a much greater awareness of the needs of individual pupils. The success of the measures taken is evident in the very good progress made by pupils at all levels of attainment. The school has responded very effectively to the concerns raised about the weakness of the links with local primary schools. These links are now excellent. The school has responded very thoroughly to the weaknesses identified in the provision and management of information communications technology and this is an area that goes from strength to strength, though a few minor weaknesses remain. There has been a significant improvement in the standards of attainment since the previous inspection. The school drew very effectively from the previous report to guide many other improvements.

## STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	B	B	B	C
A-levels/AS-levels	A	A	A*	

**Key**

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

In 1999 pupils' results in National Curriculum tests for 14 year-olds were very good in English, mathematics and science. In comparison with similar schools 14 year-old pupils reach very high standards in English and mathematics and well above average standards in science. Boys outperform girls in English. Sixteen year-olds achieved above average results in the GCSE examinations. This level of attainment exceeds that reached by similar schools. There were particular strengths in art and design, biology, business studies, chemistry, design and technology, drama, modern foreign languages, mathematics, physics and religious studies. Attainment of the higher grades A\*-C in all subjects exceeded the national average.

The attainment of students in GCE Advanced level has been consistently very high. Over the last three years the average attainment of students has been well above the national average figure. Attainment in the General National Vocational Qualifications examinations has also been high. A striking feature of attainment at A level has been the outstanding performance of the students taking English Language, the sciences, mathematics, business studies and economics. Attainment in Religious studies has been average. The school sets and meets realistic targets for improvements in attainment. The skills of literacy and numeracy are well taught with the consequence that pupils' engage in a very good range of writing across most subjects and use their numerical skills to good effect in many areas. Skills in information communications technology develop quickly in Key Stages 3 and 4. In the sixth form students exhibit well above average skills in relevant applications

of computers.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils respond excellently to the very good provision they experience. They appreciate the positive climate for learning and the quality of support they receive from the teachers.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They act from a respect for those around them and not just from the constraint of rules.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils' personal development is very good. They make good use of the many opportunities provided for the exercise of responsibility.
Attendance	The level of attendance is good and has shown recently a marked improvement through the implementation of an effective policy.

The pupils respect the school and value what it provides. They are particularly appreciative of the quality of teaching they experience and respond by a strong commitment to productive work. Rare incidences of bullying or oppressive behaviour are handled effectively either by the pupils themselves or by an appropriate adult. The pupils' very positive attitudes are a key element in the good standards of attainment and the progress made by the pupils in their work.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The overall quality of teaching is very good. Of the 190 lessons seen all but 3.5 per cent were at least satisfactory. Teaching was good in 36 per cent of lessons, very good in 42 per cent and excellent in five per cent. Teaching is good throughout Key Stage 3. There are many very good and outstanding features in the teaching in Key Stage 4. A marked feature of the school is the consistent pattern of good and very good teaching in the sixth form. Weaknesses in teaching occur in a few lessons in English, mathematics, design and technology and information communications technology, mainly in Years 8 and 9. These usually arise from a slow pace to lessons with the consequence that the pupils do not engage enthusiastically in their work, making modest progress.

The quality of teaching is very good in English in both key stages and in the sixth form. In mathematics teaching is good in Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. In science teaching is good in Key Stage 3, very good in Key Stage 4 and excellent in the sixth form. In Key Stage 3 teaching is good in most other subjects and very good in art and design and technology. In Key Stage 4 the quality of teaching is very good in all subjects; it is good in geography and modern languages. Teaching in the sixth form is very good across the subjects. In geography and physical education teaching is good; in modern languages it is satisfactory. Teaching is very good in the vocational courses. Literacy and numeracy are well taught. A particular strength is the way the teachers



encourage the use of the technical language of the subjects they teach. Lessons are well planned to cater for the needs of all pupils.

### OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	A wide-ranging and stimulating curriculum is enhanced by excellent extra-curricular provision. The excellent contribution of the community to the work of the school further enriches the curriculum.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	These pupils are very well cared for and every effort is made to provide access to the full range of the curriculum. This is particularly evident in the quality of support provided for the pupils with profound hearing disabilities.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The few pupils who experience English as an additional language in the home are sufficiently fluent to participate fully in lessons. The school provides well for these pupils.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for moral and social development is excellent. The provision for spiritual and cultural development is very good. Overall the provision for personal development is very good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	A strong commitment to care for all pupils is manifest in the very effective arrangements for ensuring their health and safety and in the quality of guidance and support they receive

The curricular provision is very good overall. Extra-curricular provision is a strength of the school. There is excellent provision for careers education and the excellent relationships with the community make a very significant contribution to the pupils' learning.

### HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The head teacher provides excellent leadership. He is supported by three very effective deputies and other senior colleagues whose complementary skills are harnessed to good effect in giving very clear direction to the work of the school.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors have formed themselves into a very effective group. They are very well led in the exercise of their distinctive responsibilities.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school has taken very effective measures to evaluate its performance. Realistic targets for improvement are set and met.
The strategic use of resources	The good level of resources is excellently deployed in the enrichment of the curriculum and in the raising of standards of attainment.

There is a very good match of teaching and support staff to the needs of the curriculum. Accommodation is satisfactory overall. There is a good range of resources. The school is very assiduous in applying the principles of best value in the acquisition of resources and in

other major elements of expenditure.

## **PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

<b>What pleases parents most</b>	<b>What parents would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The high expectations for attainment.</li><li>• The progress made by their children.</li><li>• The pupils' good behaviour.</li><li>• The quality of leadership and management.</li><li>• The range of extra-curricular activities.</li><li>• The quality of teaching.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provision for the lower- attaining pupils.</li><li>• Provision for pupils with special educational needs.</li></ul>

The inspection findings support the parents' overall very positive perception of what the school provides. The views of some parents that provision for the pupils with special needs has significant weaknesses is not born out by the evidence from the inspection. With regard to the lower-attaining pupils there is some evidence to suggest that occasionally these pupils do not make as much progress as their peers. Overall, however, the school does well by these pupils and the setting arrangements generally work to the advantage of all pupils.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

#### **The school's results and achievements**

1. In 1999 pupils' results in National Curriculum tests for 14 year-olds were very high in relation to the national comparison with all schools in English, well above average in mathematics and above average in science. The proportion of pupils reaching Level 6 was well above average in English, mathematics and science. Many higher-attaining 14 year-olds produce work of a very high standard in English and geography, whilst average and lower-attaining pupils reach good standards in all subjects in relation to their prior attainment. In information communications technology most pupils reach average standards in their work in lessons at this stage. In comparison with similar schools 14 year-old pupils reach very high standards in English and mathematics and well above average standards in science. Boys outperform girls in English, though this difference does not show itself in current work or in lessons.
2. Sixteen year-old pupils achieve good standards in public examinations. Over the past three years boys and girls have achieved above average results. This level of attainment exceeds that reached by similar schools. In 1999 the proportion of pupils achieving 5 or more grades A\*-C was above average nationally. The average total GCSE points scored was above the national average for all schools and for similar schools. There were particular strengths in art and design, biology, business studies, chemistry, design and technology, drama, modern languages, mathematics, physics and religious studies. Attainment of the higher grades A\*-C in all subjects exceeded the national average.
3. The attainment of students in GCE Advanced level has been consistently very high. Over the last three years the average attainment of students has been well above the national average figure. A striking feature of attainment at A level has been the outstanding performance of the students taking English Language, science subjects, mathematics, business studies and economics. Attainment in the General National Vocational Qualifications examinations has also been high, exceeding the national average performance and emerging with the highest level of attainment in the county. The work of the older pupils in the sixth form is of a very high quality with outstanding work in art. The main evidence of attainment in religious education in the sixth form comes from the attainment of the few pupils who took the A level course where standards were average. However, evidence from the work of the older pupils currently in Year 13 who are due to take the A level examination in Religious Education shows an improvement on attainment in the previous year; many achieve above average standards in their work.
4. The evidence gathered during the inspection of lessons and pupils' work confirms the high standards reached in the examinations at 14, 16 and in the sixth form. The overall high standards achieved across the school are clearly related to the quality of teaching and the school's determined efforts to create and sustain a positive and productive climate for learning where the pupils feel valued and supported in their work. The high levels attained in the sixth form can be attributed to a great extent to the very effective teaching of the higher-order intellectual skills of analysis and interpretation that the students bring to bear on their work. The school sets and meets demanding but feasible overall targets for improvements in attainment. These targets are rooted in an analysis of the attainments of individual groups of pupils. Explicit measures are taken

to reach the targets set.

5. As the skills of literacy and numeracy are well taught pupils engage in a very good range of writing across all subjects. They apply their numerical skills to the analysis and interpretation of data in many subjects, particularly in geography and science. In science, for example, they describe their experimental findings, using the appropriate language. They represent data using a good range of modes of representation. The pupils are quick to improve their skills in information communications technology as they move through the school and the very good grounding they receive in Key Stages 3 and 4 leads to well above average skills in the sixth form.
6. Pupils join the school with average levels of attainment overall, though they exhibit a wide range of attainment. Pupils make very rapid advances in the development of knowledge, understanding and skill as they move through the school. The pupils with special educational needs achieve well in relation to their prior levels of attainment. This results from the very good level of support they receive in lessons and the well-targeted teaching they experience when withdrawn from lessons for special help. Very high attaining pupils are also supported in making very good progress in all aspects of their work. A particular strength of the school is the quality of support provided for pupils with profound hearing disabilities, with the consequence that these pupils make progress in their work that is mostly comparable to that of their peers. The few pupils who experience English as an additional language in their homes are supported very effectively in the development of the level of fluency required to participate fully in lessons.
7. There has been a significant improvement in the standards of attainment since the previous inspection. This can be linked to improvements in the quality of teaching and in the procedures by which individual pupil's barriers to learning are detected and remedied. An effective system of target setting has also been a factor in sustaining a pattern of very good results.

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

8. Pupils' attitudes to the school are excellent, their behaviour and personal development are both very good and pupils' attendance is good.
9. Pupils are keen and eager to come to school, which can be seen by their prompt arrival in the classroom and the way they quickly settle down at the start of the school day, following registration. Pupils respond excellently to the positive climate for learning. Many pupils participate in the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided by the school. The high level of participation can in part be explained by the encouragement pupils receive from staff when they first come to the school. The level of enthusiasm for the school shown by the pupils is infectious. The school is regularly kept open late into the evening for many of the extra-curricular activities to take place.
10. The behaviour of pupils in and around the school is very good. Pupils are polite to visitors and respond courteously. They are trustworthy and show respect for the school's property and resources. Many examples of the very good behaviour were seen during the inspection. For instance, when pupils were gathering for year assemblies they filed in to the hall in an orderly manner and sat quietly and reflectively while the assembly took place. Any inappropriate behaviour in the classroom is dealt with sensitively by the class teacher and only occasionally is it necessary to invoke the school's disciplinary code.

11. Rare instances of bullying or oppressive behaviour are handled well either by pupils themselves or by an appropriate member of staff. There were 61 exclusions during the previous reporting year, five of which were permanent, involving 23 pupils. This level of exclusions is above average and found in about one-third of schools of this size nationally. The reasons for exclusion relate either to persistent infringements of the rules or occasionally to acts of violence and were incurred by pupils with known behaviour problems. Many of these were on a waiting list for pupil referral units, for which places are at a premium within the local education authority.
12. Pupils form constructive relationships with each other, with teachers and other adults. They listen to other peoples' views as well as respecting their feelings, values and beliefs. Pupils reflect on their actions and their awareness of the impact that these have on others is excellent.
13. Pupils make good use of the many opportunities offered to show initiative. They show an increasing willingness to take responsibility. Responsibilities exercised include helping to keep the school tidy by picking up litter, acting as prefects in the middle school and acting as mentors for primary school pupils. They also act as guides to visitors.
14. The level of attendance is good. The overall attendance level in the most recent reporting year is in line with the national average. Unauthorised absence is above the national average. This is spread across the different years and is not due to the absence of particular groups. However, with the advent of a new Education Welfare Officer the cause of the unauthorised absence level has been identified and addressed. So far in the current year the attendance rate is above the national average. The unauthorised absence rate has been reduced by about one per cent. Registers are marked correctly on electronic record sheets in accordance with regulations. This is an improvement since the last inspection when there were some irregularities in the way that attendance was recorded. Pupils arrive promptly at school. The prompt arrival of pupils and the good attendance levels make a positive contribution to the attainment levels of pupils.

## **HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?**

15. The overall quality of teaching is very good. Of the 190 lessons seen all but 3.5 per cent were at least satisfactory. Teaching was good in 36 per cent of lessons, very good in 42 per cent and excellent in 5 per cent. Teaching is good throughout Key Stage 3. There are many very good and outstanding features in the teaching in Key Stage 4. A marked feature of the school is the consistent pattern of good and very good teaching in the sixth form.
16. The quality of teaching is very good in English in both key stages and in the sixth form. In mathematics teaching is good in Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. In science, teaching is good in Key Stage 3, very good in Key Stage 4 and excellent in the sixth form. In Key Stage 3, teaching is good in most other subjects and very good in art and design and technology. In Key Stage 4 the quality of teaching is very good in all subjects; it is good in geography and modern languages. Teaching in the sixth form is very good across the subjects. In geography and physical education teaching is good in modern languages it is satisfactory. Teaching is very good in the vocational courses. Literacy and numeracy are well taught. A particular strength is the way the teachers encourage the use of the technical language of the subjects they

teach. Lessons are well planned to cater for the needs of all pupils.

17. Teaching across the school is informed by the teachers' very good knowledge of what they teach. This is particularly evident in the way they extend the understanding of the higher-attaining pupils. The fruits of these efforts are evident, for instance, in the students' work in English language and English literature at A Level where the quality of many of the analytical essays is impressive. Teachers are quick to detect barriers to learning. Their knowledge of the individual pupils is a strength of the teaching, leading to appropriate adjustments to lessons to include those who struggle with some of the more demanding concepts. The pupils appreciate the teachers' enthusiasm for their subjects. Lessons are pervaded by the teachers' strong belief in the value of what they teach. Teachers combine clarity of purpose with a lightness of touch that creates an unusually strong bond of trust between the pupils and themselves.
18. The groundwork in establishing high expectations for behaviour is very effectively laid in Key Stage 3. The pupils come to share with the teachers a commitment to learning and this becomes very firmly rooted as they move through the school. The quality of the teachers' preparation is another key to the effectiveness of teaching across the school. Teachers are particularly adept at providing for the pupils a progressively demanding sequence of activities. This is clearly evident in the teaching of the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information communications technology. Outstanding teaching in a science lesson in Year 11 embodied many of the strengths of the teaching observed. Here the teachers' high level of knowledge led to very clear explanations of the principles of electromagnetism. Through skilful questioning the pupils drew on knowledge from other fields to interpret their observations. One pupil, for instance, drew on knowledge from mathematics in recognising the pattern of the display on the oscilloscope as a sine wave. The pupils respond to the challenge set in lessons by setting high expectations for themselves, willingly negotiating demanding targets for further development of their work. Lessons are very well paced through an appropriate mixture of whole-class teaching, group and individual work, skilfully matching the teaching style to the purpose of the lesson.
19. In many lessons pupils have come to see the value of regulating their own behaviour with the consequence that in lessons there is often a palpable sense of commitment to productive activity. Teachers are very skilled in identifying with pupils their levels of attainment and in providing a clear focus for improving their work. Homework is used very well to support learning. It is closely linked to the pupils' class work and so provides very good opportunities for extended independent work. The teachers' success in developing the students' higher order skills of enquiry and analysis are an outstanding feature of teaching in the sixth form. This is achieved through establishing a culture of very high expectations, excellent use of time and stimulating teaching methods. There is some excellent use of well-targeted feedback and encouragement to persevere beyond the immediate and obvious interpretation of the concepts encountered. In the sixth form homework is unusually used well.
20. Teaching is occasionally weakened where work is not sufficiently planned or group work is not clearly focused. This results in pupils being set tasks that are too easy or not sufficiently interesting. This is true of some of the teaching of personal and social education during tutor periods and of some teaching of information communications technology in Year 8. In these cases the pupils are slow to engage in lessons and settle for a modest pace to their work. Weaknesses also arise when pupils in lower attaining sets are left too long to their own devices, receiving too little feedback on how they are performing or on how they might improve, as happens occasionally in

mathematics. This leads to low expectations and a slow pace to lessons. Weaknesses in planning and the pace of lessons arise in a few lessons provided for the lower sets in English with the consequence that pupils develop expectations for attainment that are unnecessarily low. In geography lessons are occasionally weakened by the provision of work that is not matched to the needs of lower attainers. The slow pace on lessons and introductions that are too long lead to weaknesses in some of the teaching of design and technology, where there is also a measure of poor teaching. Such weaknesses as there are in teaching arise mainly in Years 8 and 9.

21. The quality of teaching is reflected in the pupils' very rapid acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding. The enthusiasm of the teachers for their subject feeds the pupils' curiosity. This was clearly evident, for instance, in an English lesson in Year 9 when the pupils were studying the language of poetry. Through skilful attention to the resonance of words the pupils at all levels of attainment moved quickly to an appreciation of the deeper meaning of the poems; many of them moved on to some sophisticated evaluative written work. They produced a wide range of divergent interpretations of the same poem, all rooted in a genuine understanding of poetic structure. Pupils apply themselves to their work with increasing concentration and independence as they move through the school. Through the practice of effective target setting the pupils generally have a very accurate knowledge of their learning and of how to improve. The very good teaching of pupils with special educational needs, including those pupils with specific learning difficulties, supports good advances in learning. This is particularly evident in the Reading Recovery programme, which very effectively supports pupils in improving their confidence and fluency in reading. The few pupils for whom English is an additional language in the home are very effectively supported in acquiring fluent English. The progress they make in their work in relation to their prior attainments is not significantly different from that made by their peers. This is also true of the higher attainers and the pupils with exceptional skills.

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

22. The school offers a very broad and balanced curriculum that encourages high achievement and is planned effectively to meet the various interests, needs and aptitudes of all its pupils. At Key Stage 3 a common curriculum is offered to all pupils; this works well. Most subjects are taught in mixed ability groups in Year 7; a setting or banding system operates in Years 8 and 9. These arrangements work to the advantage of all pupils. In Year 7 pupils follow a modular studies course based on key skills and from Year 8 some pupils take a second modern foreign language. This pattern ensures a good range of provision for all. At Key Stage 4 the core curriculum consists of English, mathematics, science, information and communications technology and modern foreign languages. In addition there is a wide and varied choice of options for pupils leading to GCSE and vocational qualifications. The latter include subjects such as electronics, home and family and word-processing. The setting arrangements at this stage are well managed.
23. In the sixth form the curriculum caters very well for students of wide-ranging levels of attainment. Most students follow a course of three A levels, but there is also provision for advanced and intermediate GNVQ courses. Courses are planned well to meet individual needs. The curriculum includes a full range of traditional subjects and others such as psychology and sociology. Students also follow a core curriculum comprising general lectures, key skills, electives, such as Japanese, Latin, sports and music, and

community service. This provides the students with a wide range of options.

24. National Curriculum statutory requirements are met fully. The requirement for the provision of religious education in the sixth form is not met. The school has a very efficient management structure to oversee the curriculum. Work on the development of the curriculum is very effectively supported by a designated group of staff, which discusses new ideas and provides a valuable forum for critical analysis of curricular matters.
25. The school demonstrates a strong commitment to the provision of equality of access to the full range of the curriculum for all pupils. Curricular provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good throughout the school. Provision for pupils with profound hearing disabilities is particularly good. There is no formal identification of pupils who are gifted or talented. Work has begun in this area and already there is a strong awareness of the needs of the very highest attainers. Provision for these pupils is good, particularly in the sixth form. The teachers' strong knowledge of what they teach is a key to the school's emerging success in this field.
26. The school's strategy for the development of literacy is working well and has been clearly implemented. All departments are contributing effectively to improving the use of language within their subjects. There is a very good emphasis on the use of the technical language of subjects. As a consequence other areas of the curriculum are able to use and build appropriately upon these skills in their own subject to enhance learning. The strong teaching of mathematics has ensured that all pupils are provided with opportunities to apply their number skills in different subjects. There is, for instance, a very good emphasis in science on the use of number skills in the gathering and analysis of data and in the representation of results.
27. There is an outstanding programme of extra-curricular activities to support the mainstream curriculum. This includes numerous visits and exchanges. A particular feature of this provision is the opportunity provided for pupils to widen their horizons through a wide range of foreign visits and exchanges. There was an impressive total of 12 such visits last year, including trips to the Italian Alps, a hockey tour of Holland, an art trip to Florence and Venice, French and German exchanges and a history link with schools in France and Greece. In addition there is a wealth of after-school clubs and activities. In music the school has built up an enviable reputation through its orchestra, big band and string quartet. In drama there are impressive annual productions for all year groups. In sport there is a very wide variety of competitive sports and school teams. The participation rates in all these activities are very high and the overall standards are excellent. Many teachers are involved in this provision.
28. There is a comprehensive programme of personal, social and health education taught during form tutor time, which incorporates sex, drugs, careers and health education. The teaching of this provision, however, is patchy and some sessions lack direction and depth. The personal development of pupils is also fostered in assemblies, in the development of interpersonal skills in subject areas and in a wide-ranging work experience programme in Year 10. In the sixth form a stimulating programme of outside speakers is arranged, covering a wide range of topics, to broaden the experience of students.
29. The school provides very effectively for work-related education. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form there is a clear focus on the preparation of pupils and students for the next stage of education or for the world of work. Pupils from Years 10 and 11 are



involved in a number of well-planned work-related initiatives. Pupils from Year 9 onwards receive regular careers advice from the school and from the local careers service. In addition the school takes a major role in the annual local careers convention and has extensive links with local employers and business groups, especially with regard to design technology, business studies and vocational courses. A far-reaching programme of careers advice, work experience and work-related education is also provided for sixth form students in order to prepare them for adult life. All these initiatives increase pupils' self-confidence and their capacity to look creatively towards their future.

30. The school has excellent and very extensive links with the local community which enhance the academic and personal development of pupils. 'Serving the Community' is one of its overarching aims and this is realised in a variety of ways. There are numerous links with the local business community as part of the school's technology status and the technology management group includes representatives from local community and business interests. The school is also represented by senior staff on local development groups and forms the majority on the local Youth Forum. The Comenius project has added a productive European dimension to the school's work. A high priority is given to charity work. The school premises are used extensively by the local community and there is a sense of communal purpose in the school's activities; all of which are monitored assiduously.
31. The school forms excellent and very constructive relationships with partner institutions at all stages. In particular, it has addressed a key issue arising from the previous inspection relating to weaknesses in its curricular links with primary schools. There are now extensive links with the providing primary schools, especially in English, mathematics and history. In addition sixth form students act as mentors in primary schools as part of the 'Family of Schools' initiative. This has emanated from the school's recent technology status and there is also a Family of Schools development group, which includes representatives from other primary and secondary schools in the area. The involvement of the pupils in these initiatives makes a very valuable contribution to their learning. Pupils are given clear advice about their achievement, progress and the range of opportunities available to them at key times during their education. The school has very strong links with higher education institutions and provides excellent advice for sixth form students on the choices available to them when they leave school.
32. Overall, the school has maintained and built well on the achievements outlined in the report on the previous inspection. It provides a very rich, wide and varied curricular experience for all its pupils. The curriculum is organised and managed very well and the school is to be commended in particular for its outstanding extra-curricular provision and for its excellent links with the local community and with partner institutions.
33. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is very good. The ethos of the school is soundly based on Christian values and these are very clearly manifested in the way pupils conduct themselves. There are numerous opportunities for reflection throughout the curriculum, especially in art, music, physical education and religious education. Most assemblies are well used to promote the spiritual and moral development of pupils. Form tutor times very rarely provide time for reflection. In this respect the school still fails to comply with the statutory requirement for daily collective worship. The school has done all it can to ensure compliance. Overall the school ensures that the spiritual life of pupils is nurtured through teaching them to respect their own and other's lives and feelings, to feel proud of their achievements and to value their capacity

for reflection and serious thought.

34. The provision for moral education is excellent. The behaviour of pupils shows that the various policies are fully understood. Staff and sixth form students provide excellent role models. Pupils are self-disciplined. They distinguish between right and wrong and the system of rewards and sanctions is well understood. Moral awareness is fostered in many subjects. In English pupils study books such as 'Of Mice and Men' which deal with moral issues. In art moral issues are regularly raised and discussed in topics arising from looking at art history and contemporary issues such as those related to gender are addressed. In geography they consider the moral issues raised by contrasts in the levels of economic development across the world. In religious education the concerns surrounding present day social issues such as fertility treatments are addressed.
35. Provision for pupils' social development is excellent. There is a very wide range of extra-curricular activities to appeal to all ages and tastes. The school encourages everyone to become involved and the participation rate is very high. Relationships between pupils and between pupils and staff are very respectful and friendly. Within lessons the many opportunities for paired and group work support collaborative relationships amongst the pupils. The school has a very well developed programme for the development of leadership skills.
36. The cultural development of the pupils is very well supported. In religious education pupils study aspects of major world religions and learn how beliefs influence behaviour. There are many visits at home and abroad that enable pupils to experience other cultures first hand. Within lessons pupils study music and art from Britain and other countries and the school participates in the artist-in-residence scheme. They are aware of the cultural diversity of Great Britain.
37. Since the last inspection the school has maintained and built on the strong base outlined in the report. The provision for personal development has improved and is very good and makes an impressive impact on the high achievement ethos of the school. There has been a positive response to raising awareness of racial issues and multiculturalism among staff by the use of in-service education. The school's anti-bullying policy has been amended to include the issue of racism.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?**

38. The school takes very good care of its pupils and parents are strong in their appreciation of the way the school supports the pupils in their personal and academic lives. The procedures for child protection, for ensuring pupils' welfare, for monitoring pupils' academic performance and personal development and the educational and personal support and guidance that the school provides for pupils are all very good. Pupils, therefore, receive their education in a secure, caring and supportive environment.
39. The school has proper and effective child protection procedures in place in line with those of the local authority's child protection team. There is an appropriately designated adult with responsibility for this area. The child protection procedures extend clearly to pupils on school trips and to those on exchange visits. The designated adult and two other members of the senior management team have received full child protection training. The head of lower school provides effective

training for all other members of staff. The school has a good relationship with the social services child protection team.

40. There are very good procedures in place for ensuring the welfare of pupils, including their health and safety and the management of minor and major accidents. The school also receives very good support from outside agencies such as the National Health Service, through the school nurse, community paediatrician and school dentist. All members of staff involved have the necessary expertise with over 20 members of staff trained in first aid.
41. The school has excellent procedures in place to monitor and improve pupils' attendance. For six months the school was without the services of an education welfare officer, which has now been rectified. The level of attendance has now increased and unauthorised absences are being followed up appropriately. Other procedures, such as those for monitoring late arrivals, scanning the registers on to the computer and the efficient use of the electronic recording system, suggests that the school does all it can do to monitor the attendance and time of arrival of pupils.
42. The procedures in place for monitoring and promoting good behaviour are good and those for monitoring and eliminating oppressive behaviour are very good. The school has an effective and detailed behaviour policy in place. Pupils are aware of the rules. The school's positive approach to behaviour management is very effective. The teaching of a comprehensive personal and social education programme enhances the school's behaviour policy.
43. The procedures in place for assessing pupils' attainment and progress and the use of assessment to guide curricular planning are very good. Pupils undergo regular academic assessment and the result of this assessment is recorded and filed in the pupil record files with the consequence that the progress of individual pupils is tracked accurately.
44. A very high standard of pastoral care is provided through the tutor and year system, which enables the school to monitor very well pupils' academic progress and personal development. This starts with a comprehensive induction process much appreciated by pupils themselves in Year 7. The form tutors get to know their pupils very well by staying with the same group through the whole of their time in the lower school and sometimes continuing through the middle school. Regular monitoring of pupils takes place and information on pupils' progress is kept in individual pupil files by the head of year and passed on when the pupils moves up to the next year. This provision has a very positive impact on the standards of attainment throughout the school.
45. The school has maintained the overall very good provision in this area since the previous inspection and has extended its provision for careers education. The previous inspection drew attention to road safety outside the school. The orderly way the pupils move from one part of the school to the other ensures that there are no evident risks to the safety of the pupils.

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

46. The school works very well in partnership with parents. The parents are very positive in support of the school and value highly the contribution it makes to the education of their children. Home-school contracts were introduced at the beginning of the school year,

but have not yet been in place long enough for their effectiveness to be assessed. However, the school is always open to parents who have any concerns about a student's progress and many involve themselves in the work of the school, for example, in the special educational needs department. Their involvement makes a good contribution to the work of the school and to the pupils' learning.

47. The parents' links with the school are strengthened through an active Parents' Association, which regularly provides substantial sums of money to support the school's work. A major example of this was the £20,000 the Association provided to support the school's application for Technology College status. The Association also pays for the replacement of the minibuses. Parents are available to help with the provision of extra-curricular activities, some parents are qualified coaches for sporting activities. Parents also support pupils on school visits, helping to improve the adult-pupil ratio on these outings.
48. Some parents feel that the pupils' annual reports are issued too late in the term to allow for a response. While it is true they are issued late there are termly summary progress reports, which invite parents' comments. If parents have not commented after a reasonable period of time a reminder is sent to them. Apart from school open evenings subject teachers, form and year tutors and heads of school are always available to talk to parents should there be areas of concern. Parents are kept well informed about the school from the detailed induction programme for new pupils, through the information they receive about pupils' options for GCSE and about the courses available on entry to the sixth form.
49. The school has continued to develop its links with parents since the previous inspection. It has strengthened its links with providing primary schools, which are now very good; this was a weakness in the previous inspection.

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

50. A significant strength of the school is the excellent leadership and management of the headteacher, who is ably supported in the day-to-day running of the school by his three very effective deputies and other senior colleagues, one of whom has specific responsibility for the sixth form. The headteacher provides very clear educational direction to the work of the school through very effective planning, comprehensive documentation and the implementation of policies that challenge, but support, the teachers. Most significantly he combines his responsibility for management with a measure of very effective classroom teaching.
51. Responsibilities are delegated sensibly by ensuring, for instance, that those who carry responsibility for managing subjects are sufficiently skilled and effectively supported as they develop their roles. The delegation of responsibility to the deputies is strong and effective, though there is some imbalance in the distribution of responsibilities at this level. The high quality of the overall leadership and management of the school has supported the raising of standards of attainment across the school. The leadership and management of subjects, which are clearly directed to the raising of standards of attainment, are mostly very good and outstanding in English.
52. The governing body is excellently led in the exercise of its responsibilities. It has a high level of relevant expertise and has played a significant role in steering the school towards its new status as a technology college. The governors have formed

themselves into a cohesive group, supporting the school and monitoring its effectiveness whilst respecting the professionalism of the teachers. The attachment of individual governors to specific subjects and aspects of the school's work is a very effective strategy for ensuring that the work of the school is monitored rigorously. The governors' clear understanding both of the school's strengths and where it needs to go forward in its development allied to their very positive relationship to senior managers in the school puts their role on a very firm footing. In the main they have ensured that all statutory requirements are met apart from those relating to the provision of religious education in the sixth form and the provision of a daily act of collective worship for all the pupils. It must be said, however, that though these requirements are not met the teachers do not miss any opportunity to support the exploration of issues that are of deep personal concern to the pupils.

53. The interests of the pupils with special educational needs are well served by the designation of an experienced governor with responsibility for the oversight of this area. The governors fulfil all their responsibilities related to provision for pupils with special educational needs, including those relating to reporting to parents about how the relevant resources have been deployed. They are provided with clear information on budgeting and planning for the needs of pupils with special learning difficulties. This places them in a strong position to exercise a very good level of monitoring of what is provided.
54. There have been significant improvements in the quality of teaching since the last inspection and this in turn has improved the pupils' learning and raised standards of attainment. This is due to the systematic monitoring of teaching whereby good practice is identified and disseminated. Teachers who experience difficulties are provided with the appropriate level of support. Teachers are helped to identify their own needs and to draw on the experience of other staff. The headteacher and his deputies have a detailed knowledge of what is happening in classrooms. The newly qualified teachers receive a very good level of support. In cases where it is appropriate performance targets are set for teachers; these are used positively to encourage improvement in particular aspects of teaching. Staff who are new to the school receive very good support from colleagues. Learning support assistants work effectively with the class teacher in managing the provision of special help to pupils.
55. The teachers have formed themselves into a cohesive, self-critical group. This ensures that the school is driven by a sense of common purpose, clarity of vision and the enthusiasm required to sustain continued development of its work on all fronts. Planning for the future development of the school is excellent. Appropriate, challenging but feasible targets are set and met. After the last inspection the school set its sights on improving links with the local providing primary schools as weaknesses had been identified in this area. Very significant strides have been made in working closely and effectively with these schools. There is clear evidence of the success of the approach adopted. Other matters raised throughout the previous report have been successfully tackled. There has been much detailed and effective planning related to the development of literacy and numeracy and this has born fruit, particularly in the quality of writing across the school and in the confident use of number, for example, in science. Financial planning is tightly linked to the school's development plan and is very effective in ensuring that expenditure is directed towards agreed priorities. This is particularly evident in the school's planning and budgeting for the transition to technology college status.
56. The school's good level of resources is well managed. Accommodation is satisfactory

and the school manages it well. Classrooms are mostly of adequate size and some are very large. On the whole the school is well maintained but a few classrooms are in a poor decorative state. In these rooms as throughout the school teachers make very good use of opportunities to display pupils' work. This provides a very stimulating environment. One classroom used for English is too small for the teacher to circulate and this contributes to the very rare instances of less than satisfactory behaviour. Toilet facilities in the main building are only just adequate for the large number of pupils and there is need for more frequent attention to ensure cleanliness.

57. The school makes good use of information communications technology and has steadily improved the level of the teachers' expertise. All subjects provide opportunities for the use and application of information communications technology. Pupils make use of the Internet and e-mail as a matter of routine. Information communications technology is also used well to support financial planning and management. The computerised system in use gives easy access to clear and accessible statements of accounts. The most recent auditor's report found the systems used by the school to be good apart from a few minor procedural items which have been effectively addressed.
58. Additional funds have been used appropriately. Funding for books has been rightly directed towards the development of the school's initiatives in raising standards of literacy and numeracy. There is a very good match of the teachers' qualifications and experience to the needs of the curriculum. This shows itself in the quality of teaching, in that the teachers' knowledge of what they teach is a key factor in the standards reached by the pupils, particularly in the sixth form. Support staff too demonstrate considerable knowledge and skill in the exercise of their distinctive responsibilities. There is a good level of appropriate expertise to identify and support pupils with special educational needs, including the small number who have English as an additional language. Teachers of practical subjects have good technical support. There is a strong programme of professional development.
59. The governing body has managed to recruit some members with a high level of financial expertise to ensure that the school applies best value principles. With the support of the local educational authority the school compares its costs to that of similar schools in order to ensure efficiency. The cost of educating each pupil is around average for a school with specialist status.
60. The local area is very well used to enrich the curriculum, particularly through the strong links with local business and industry. In this respect the school has attracted a high level of financial support and sponsorship. That the school seeks the views of parents and relevant professionals before taking major decisions is evident, for instance, in the way the planning for Technology College status has been managed.
61. The school has built significantly on the very good standards of management noted in the report on the previous inspection. Roles and responsibilities are now even more clearly defined and focused on continuing to raise the already high standards of attainment.

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

In the context of the school's many significant strengths, the governors and the school should:

fulfil the statutory requirement for the provision of a daily act of collective worship for all pupils;

**(Paragraph 33)**

fulfil the requirement for the provision of religious education to all pupils in the sixth form.

**(Paragraph 24)**

Additionally, they should consider taking the following actions in order to address some less significant weaknesses:

Further improve the teaching of lower attaining sets by:

ensuring that work is appropriately matched to their attainments;

providing more effective individual feedback on attainment;

raising the expectations of attainment for all these pupils, particularly in mathematics.

**(Paragraphs 20, 67, 78, 79, 111 and 124)**

Accelerate the developments already intended in information communications technology, design and technology and modern languages.

**(Paragraphs 88, 93, 104, 128 and 137)**

Further improve the provision for personal and social education by ensuring that those who teach it plan a clear sequence of lessons.

**(Paragraphs 20 and 28)**

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed

190

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

43

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5	42	36	14	3	0.5	0

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

### Information about the school's pupils

#### Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1381	333
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	150	

#### Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	45	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	316	23

#### English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	14

#### Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	36
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	41

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.1
National comparative data	7.9

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.8
National comparative data	1.1

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



### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	162	115	277

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	130	120	112
	Girls	97	81	74
	Total	227	201	186
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	82 (64)	73 (74)	67 (71)
	National	63 (56)	62 (60)	55 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	55 (30)	52 (53)	37 (44)
	National	28 (23)	38 (37)	23 (29)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	117	103	120
	Girls	94	71	74
	Total	211	174	194
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	77 (68)	63 (67)	71 (83)
	National	64 (59)	64 (63)	60 (61)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	46 (34)	44 (39)	39 (45)
	National	31 (28)	37 (37)	28 (29)

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	140	139	279

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	70	127	133
	Girls	85	129	134
	Total	155	256	267
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	56 (55)	92 (92.3)	9 (96.4)
	National	46.3 (43.3)	90.7 (88.5)	95.7 (94)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	42.2 (41.7)
	National	37.8 (43.7)

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

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

### Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		1999	70	59

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	23.6	25.1	24.3 (21.8)	2.7	5.1	3.8 (3.67)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (17.2)	2.7	2.8	2.8

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	22
	National	100

International Baccalaureate	Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all they studied	School	N/a
	National	82.5

### **Ethnic background of pupils**

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	0
Indian	1
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	1
White	1710
Any other minority ethnic group	0

### **Teachers and classes**

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	95.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	22.7

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of education support staff	32
Total aggregate hours worked per week	627

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	80.8
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	24.2
Key Stage 4	21.3

### **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	60	5
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

### **Financial information**

Financial year	1999
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	£
Total income	3,545,320
Total expenditure	3,576,343
Expenditure per pupil	2,131
Balance brought forward from previous year	-37,840
Balance carried forward to next year	-68,863

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate 29.5%

Number of questionnaires sent out	1741
Number of questionnaires returned	513

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	39	55	5	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	39	55	4	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	25	64	5	0	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	22	59	15	2	2
The teaching is good.	27	67	1	0	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	27	55	14	3	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	44	48	5	2	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	58	39	1	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	19	57	16	4	4
The school is well led and managed.	46	47	2	1	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	36	58	3	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	57	35	3	1	4

### Other issues raised by parents

Some parents feel that provision for pupils with special educational needs is inadequate.

Some parents feel that some of the lower attaining sets are not well taught.

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

### **ENGLISH**

62. Pupils' attainment in English at the age of 14 is well above average. In the 1999 National Curriculum Key Stage 3 tests both boys and girls achieved standards which were well above the national average and very high in comparison with those achieved by pupils in similar schools. These results show a considerable improvement on the previous three years when attainment rose at a rate similar to the national trend. These high standards are reflected in lessons and in pupils' work.
63. Pupils enter the school with broadly average levels of attainment but during Years 7, 8 and 9 make very good progress in all aspects of English. They read increasingly difficult and demanding literary and non-literary texts and identify the specific features that contribute towards the effect that an author achieves. By Year 9 pupils have developed sophisticated reading skills that enable them to infer and deduce meaning and to respond both critically to the craft of writing and on a personal level to the author's art. For example, in one Year 9 lesson pupils were preparing for Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests by annotating a piece of writing about the Loch Ness monster to show how the writer subtly combined fact and opinion to manipulate the reader's views. In another Year 9 lesson pupils demonstrated how the structure and rhythm of the poem and the resonance of the words in "The Bee's Last Journey to the Rose" reflected the poem's meaning. They used the poem as a starting point for reflection on human destiny and the sadness of death. The writing skills of pupils of all levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs, also show good improvement as pupils progress through Key Stage 3. By Year 9 higher-attaining pupils write in a wide range of appropriate styles showing a mature understanding of the needs of different audiences. They use drafting and re-writing to improve their work and have good technical skills. Average and lower-attaining pupils achieve standards which are good in relation to their prior levels of attainment. Almost all sustain and develop their ideas in interesting ways and structure their work into paragraphs. Pupils are confident speakers and adapt their talk to the demands of different contexts with increasing confidence. A particular feature in all classrooms is the way in which pupils use exploratory talk to assist their learning.
64. At the end of Key Stage 4 the results that pupils achieve in English in the GCSE examinations are broadly average both in relation to national standards and those achieved by pupils in similar schools. The standards that they achieve in English literature, however, are higher. A greater proportion of pupils achieve Grades A\*-C and far more pupils attain Grades A\*-G in comparison with the national entry figures because of the department's policy of entering all pupils for both English and English literature. Even the lowest-attaining pupils gain two GCSE passes at the end of Key Stage 4 and this is a real strength of the department's work. The work seen during the inspection in lessons and in pupils' course work would suggest that pupils are achieving above average standards and in some lessons work of very high quality is produced. In one Year 11 lesson, for example, pupils analysed the persuasive language of advertising through their own confident use of appropriate subject-specific terminology. In a Year 10 lesson pupils with a broad range of prior attainment compared tabloid and broadsheet newspaper accounts of the same incident through sharp and well-focused analysis. The coursework already produced by Year 10 and 11 pupils contains some highly perceptive analysis of media texts and writing that demonstrates a clear

understanding of drama, including Shakespeare, and the skills and conventions used to create a piece of theatre from the written text. Pupils reach high standards in their original and imaginative writing because of the sophistication of their understanding of the methods used by other writers and the demand made on them to plan, draft and rework their own writing.

65. In spite of this apparently healthy picture, however, in the last three years pupils have done less well in English examinations than they have in their other subjects. The department is aware of this and is beginning to address the issue initially through a more thorough analysis of the marks achieved in the various sections of the GCSE examinations to give a firm basis for planning. Because pupils in the main school receive such a positive experience in their English lessons a good number of students continues their studies in the sixth form. The department offers a broad range of courses, including English literature, English language, media studies and theatre studies. By the end of the sixth form students' attain standards well above the national averages in all these subjects. Sixth form lessons are stimulating occasions. Teachers have an impressive and specialised knowledge of their subject and enable students to enjoy intellectual debate of a quality rarely seen in schools.
66. Pupils throughout the school display very positive attitudes towards their English lessons. They arrive in lessons prepared to work hard and learn, they settle down quickly, concentrate well, do not waste time, listen carefully to the teacher and to each other and respect views and opinions different from their own. They are prepared to use their initiative and take responsibility for their own learning. Pupils say that they enjoy English and they appreciate the commitment of their teachers who give much of their own time to extending and enriching the pupils' cultural experiences.
67. The quality of teaching throughout all key stages is very good and has many strengths. Lessons are very well planned. Objectives for learning are shared with pupils so that they are fully involved, know what they are doing and recognise the progress they have made. Most lessons are conducted at a good pace through lively and energetic teaching but teachers also recognise the need to build in opportunities for pupils to reflect both on their learning and on spiritual and moral issues that they encounter. Teachers raise expectations by their consistent use of subject-specific language which encourages pupils, including lower attaining pupils, to use and understand such terms themselves with a good deal of confidence. Teachers use questioning techniques that require pupils to think for themselves and that assess how well pupils have understood new knowledge and concepts. Almost all the lessons observed during the inspection exhibited these good features. Homework is used very well to support learning by encouraging pupils to work independently in researching topics. Pupils are encouraged to use information communications technology in researching and in presenting their work and pupils respond enthusiastically. There were, however, a few lessons that, while having some of these strengths, fell short of the overall very high standards for various reasons, among them a slow pace of working which led to pupils losing concentration and not knowing what they had to do. Another feature was that pupils became passive and dependent on their teacher. These lessons were all with lower attaining groups in Years 9 and 10.
68. Drama and media studies both offer pupils a very good experience. Teaching of both subjects is highly effective and pupils make very rapid progress, quickly acquiring the specialist knowledge of language and conventions that enable them to achieve above average results at the end of the course.

69. The previous inspection report was very positive and identified only minor weaknesses. This did not, however, lead the department to become complacent and since the appointment just over two years ago of the new head of department after a period of some instability the rate of change and improvement has been impressive. The whole of the Key Stage 3 curriculum has been reviewed and restructured and this has led to greatly improved attainment. The drafting process is used very effectively to show pupils how they can improve their own work. Access to information communications technology has been improved significantly. Good procedures for assessing and monitoring pupils' performance have recently been agreed and closer analysis of examination results enable the department to plan more effectively for future improvement particularly in GCSE examinations.
70. The English department is dynamic and highly effective. Its leadership and management are of a very high quality. Teaching is monitored and supported very effectively. A committed team of teachers provides a very good learning experience that is enhanced by the excellent range of extra-curricular activities that the department offers. The whole atmosphere is one of intellectual rigour and cultural enrichment.

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF LITERACY**

71. Although the school has only recently set up a group to co-ordinate and enhance the provision for literacy teaching across the curriculum, there are already many initiatives taking place which demonstrate a good understanding of the underlying principles. Pupils are encouraged in English and religious education to use exploratory talk to improve the quality of subsequent written activities. Pupils are expected to make their own notes in science and to use their own words when writing up experiments and investigations. The mathematics department is revising Year 7 schemes of work to address the use of mathematical language. In many subject areas including English, information technology, physical education and GNVQ Health and social care, teachers expect pupils to become familiar and confident with a range of subject-specific terminology. These strategies all contribute to the successful development of pupils' literacy skills which enable them to gain access to the full range of the curriculum.

## **MATHEMATICS**

72. In mathematics the results at the end of all key stages continue to show an upward trend and are above national averages at the end of Key Stage 3 and well above national averages at the end of Key Stage 4. In the sixth form the A Level results are very high. The achievement in mathematics of all pupils is good and often very good throughout their time in the school in all key stages. Pupils in Key Stage 4 and generally in the higher-attaining sets tend to achieve better than those in other sets, but pupils with special educational needs make very good progress throughout.
73. The quality of work in lessons reflects that at the end of the key stages; in the sixth form a significant number of students show very high quality mathematical thinking. The school identifies a group of pupils in Year 8 who are targeted for early entry for GCSE in Year 10 and who begin their A level preparation in Year 11. This group produces excellent results at GCSE and subsequently at A level. By the beginning of Year 11 they analyse the roots of compound quadratic functions and debate the implications of their findings. Algebra is a strength of the school and pupils respond well to the introduction of calculus. The school has addressed the weakness in mental arithmetic identified in the previous report and has a policy to reduce the use of calculators. This

has contributed to the strength of algebra as well as to the improvement in arithmetical competence.

74. Pupils in Year 7 consolidate their understanding of equivalent fractions, whereas pupils in an average attaining set in Year 9 use their knowledge that ratio is unchanged in similar figures to calculate lengths. In the lowest attaining set in Year 10 pupils convert simple fractions to percentages. They recognise and draw shapes with lines of symmetry and understand probability. They identify polygons and calculate their angles.
75. Pupils' attitudes in mathematics lessons are almost universally very good and the way in which they co-operate with their teachers makes a strong contribution to the high quality of learning in lessons. They present their work well and take a pride in their achievements.
76. The quality of teaching is very good in both key stages and in the sixth form where there are some outstanding features. The specialist mathematics teachers' subject and professional knowledge is very good and this is a strength of the department; the pupils recognise and value it. In the sixth form the teachers' knowledge of what they teach is excellent. Teachers use good explanations, promote dialogue with the pupils and are very clear about what they wish to achieve in the lesson. They encourage pupils to use the correct mathematical vocabulary. They encourage the use of information communications technology and use homework well to support pupils' learning. They are alert to how the pupils are achieving and adjust their lessons to meet their needs.
77. In one lesson in Year 7 an experienced teacher enthused pupils about fractions in the last lesson of the day. She very effectively used a mixture of direct instruction, question and answer, exploration and written tasks with pupils working in small groups and pairs. She built upon prior knowledge so that the pupils felt confident about taking the next steps in their learning. In a Year 11 class a teacher used a systematic reconstruction of the pupils' prior learning of equations to create a coherent body of knowledge. This precisely met the expectations of the group with the consequence that they were motivated to concentrate and ask questions. The general ethos of the lesson encouraged the sustained exploration of key concepts. In the sixth form the teachers ensure that the students participate in developing new concepts so that they experience the benefits of collaborative learning. Standards could be further raised by encouraging some students to present their work in a more structured form that clearly shows their thinking and conclusions as they work on problems. Pupils' work is generally marked with clear evaluative comments and advice and this is an improvement on what was noted in the previous inspection.
78. In a few lessons for some lower-attaining sets, mainly in Years 8 and 9 and to a lesser extent in Year 10, teaching is weakened when the tasks provided are too easy and do not build effectively on pupils' prior knowledge. The consequence of this is that the rate of learning is too slow.
79. The mathematics curriculum is broad and balanced and is enriched with additional lessons and activities that are all designed to raise levels of attainment. For example, there is a well-planned lunch-time booster class for those who might not achieve a grade C at GCSE, additional classes for candidates for Oxford and Cambridge entry and involvement in a mathematical challenge programme. The curriculum is generally very well organised to promote learning, but in Year 7 and to a lesser extent in Years 8 and 9 there is insufficient focus on the precise objectives of each unit of work. The



curriculum for lower-attaining groups in Key Stage 4 leads to less direct teaching and pupils are more dependent upon self-motivation to progress through the units of work, with the effect that expectations are too low and pupils settle for modest advances in learning.

80. There are very good procedures for assessing pupils after each curriculum module in Key Stage 3 and which are used continually to review the setting arrangements which come into effect in Year 7. Many pupils are aware of the standards they have reached and their targets for improvement. In Key Stage 4 there is a similar regime of testing in preparation for mock examinations and GCSE which focuses pupils and teachers upon levels of attainment at the end of the key stage.
81. The mathematics department is very well led with a very clear shared educational purpose that has been successful in continually raising standards, particularly at the higher end of attainment; the current departmental development plan maintains this emphasis. Teaching is monitored and supported very effectively.

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF NUMERACY**

82. While there is currently no policy for numeracy across the curriculum due to the emphasis laid upon numeracy skills by the mathematics teachers all pupils have levels of numeracy which match their general level of mathematics. As a consequence other areas of the curriculum build appropriately upon these skills in their own subject in order to enhance learning, for example, graphs and formula manipulation are used well in science and an interesting application in algebra and information retrieval is used in A level physical education.

## **SCIENCE**

83. The attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 is well above the national average. In 1999 test results were well above the national average and well above average for similar schools. Over the past four years results have been consistently well above national averages. Classroom observations, scrutiny of work and analysis of teacher assessments confirm these high standards. By the end of the key stage higher-attaining pupils show a clear understanding of scientific concepts across all attainment targets and apply them to a wide range of tasks. They have the skills and knowledge to plan fair experiments, make relevant predictions, analyse results, come to well-thought-out conclusions and evaluate the quality of their work. All pupils have good practical and investigative skills, are aware of safe working practices and work collaboratively in groups. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls.
84. The overall attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 is well above the national average. The numbers of pupils gaining A\*-C grades in the individual sciences or the dual award science are above the national average. In all of the science subjects the number of pupils achieving the highest grades A\* or A is above the national average, as is the number of pupils gaining grades A\*-G. The results show an improving trend with little difference in the attainment of boys and girls. Pupils do better in science subjects than they do in mathematics or English. Attainment in lessons fully reflects the high levels achieved in external examinations. By the end of the key stage high and average attaining pupils describe the functioning of electromagnets in a bell and the use of magnets to produce electric current. They also produce carefully labelled diagrams showing understanding of cell functions and osmosis. They balance chemical

equations and work out ionic formulae using their knowledge of atomic structure. In investigative work relevant predictions are made based on research and prior understanding. The final evaluations show a mature attitude to the work. This represents an improvement on what was noted in the previous inspection when pupils' learning was weakened by a lack of opportunities to predict results. Lower-attaining pupils plan fair experiments and carry them out safely. Pupils with special educational needs are assisted to make gains in understanding commensurate with their prior attainment. All pupils improve their literacy skills by being encouraged to write answers in sentences using correct scientific vocabulary and by using their own descriptions for observations and conclusions. Numeracy skills are developed by the strong departmental emphasis on the use of tables, line graphs and numerical calculations.

85. By the end of Year 13 attainment is very good in physics, chemistry and biology with over 60 per cent of students achieving the highest grades of A or B. Almost all students obtain a grade D or higher. Standards are much better than those achieved nationally for students following A level courses. Students are highly motivated and this is reflected in the high quality of their work, which shows well-developed research skills using books and information communications technology texts, including those found on the Internet. Conclusions and evaluations show maturity and depth of understanding. Numeracy skills are of a high order and used in all the sciences. In physics students manipulate complex formulae with confidence and accuracy and describe variations in electric and magnetic fields in space. In biology students show a good understanding of polymorphism, speciation and selection. Chemistry students have a deep knowledge of organic chemistry and in physical chemistry they apply mathematical concepts to calculations on acid-base equilibria.
86. The quality of teaching and learning is good in Key Stage 3, very good in Key Stage 4 and excellent in the sixth form. Teaching is rooted in very good subject knowledge and the use of a variety of appropriate teaching strategies. The teachers' enthusiasm for what they teach communicates itself to the pupils who in turn come to value what they learn. Teachers are especially good at using questions to make pupils think and produce answers for themselves. There is very little reliance on simple information giving. Investigative work of a high standard builds on prior knowledge and conceptual understanding as well as skills in scientific method. Demonstrations are used effectively to engage the pupils' curiosity and produce deeper understanding. For example, pupils learned very quickly about the origins of electric currents because the teacher used a galvanometer and oscilloscope with speed, skill and accuracy. Pupils with special educational needs are equally challenged and careful preparation of worksheets for writing and recording enable them to focus on the scientific concepts being taught. Teachers positively encourage questions and pupils are eager to join in discussions. Teachers engender an excitement for science in a learning that clearly benefits all pupils. Almost all pupils make good progress in relation to prior learning. They use homework well to support pupils learning through encouraging independent enquiry.
87. High standards have not only been maintained since the last inspection, but there have also been some improvements. GCSE and A level results have improved, as has the overall quality of investigative work, which is now at a very high standard.
88. Although information communications technology is used well to enhance learning in the sixth form courses, it is not used consistently in all three subject areas up to the end of Key Stage 4.

89. The three heads of department co-operate very effectively to produce a very well-led science department where teaching is monitored very effectively. They are extremely well supported by a strong team of teachers and laboratory support staff. Policies and procedures are clearly thought out and followed. All statutory requirements are met and the very good assessment practices play an important part in setting appropriate challenges for staff and pupils.

## **ART**

90. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is good and is often better than the standards expected for pupils of the same age nationally. Pupils have a well-developed knowledge and understanding of observational recording. They recognise the work of established artists such as David Hockney and successfully incorporate their styles in their own original work. They explore the art of other cultures, such as traditional Celtic knot patterns or contemporary African art forms. They are good at using different media to record formal observational drawings and design imaginatively in the style of well-known art movements. They record images accurately in line and tone from direct observation and rarely rely on secondary source material. They use colour well and create good imaginative and expressive imagery. Sketchbook work is good.

91. At the end of Key Stage 4 attainment for both boys and girls is very good. They achieve above average results in the GCSE examinations. In their work they acquire and demonstrate skills and new techniques such as collage revealing an understanding at a level beyond expectations for their age. They sustain a chosen study from conception to realisation. They develop good craft skills as a direct result of regular good demonstrations by the teachers.

92. Attainment at the end of sixth form is exceptional. Pupils reach well above average standards in the A level examinations. In their work students produce work of both breadth and depth, combining good craft skills with imaginative flair and a genuine sense of curiosity. They show very good spatial concepts when working on experimental small and large-scale sculptural forms. They show great strength in sensitive formal observational painting, in drawing and illustration, regularly demonstrating attainment of a higher level. They understand how to use paint to represent a wide range of qualities, from watery-sky treatment to thick impasto textural surface-treatment. Colour is used with sensitivity. Students' ability to regularly review, modify and refine their work as it progresses is a strength that leads to very good accomplishment. Moral issues are regularly raised and discussed in topics arising from looking at art history and contemporary issues such as feminism are addressed in work, for example, allegorical representation of the basque.

93. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and the higher-attaining pupils, make good progress during their time at the school. They arrive at the school with varied levels of previous experience. They are introduced to a very wide range of visual and tactile experiences in a well-considered and balanced curriculum. They make good progress at Key Stage 3 and improve their craft and design skills equally in both two and three-dimensional work. Their understanding of a range of artists' work is extended by a good stock of books and contemporary learning materials. The work at Key Stage 3 provides a sound practical foundation for Key Stage 4 where pupils continue to make

good progress, particularly when introduced to a wide range of new media as in their very imaginative and often exotic shoe creations. Independent study skills develop well as pupils move through the school. Progress in the sixth form is very good and is notable for the significant gains in both skill and wider understanding and appreciation of art. Opportunities to work with artists-in-residence are introduced leading to a greater awareness and application of modern practice. The use of computers to generate creative art and design is good but limited by out-of-date equipment, resulting in pupils not being able to work to their potential. This is equally apparent in photography where pupils demonstrate good traditional technical skills, but do not have access to digital cameras.

94. When writing or talking about art pupils express well-considered opinions and judgements and use an appropriate art vocabulary. The use of language, the incorporation of poetry and the exploitation of words as sources of imagery are a very great strength of the department in all years and make a very good contribution to the development of literacy. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form the good practice of annotation alongside artwork also helps pupils to reflect on and shape their ideas. Regular opportunities for group discussion reinforce understanding and help pupils to express themselves thoughtfully. Visits to local and national art galleries and opportunities to visit Italy have a significant and long-lasting influence on the quality of work.
95. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good and they behave well in lessons. This is a direct result of the enthusiasm which teachers bring to their work and the high standards they set. Pupils respond well to the challenges in the work set for them. They organise themselves effectively, support each other, share ideas and show respect for each other's work. The quantity and quality of coursework generally reveals a very positive attitude to the subject. Homework makes a positive impact at all stages.
96. All teaching is consistently good, often very good and at times inspiring. Teachers have a good knowledge of the subject and very good technical and craft skill, which is evident in frequent practical demonstrations to groups and individuals working in all activities. Teachers are particularly good at motivating pupils and setting high expectations for achievement. Students at A level have a mature working relationship with their teachers, valuing and responding well to the high-quality guidance they receive. Assessment is used very well to raise pupils' awareness of what to do in order to progress further. Marking and recording of attainment is done well with useful comments provided to guide pupils to further effort. Relationships between pupils and teachers are very good. Pupils of all levels of attainment are given equal consideration and support. The learning environment is visually stimulating with many rich examples of different media. The extensive display of very good artwork in the department and around the school serves to promote inventiveness and set high standards. Students' work displayed in the canteen foyer deserves a better setting, worthy of its exceptional quality.
97. The leadership and management of the subject are very good, resulting in very effective team work. Documentation is very well considered to meet the needs of all pupils in all areas. Since the previous inspection significant progress has been made in raising GCSE and A level examination results with the result that both are now significantly better than national averages.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

98. Standards of attainment in design and technology in the end of Key Stage 3 tests are significantly above national averages and in comparison to similar schools. In the GCSE examination standards of attainment in design technology and childcare are very good and significantly above the national average and the school's average score for all subjects. Attainment in the food component was particularly high. The regular workshops aimed at boys and lower-attaining pupils but attended by large numbers of pupils at all levels of attainment contributed to boys scoring above the county and national averages. There has been a steady increase in the number of candidates taking A level examinations. Standards of attainment are well above average.
99. Pupils' attainment in lessons at the end of Key Stage 3 is very good. Pupils at all levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs, make generally very good progress. In all areas pupils produce detailed drawings that are annotated to show specific design points. They understand the characteristics of familiar products and the situations in which their design will function. In the workshops they handle materials with confidence, use tools safely and in the right way to do the right job. In food lessons pupils work from their own plans, making necessary changes as they proceed. In textiles lessons they use materials and tools with increased precision, controlling, measuring and checking procedures as their work develops. In all areas they evaluate their work and suggest improvements.
100. At the end of Key Stage 4 attainment in lessons is good. In graphics pupils develop criteria for designs that take into account appearance, function, safety and the needs of the user. They use these effectively to draw up their design proposals. They make well-constructed preliminary models to test their design ideas. When making products they become skilful in using techniques and processes. In electronics pupils produce high quality individually designed circuits to perform prescribed functions linked to projects such as that involved in creating the robot cat with sensitive whiskers. Pupils studying textiles develop ideas using fabrics and a broad range of techniques including beadwork, felt making and appliqué. In the study of foods pupils understand the need for legal information and its relevance when packaging food products. Throughout all key stages pupils increasingly use a wide range of technical vocabulary and numeracy skills, including logarithms.
101. In the motor vehicle workshop where pupils take the school's certificate in motor vehicle studies attainment is very good. Achievements include the knowledge of metals, a good understanding of the function of key components and skills of assembly in relation to different vehicles. Above all pupils identify with the world of work and develop skills in collaborating to achieve an agreed goal. The teacher is a very good role model for this otherwise lower-attaining group. With his encouragement most students have already secured places at colleges for further education linked to mechanical engineering.
102. In the sixth form lessons attainment is good and the quality of teaching is very good. Students conducting their analysis have clear aims to direct investigations. They use a broad range of high level study skills and from the completed investigations there is evidence of very good levels of knowledge gained in the food and nutrition course-work. Students on the graphics course benefit from teaching that simplifies drawing tasks, making them accessible to all. The good use of technical language and clear

demonstrations increase pupils' confidence and make the tasks achievable. Students are motivated by the supportive relationships they have with the teacher and achieve good quality work to a fair level of precision. From the analysis of students' work the standards of graphics achieved by some pupils are exceptionally high when taught by a specialist and the progress in learning is very good.

103. Teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 is very good. A real strength is the high level of skill and expertise of the teachers. They know their pupils well and plan for all levels of attainment. In lessons, through careful explanations and questioning, they make sure that pupils know what to do and how to do it. Resources are of a good quality, especially in textiles lessons, and pupils have free access to them. Through the teachers' careful checking and correcting of unsatisfactory practice, especially when using wood, high standards of practical work are achieved by the pupils. In a Year 7 metalwork lesson, for instance, the pupils handled the brass within minutes of the lesson starting. They were enthralled by the teacher's style, skill and use of the material, tools and technical language. The effect on learning was to build pupils' confidence. They moved eagerly to their work, inspired to do well as they filed, marked and punched their key fobs. The high achievements and the progress of this lesson were further assured by the very good planning for all pupils' levels of attainment and the management of pupils through a range of stimulating practical activities.
104. Teachers recognise and value the contribution that information communication technology makes to pupils' learning and its use is positively encouraged in all areas of the department.
105. The curriculum offered is broad due to the wide range of subject expertise. Procedures for assessment and their use in informing further curricular planning are satisfactory. The department is managed well by two members of staff with complementary skills. The schools recent technology status has enhanced the provision for computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture in the department. There is planned refurbishment to increase the provision for teaching electronics. The resistant materials workshops are very worn in appearance and do not provide the same quality of environment as other areas of the department.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

106. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils attain well above expected levels. They have a good appreciation of the different stages of economic development through studying birth rates, death rates and infant mortality rates. They use geographical terms correctly. They establish correlations between phenomena such as climate, vegetation and population and they competently interpret maps and diagrams. They acquire a good understanding of reasons for migration into urban areas, both in Britain and overseas. Their work shows above average research skills, notably when they find information about North Sea pollution. Responses in lessons show good understanding of the processes causing earthquakes and volcanic eruptions and pupils learn about the economic and social consequences of these events. Most pupils are skilled at extracting relevant information from a text and they express themselves very well both orally and in writing.
107. In the 1999 GCSE examinations the proportion of pupils achieving grades A\*-C was well above the national average. This is also the case when compared with similar schools. Girls performed better than boys overall but this was not by a greater margin

than is to be found nationally. The percentage of pupils obtaining grades A\*-G was also significantly above the national figure. The attainment level has remained static over the last three years but shows a significant increase since the last inspection. In 1999 pupils achieved satisfactorily in geography when results are compared with those of other subjects.

108. Pupils have good personal study skills. For example, they successfully use the Internet to find information about earthquakes. They develop a good awareness of the impact of natural disasters on rich and poor countries. By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils discuss objectively such matters as re-use, re-cycling and disposal of articles. They gain an appreciation of the economic viability of re-cycling different products. Most pupils interpret statistics and draw conclusions from them. Those studying for the foundation level in GCSE make good progress in their understanding of changes of location of British industry and the contributory factors.
109. A level students attain above average standards. They have a good grounding in statistical techniques. Their discussions and work show a good understanding of climatic change on global, continental and local scales. When considering the impact of the increase in road transport they express their findings concisely and articulately. Sixth form students synthesise information obtained from statistics and apply a quantitative approach to geographical study.
110. Pupils in both key stages and in the sixth form have very good attitudes to learning in geography. They are keen to take part in question and answer sessions and in class discussions. Behaviour is of a high standard, often excellent. On the few occasions when it is just satisfactory a few pupils lack self-control or are inattentive. Pupils respond well to challenging tasks. They conduct their own research and collect data using their numeracy skills to good effect. They write extensively for a wide range of purposes. They co-operate well in lessons when asked to work in groups or pairs and the good relationships between teachers and pupils contribute to the high standard of work.
111. The quality of teaching in geography is good across the school and has a strong impact on pupils' learning. This is because teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject and also because they usually set tasks that make pupils think for themselves and apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired. In a Year 9 lesson, for example, when pupils compared the differences in social and economic effects of a recent earthquake and one in the early part of the twentieth century the teacher built on pupils' existing knowledge and skilfully led them to make well-argued comparisons. The teachers' high expectations elicit a very positive response from pupils in all key stages. Teachers expect high standards of literacy in pupils' work. They are very aware of the special needs of some pupils and give them strong support but lower-attaining pupils in Years 7 and 8 do not always get tasks that are adapted to their needs. Lessons usually move at a brisk pace. This creates a sense of urgency about the tasks and ensures productive use of the time available. Some teachers use question and answer techniques very successfully as a teaching strategy. This leads to the enthusiastic involvement of pupils in discussion. Good planning ensures a balance between the teaching of facts and skills and that lessons have clear aims which are understood by the pupils. Teachers usually manage their classes well and expect very high standards of behaviour. As a result, pupils are very attentive during lessons and concentrate on their work with the minimum of distraction. Good use is made of homework to support learning and personal study skills.

112. Although the department head has been in post for only one term he has a clear view of the educational direction the subject should take and leads the department well. There is a good scheme of work in place and teaching is monitored effectively. The requirements of the National Curriculum are being met. There are satisfactory procedures in place for the assessment of pupils' attainment. Good use is made of information technology. There are good opportunities for pupils following examination syllabuses to undertake investigative fieldwork. There are sufficient suitably qualified staff to ensure that geography is taught to National Curriculum requirements and teachers receive satisfactory support in their professional development. The accommodation available for geography is good. There is a series of adjacent rooms, some of which are very large and lend themselves to displays. Even the smaller rooms are used very imaginatively for extensive displays of pupils' work. Learning resources are sufficient in range and quantity for the subject to be taught effectively.
113. Since the last inspection there have been many improvements. There is better provision for higher-attaining pupils, particularly in the development of research skills. Pupils' attainment in GCSE examinations has improved. There is wider use of information technology to support learning.

## **HISTORY**

114. In recent GCSE examinations results in both the A\*-C and A\*-G range have been above national averages and those of similar schools and these high standards have been surpassed in the sixth form where recent results at A level have been well above national norms.
115. The seeds of these achievements are sown at Key Stage 3 where pupils are learning quickly to develop subject skills, such as the critical use of source materials and a secure sense of chronology. Pupils move freely and competently between descriptive, analytical and empathetic writing. Some impressive examples of this were seen from Year 9 pupils on the conditions on board slave ships travelling from Africa to the Americas. By the end of the key stage attainment in lessons and work seen in exercise books are above national standards. This has addressed an issue arising from the previous inspection where there were weaknesses in attainment.
116. Above average standards are maintained during Key Stage 4 when pupils develop a detailed knowledge and understanding of the subject. They analyse historical issues in depth, as was shown to particularly good effect in an excellent Year 10 lesson during which pupils examined a political cartoon on the Treaty of Versailles in detail in order to improve their written responses to questions related to the analysis of sources. In the sixth form A level students are honing their historical skills. The level of oral and written work in sixth form history lessons is very good. This was evident, for example, in a Year 12 lesson in which students analysed in considerable depth the positive features and shortcomings of a model A level answer in order to improve their own standards of essay writing. Here they showed considerable sophistication in their understanding of the complexity of historical events and how competing explanations vie with one another.
117. The quality of teaching is good in Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. The shortcomings in teaching noted in the previous inspection no longer exist. Teachers have a very good grasp of their subject and this is used effectively to encourage pupils to achieve their best. This was demonstrated clearly in a very good



Year 9 lesson in which pupils investigated the events in Sarajevo in 1914 in considerable detail and were then encouraged by the teacher to analyse why this particular event led to war. The pupils showed real curiosity and rapidly extended their historical understanding. Lessons are planned well and classroom management is strong. Teachers have very high expectations of their pupils with the result that there is an air of purpose, rigour and progression to history lessons. This was exemplified very well in a Year 7 lesson during which pupils were encouraged to examine the validity of various claims to the English throne in 1066 and to prepare arguments in favour of each of the claimants. The class was a hive of historical investigation and testing of theories. This gave pupils confidence to develop their critical reasoning powers to a high degree. Pupils are at ease with historical vocabulary and there is a heartening dedication to the improvement of standards in the thorough marking of exercise books. All pupils are encouraged to take part in classroom debates and they participate willingly. The use of information communications technology is inbuilt into planning. The teachers ensure that all pupils are familiar with appropriate software to support their work. Homework is used well to extend pupils learning, particularly in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

118. Higher-attaining pupils are given ample scope to develop their knowledge and understanding of the subject and some very impressive note-taking and essay writing was seen in sixth form coursework folders. Pupils with special educational needs are given good support both in the classroom and in the use of material to suit their needs and make good progress. This has addressed an issue arising from the previous inspection relating to the poor match of tasks to levels of attainment. These pupils are integrated fully into classroom activities. Pupils behave very well at all times and have a very positive attitude towards their history lessons. They show a clear sense of commitment and respect the viewpoint of other members of the class.
119. The department has a strong, experienced teaching team and is managed very well. Assessment techniques are used very effectively to monitor the progress of pupils and reports on attainment are now more evaluative. A key feature of the department's work is the wide-ranging programme of historical visits to enrich the taught curriculum and very productive links have also been developed with schools in France and Greece. Display is used to very good effect in classrooms and there are numerous exhibitions in other areas of the school that are testimony to the extra-curricular work undertaken by pupils.
120. Overall, good progress has been made since the previous inspection. This is a strong, well-organised department with the undoubted ability to build further on its impressive achievements.

## **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

121. Attainment is above average by the end of Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Overall standards in 1999 have improved by the end of Key Stage 3 compared with 1998 and pupils' attainments are above national expectations. Most pupils attain GCSE Grade C or better. This is above the national standard and better than the standards in many other subjects. The same is true for the numbers gaining grades A\*-G. Attainments in business-oriented, word-processing examinations have been consistently very high for a number of years. Results at A level have been average in recent years, but the achievements of students in their recent work is at least above average and sometimes well above average. In general more able students attain well above average.

122. Throughout the school pupils' achievements in lessons are often good. Pupils have a good level of competence in using information communications technology by the end of Key Stage 3. By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils use a word-processor to enter, save, analyse, synthesise, amend and retrieve data, generate computer graphics and also access information held on CD-ROM media and research material from the Internet. Key Stage 4 and sixth form students use desktop publishing, word-processing, presentational, spreadsheet and database software with a good level of skill. Pupils use information communications technology to support their learning in literacy and numeracy with much success. Pupils with special educational needs usually achieve well in relation to their prior attainment. Attainment in information and communications technology in other subjects is usually satisfactory. There is good use of relevant software to support learning in many subjects but this is occasionally hindered by limited access to computers or insufficient staff training.
123. Year 7 pupils are increasingly skilled in using various tools in graphics programs. In geography lessons Year 10, for instance, access the Internet in order to view an erupting volcano and this enhancement brings their learning to life. In Year 13 music lessons some students produce scores of their compositions on a computer program, which they then use to experiment with changes in their music. In design and technology Year 10 pupils download relevant images and text from the World Wide Web. Information and communications technology has been used effectively for computer-aided design as well as in control technology coursework thus enhancing learning further.
124. The quality of teaching is good in Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Because teachers have very good subject knowledge pupils freely ask questions, assured of getting swift and accurate responses. The confident manner and knowledge of teachers enthuses pupils with the curiosity to explore the Internet and to build their own Intranets. Teachers organise and manage the explanation of knowledge with care and skill and this shapes learning. Teachers give clear demonstrations and make topics such as text processing, database manipulation or the testing and debugging of computer programs easier to understand. Very rarely teaching is less satisfactory when the teacher does not assess the pupils' grasp of what is being taught during the lesson with the consequence that lower-attaining pupils in particular make slow progress.
125. Teachers provide pupils with levels of challenge that match a wide range of needs very effectively. Teachers provide guided individual support for pupils to increase their competence in the use of information communications technology. When lessons are directed well pupils make good progress in learning, building on what they already know. Teachers enhance the opportunities for older pupils to learn more by extending the time available for the use of computers at lunchtimes. Teachers' skill and understanding in working with computers enables pupils to access the Internet in a focused way to enhance their learning. As a result, they learn about electronic mail. In Year 13 students use e-mail to question software companies about the errors in their commercial databases and programming software. They receive helpful support from such external agencies. Above all, teachers show respect for the contributions of all pupils and this encourages their self-confidence.
126. Pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour in lessons are very good in all key stages. Most listen attentively to instructions, concentrate well, co-operate well with each other and the teacher and handle fragile resources with respect. Due to the interest which teachers create students show a substantial commitment to working on

their coursework at home and this enables them to improve their attainments.

127. The curriculum is broad and balanced in Key Stage 3 and plans are in place to improve it further. In Key Stage 4 and the sixth form the curriculum is rich, broad and carefully planned, providing students with a good range of opportunities to improve their attainments, both vocationally and academically. Pupils experience a good degree of challenge in a curriculum designed to match carefully their needs and their differing levels of attainment. Pupils who study the German language, for example, are taught information communications technology in setted groups where they fulfil their potential because of the increased level of challenge.
128. The analysis of the assessment of pupils' work at the end of assignments, projects, and National Curriculum tests has improved in all key stages. However, the new self-assessment scheme is sometimes inconsistently applied in Key Stage 3 with the consequence that sometimes teachers do not have meaningful information about pupils' previous attainments with which to inform their planning of what to teach next. Teachers of other subjects are given clear guidance on examples of different National Curriculum levels of attainment. Though the school has clear plans in place for further developments, use of subject-specific software is underdeveloped in art, design and technology and modern languages.
129. The quality of leadership and management are very good. The head of department, an experienced and skilled practitioner, leads the subject very effectively and dynamically. The school's planning for the development of information communications technology is very good, providing a sharp focus upon the use of new technologies to support learning and the further improvement of standards at all levels. Above all, provision has been improved significantly since the last inspection.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

130. With its policy of providing opportunities for all to gain a language qualification the school enters a high percentage of its pupils for GCSE. On average the number of entries, including those studying two languages, has exceeded the national averages since 1997. This demonstrates the success of the school's policy of foreign languages for all. GCSE results both in French and German remain above the national averages since the last inspection and show an upward trend. In 1999 all those entered for GCSE French secured a pass grade. In German of those entered for GCSE all secured a pass grade with a very high proportion gaining A\*-C.
131. Data relating to A level entrants for French and German indicate a similar picture. For example, of those entered for French A level in 1999 all attained a pass grade with an above average proportion attaining the higher grades A and B. Similarly, in German A level in 1999 all achieved a pass grade A-E with a very high proportion achieving A and B grades. The relative performance scores of all subjects in the school show that there are no significant differences between pupils' performance in a modern language and in other subjects, while those doing German usually score highly in other subjects as they are the more able, dual linguists.
132. While no national comparisons are yet available for attainment in teachers' assessment of 14 year-olds the school's results for 1998 and 1999 present a generally sound picture when examined in the context of the school's inclusive policy of languages for all. The results are broadly in line with the nationally expected standards in modern foreign languages, especially where there are no pupils with prior knowledge

of these languages at Year 7 and pupils with special educational needs requirements are also assessed along with others. While there are no significant gender differences in A level examination results girls significantly outperform boys in both key stages.

133. In lessons observed and pupils' work seen standards in both French and German remain high, as at the last inspection, at the end of both key stages. Classes with dual linguists, such as the top sets in Year 10 French and Year 9 German, demonstrate high standards of work by the higher-attaining pupils in both French and German. Standards in the current A level French and German classes are average. These pupils came to the courses with significantly lower levels of prior attainment than the group that took the A level examinations in the previous year and are achieving well in relation to their attainment at the start of the course. Across Key Stages 3 and 4 all pupils achieve standards that are at least satisfactory in relation to their prior attainment and other associated factors. This is particularly evident in the case of lower-attaining groups and those pupils with special education needs.
134. The current arrangements for setting and the offer of two languages from Year 8 for the higher-attaining pupils cater for the needs of the full range of attainment, including those pupils with higher aptitude. Good examples of the range of provision were seen in both Year 9 and Year 10 classes where lower attaining sets with special education needs pupils are well catered for.
135. Both in Key Stage 3 and in Key Stage 4 pupils demonstrate a positive attitude to languages. Their relationships with their teachers and with each other are usually very good. In lessons they settle to work promptly and efficiently, willingly undertake tasks and generally sustain concentration for the entire lesson. Pupils consistently complete homework tasks with due diligence. These factors contribute to their standards of achievement as well as to their rate of progress in lessons and over time. Overall, pupils' attitudes are very positive towards the languages of their choice and they engage in self-evaluation to monitor their own progress and performance.
136. The consistent use of the target languages by teachers provides pupils with the necessary listening experience and gives them encouragement for experimenting with the sounds and structures of these languages. Within a wide range of areas of linguistic experience teachers integrate all language skills in their lessons. Teachers employ a good variety of themes, activities and techniques to motivate all pupils. Consequently, pupils in both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 demonstrate consistently good attainment and progress in listening, speaking, reading and writing in a diversity of contexts. While building pupils' vocabulary is one of the main objectives of lessons, grammar and language structures are taught in a clear framework, which keeps pupils of all levels of attainment engaged in their lessons. Marking and feedback are usually consistent. Homework forms part of the department's strategy to extend pupils' learning experience and to improve pupils' language learning skills as well as their independence. This, combined with regular marking and feedback, encourages pupils at all levels of language competence to improve their performance. Teachers exploit every opportunity to highlight the salient features of the associated cultures, history and institutions of their target languages. As a result, pupils produce substantial amounts of work encompassing a variety of topics, tasks and activities, including grammar work, work relating to the associated culture and geography and vocabulary work.
137. Teachers use computers effectively for graphics and word processing for course work. However, subject-specific applications of information communications technology remain to be developed in the department, including productive use of interactive

materials and Internet links with other schools and communities.

138. The languages programme offers choice and opportunity to all pupils, including those with special education needs. The department is well managed with considerable collaboration between all staff. This has led to substantial development of both materials and teaching. Classroom displays, which include written materials in the target languages as well as an interesting collection of photographs and artefacts make language learning purposeful. Strong links with France and Germany and exchanges of pupils create a good ethos for learning by setting the relevant languages in a context of immediate practical use.

## **MUSIC**

139. The attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 is above average compared to levels found in similar schools. By the end of Year 9 pupils perform music expressively with confidence in ensembles using a range of instruments. They develop a good working knowledge of the basic elements of melody, rhythm and chords and many of them read music sufficiently to support and extend their practical work effectively. Since the previous inspection the use of singing has been increased as a valuable extra instrumental skill and this is having a beneficial impact on levels of musicianship generally. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls.
140. The attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 is well above the national average. The number of pupils gaining A\*-C and A\*-G grades in GCSE is well above the national subject level and has not changed over the past three years. Attainment in lessons matches examination results. By the end of Year 11 pupils perform their own well-structured compositions with considerable style and their reliable aural skills enable many of them to develop a commendable level of musicianship. Standards of practical work are good and most pupils perform up to about Grade 5-6 (Associated Board).
141. A level results are good for the relatively small numbers of students involved. Most of those entered over the past three years have gained grades in the A-C range. Attainment in lessons matches examination results and confirms that performing and aural standards are above average compared to national subject levels. By the end of Year 13 most students perform up to Grade 8 (Associated Board) and beyond. They have high levels of musicianship, which enable them to enjoy the analysis of music with their teachers.
142. The school is justly proud of the exceptional levels of musical attainment achieved by many of the significant number of pupils who participate in extra-curricular musical activities. A programme of concerts throughout the year ensures that high performing standards are maintained. The inclusion of challenging works, such as Mozart's Requiem and Mendelssohn's Fingal's Cave Overture, is a regular feature of these occasions. Since the previous inspection an increasingly rich variety of choirs, orchestras, bands and other instrumental groups has been maintained, providing opportunities for both experienced and less experienced players to perform music in a wide range of styles. Several groups do well in competitive festivals and some, like the string quartet, perform to a professionally high standard.
143. Behaviour is good and pupils are very enthusiastic about their music making. They collaborate well together when practising in small groups and frequently take responsibility for their own performing. Although relatively few pupils choose to do GCSE at present numbers have increased over the past three years. Very positive and

supportive relationships develop amongst the significant numbers of pupils who engage regularly in extra-curricular musical activities. There is an increasing number of gifted soloists and groups that show a very strong commitment and devotion to performing in public for the school and the community at large.

144. The quality of teaching and learning is good in Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Some outstanding teaching was seen in Years 8 and 11 where pupils are achieving high musical standards. Lessons are taught by experienced musicians who use their specialist vocal and instrumental skills to enliven and broaden pupils' musical horizons. Music that appeals to young people is used in an exciting way to enable them to learn and develop their performing skills and musicianship generally. For example, high demands were made of pupils in a Year 8 class, who were learning how to create and understand the functions of chords by singing the backing track of a pop song in three part harmony. The rigorous pace of most lessons keeps concentration alert through constant questioning so that rapid progress is made. This was observed in GCSE and A level lessons where pupils were quick to respond to aural questioning in appropriate musical terms. It was also apparent in most Key Stage 3 classes where pupils applied a high degree of creative effort in working together as musical ensembles. In these classes wide ranges of vocal and instrumental skills are brought together, encouraging pupils of all levels of attainment to play together effectively. In most lessons teachers skilfully manage pupils' behaviour well and develop the disciplines required for practising music and performing together. They encourage pupils to be productive in a self-controlled atmosphere. Homework is used well to support learning. Since the previous inspection a useful scheme for assessing pupils' work has been established.

145. The department is well led and efficiently run. Its work and mission strongly complements that of the school. Ways are being currently explored to increase the use pupils make of the practice facilities available, to promote more independent learning and the use of information communications technology. Music is a popular subject in the school and its success is enhanced by the excellent level of involvement other staff and parents who provide practical support for its exciting extra-curricular activities.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

146. In 1999 the proportion of pupils attaining A\*-C grades in the GCSE examination was significantly above the national average and for those obtaining A\*-G grades was just above the national average. There is little difference in the performance of boys and girls and pupils perform as well in physical education as they do in other subjects in the school. The small number of pupils entered for A level attained very good standards in 1999, almost a half attained the very highest grade. In both these examinations results have improved over the last three years.

147. At the end of Key Stage 3 pupils attain standards that are good for their age. They play games with confidence. In gymnastics and dance they plan imaginative sequences of movement both individually and in small groups. Pupils have particularly good skills of observation and use them to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses in what they see. This leads to successful coaching of others to help them improve. At the end of Key Stage 4 pupils attain good standards in physical education lessons. In GCSE classes and extra-curricular activities pupils attain very good standards of performance. Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of a wide range of activities and confidently act as coaches and officials. They have a good knowledge of

the rules and apply them consistently. Pupils taking the Junior Sports Leader Award show good skills of communication and organisation when they plan and teach activities as part of the course.

148. Pupils' GCSE folders are well organised and standards of writing, numeracy and presentation are good in relation to pupils' prior learning. Physical education makes a satisfactory contribution to the development of pupils' information and communication technology skills. A strong feature of the work throughout the main school is pupils' careful preparation for physical activity. They have a good understanding of how and why to do this. In theory lessons in the sixth form pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of important issues in physical education and illustrate these from their own experiences.
149. The quality of teaching is good throughout the school. It is better in Key Stage 4 where in half the lessons seen teaching was very good. A particular strength is the very good subject knowledge of teachers which leads to the planning of interesting and challenging tasks that help pupils develop the necessary skills and understanding. In an excellent Year 7 hockey lesson the teacher planned imaginative tasks based on movement patterns of 'Lions and Lizards' that immediately engaged the pupils' attention and enthusiasm. This led to the development of good levels of skill. Teachers give very clear technical demonstrations so pupils clearly understand the key points to be learned. They observe pupils carefully and give good support and guidance on how they can improve. For their part pupils listen carefully to these assessments and respond positively. This individual feed back is an important factor in the good progress made by pupils of all levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs. Together with the opportunities teachers plan for pupils to evaluate their own performance this feedback ensures they are very interested and involved in their own learning. In a very good Year 10 basketball lesson, for instance, the teacher carefully assessed pupils' performance and set different tasks for groups of differing attainments before giving support to each group according to their level of performance. Teachers expect pupils to behave well and to be committed to improving what they do and pupils respond with a high level of commitment to their work. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and teachers organise pupils and equipment efficiently. In the best lessons teachers skilfully judge when to intervene and make a coaching point or when to allow pupils to develop their skills and ideas. Most lessons end with a clear review when the teacher uses questions to ensure pupils clearly understand the work that has been covered.
150. The leadership and management of physical education are very good. Teaching is monitored and supported well. The subject is valued by pupils and parents and makes a very good contribution to the aims of the school and to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There is a very good system for assessing pupils' performance but the data from this is not yet used to track individuals or groups of pupils to ensure maximum progress is being made. An excellent extra-curricular programme of clubs, competitive games and outdoor activities enriches the planned curriculum. These are well supported by significant numbers of pupils and staff and add to the standards of attainment in the school. They provide good opportunities for the most able to attain very good standards and many, particularly girls, go on to play at district, regional and national level.
151. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards have improved in core physical education and examination courses. Lessons provide greater opportunities for pupils to be involved through the planning and evaluation of their work.

The very good attitudes and behaviour of the last inspection have been maintained. Planning to resolve the issue of sufficient time for pupils taking a second modern foreign language is well under way for implementation in September 2000.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

152. The GCSE results maintain the trend of being significantly above the national level. Eighty per cent of candidates obtained a grade at A\*-C and all candidates obtained a pass grade. These results were achieved by five times the number of girls as boys. At A level there was only a small entry but all candidates maintained the tradition of obtaining a pass grade.
153. Attainment by pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 is above the expectations of the agreed syllabus. Pupils at this stage know about central beliefs and practices in Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Sikhism. They understand how these beliefs influence the behaviour of adherents.
154. At the end of Key Stage 4 pupils achieve in line with the expectations of the agreed syllabus. These pupils search for meaning and purpose in life and learn how Christians decide right from wrong. They explore the significance for their own lives of the beliefs and practices they encounter in their studies.
155. Learning at Key Stages 3 and 4 and in examination classes is very good. Pupils are quick to gain knowledge and understanding about how the notion of the existence of God is understood in the Christian tradition and how Christian teaching influences their lives. In the sixth form they gain in confidence when expressing their opinions on ethical issues. Pupils with special educational needs are fully integrated into the curriculum and make good progress. The attention to literacy helps extend the vocabulary of all pupils and improves their spelling and the overall quality of their writing.
156. Attitudes to learning are very good in all years. Pupils show pride in their work and come to lessons eager to learn. The merit and bonus card system of rewards works well for them. They behave well in lessons and respect the great variety of beliefs they meet in their work.
157. The teaching throughout the school is always good and in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form it is very good. Teachers have an excellent knowledge of the subject. Their enthusiasm and high expectations encourage all pupils to work very hard. Pupils appreciate the encouragement they receive through the very good quality of the assessment of their work. The detailed help examination classes receive to ensure questions are answered in the best possible way contributes to examination successes. A very good variety of teaching methods is used to engage the interest and enthusiasm of the pupils who, in turn, respond with a high level of commitment to their work. This was particularly evident in the study of Buddhism in Years 10 and 11. The pupils were given very good opportunities to explore their own beliefs and contrast them with some of the central beliefs of Buddhism. This made the subject live for them and led to some very intelligent analysis of key concepts. Homework is used well to support independent investigation.
158. The department is very well led and the exceptionally strong team works very closely together to plan work and share best practice. Teachers are well monitored and supported. Resources are good with a good stock of modern textbooks and individual



copies of texts to assist independent learning.

159. The contribution of religious education to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Lessons and the regular programme of visits to places of worship in this country and Israel enrich the pupils' spiritual and cultural experience. The department makes an excellent contribution to the school's ethos for learning.
160. Since the last inspection the department has maintained its high standards and improved its resources. Planning for the introduction of information and communication technology is well advanced ready for its introduction in September 2000. The school does not provide religious education in the sixth form as required by statute.

## **THE SIXTH FORM**

161. The report on the previous inspection noted the significant contribution made by the sixth form to the enrichment of many aspects of the school's life. Since that time the sixth form has not only maintained this position but has improved upon it. It is now a real strength of the school.
162. The results achieved at A level continue to be very high in comparison with the national average. There was a significant increase in attainment from 1998 to 1999, particularly in the percentage of passes at the higher grades. These very good results now identify the school as one of the most successful of its type nationally at A level. The results achieved by students following vocational courses are also improving. The proportion of students gaining distinction in their vocational studies in 1999 was very high and well above the national average.
163. The sixth form is growing steadily in size and reputation, attracting students with a wide range of interests and attainment. Each year over half the pupils in Year 11 stay on into the sixth form. Approximately 30 students from other schools in the local area join them. This is indicative of the high esteem in which the sixth form is held in the area.
164. The school offers a broad curriculum to suit the needs of all its students. Students have a good range of options from which to choose. Most study three subjects at A level. Approximately 30 different subject choices are available at this level. There is very well organised provision of vocational courses. Some students follow courses leading to a GNVQ at advanced level, often combined with an A level subject. A small number follow an intermediate GNVQ course. The school also provides courses in key skills such as information technology, understanding industry and problem solving. Students elect to take part in a wide range of sporting and recreational activities. Most students are encouraged to enter the general studies examination at the end of Year 13. Although there is no specific provision for religious education, many opportunities for reflection and spiritual awareness are provided through general lectures, discussions and assemblies. An outstanding range of extra-curricular activities contributes to a rich and stimulating variety of experiences, which is offered to all students.
165. Very good teaching in the sixth form enables students' level of attainment to rise progressively during Years 12 and 13. The commitment and expertise shown by the teachers, together with the excellent attitudes that students bring to their lessons, combine to create an extremely effective learning environment. Many excellent examples of teachers' high expectations, which challenge students and encourage

them to reach deeper levels of understanding, were seen during the inspection. In vocational classes teachers' intervention and encouragement is particularly successful in increasing students' self-confidence and their ability to learn independently. Students with special educational needs are well supported. They make very good progress in relation to their previous attainment. Very high attaining pupils are encouraged to extend their learning to the full extent of their competence and produce much work of outstanding quality.

166. Personal development in the sixth form is very good. Students' mature behaviour enables them to establish very good relationships with their teachers and with each other. Newcomers are welcomed generously and integrated quickly. Potential difficulties created by the existence of two separate sixth form teaching and recreational areas are minimised by a spirit of friendly co-operation that pervades the whole community. Opportunities for students to develop their powers of leadership and initiative are nurtured very effectively. Many give their time generously to community service projects, to providing learning support for younger pupils and to organising clubs and activities of all kinds, both in school and in the local area. An experienced team of heads of year and form tutors monitors students' overall welfare and progress closely. Tutors know their students very well indeed and are generous in the time and help that they offer. Expert careers guidance is available for all students, most of whom continue into higher education after they have left school.

167. The director of the sixth form provides excellent leadership and is very effectively supported by other senior colleagues. This cohesive team provides very clear educational direction to the work of the sixth form. Energetic and efficient management has ensured appropriate preparation for the implications of impending curricular change. There is now a wider range of opportunities in the sixth form than ever before. The school is in a very strong position to build on the popularity and success of its sixth form, particularly in the further development of vocational courses.

## **VOCATIONAL COURSES**

168. The school offers a wide range of vocational courses and has worked hard to ensure that they deservedly are seen as very worthwhile. The very good results achieved have raised the status of these courses. They now attract students with a wide range of prior attainment. Business studies, health and social care and leisure and tourism, all leading to an advanced GNVQ, are taught in the sixth form. A one-year course in health and social care at intermediate level is also available. Standards in all of these subjects are improving and are above the national average. In 1999 the overall percentage of distinctions awarded was well above that achieved nationally. Most students complete their studies successfully and many proceed to further or higher education courses.

169. All of the teaching observed was good and in at least half the lessons observed it was very good. The teachers involved in vocational education are experienced, work very closely together and share their expertise across several different subjects. Students' interest and self-confidence benefits from the flexibility and variety of teaching styles they encounter. They develop very good relationships with all their teachers who encourage them to take responsibility for their own progress and learning. They appreciate the support and guidance they receive from the teachers. Assignments are marked rigorously so that students are well aware of their progress. Their attainment is enhanced by the continuous use of the key skills of information

technology, number and communication. The use of a wide variety of outside speakers and contacts within the local business and health care community broadens students' experience and gives them a realistic view of employment opportunities. For example, students were totally absorbed and visibly moved during a detailed account by a young care worker from a residential home of her work with vulnerable, elderly people.

170. Vocational studies are now well established, very well managed and increasing in popularity. The department makes a major contribution to the provision of learning opportunities for students with a wide range of attainment.

### **BUSINESS STUDIES AND ECONOMICS**

171. Both of these subjects are taught at A level in the sixth form. Standards of attainment are very good and above the national average. In 1998 and 1999 all students entered for A level in both subjects were successful. In 1999 well over half the candidates were awarded the higher grades of A or B in business studies and almost half in economics.

172. The teaching observed was very good. Well-qualified teachers share their expertise and resources readily. Excellent relationships exist between students and teachers so that discussion flows freely and students' understanding is extended and challenged. Clear frameworks are established in lessons providing outlines upon which students can develop their own ideas and examples.

173. The department is well led and efficiently managed. Very good systems are in place for assessing students' progress and helping them to work independently.

### **SOCIOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY**

174. A small but growing number of students study sociology at A level. Standards achieved are encouraging. In 1999 six out of seven candidates were successful. The number of students studying psychology at A level is considerably larger. In 1998 and 1999 all the candidates entered for the examination were successful and a third of them were awarded the higher grades of A or B.

175. Some staffing difficulties this year have now been resolved and sound arrangements are in place following a recent part-time appointment. The teaching observed by the established members of staff was very good. In sociology students are very effectively taught the precise meaning of technical vocabulary and are well-trained in examination techniques. In psychology the rigorous use of statistical techniques in research is well understood. The good level of the teacher's knowledge of the subject is a key to the interest shown by the students, leading to a good grasp of different psychological theories evident, for example, in their study of sleep and dreams.

176. The department is well managed and accommodates students with a wide range of attainment very effectively. Resources are used imaginatively and students' work is assessed regularly and thoroughly.