

# INSPECTION REPORT

**THE MINSTER COLLEGE**

LEOMINSTER

LEA area: Herefordshire

Unique reference number: 116941

Headteacher: Mrs V Thomasson

Reporting inspector: I D Thompson  
12271

Dates of inspection: 17-20 January 2000

Inspection number: 187255

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	County
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	The Minster College Leominster Herefordshire
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr M Tromans
Date of previous inspection:	February 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
I D Thompson	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it?
			The school's results and students' achievements
			How well are students taught?
			How well is the school led and managed?
			What should the school do to improve further?
B Quest-Ritson	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development
			How well does the school care for its students?
			How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
R Garrett	Team inspector	English	
W Wimshurst	Team inspector	Mathematics	
O Denson	Team inspector	Science	
L Kauffman	Team inspector	Design and technology Information technology	
D Shepherd	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages Equal opportunities	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
E Johnes	Team inspector	Geography	
P Mitchell	Team inspector	History	
D Morris	Team inspector	Art	
I Kirby	Team inspector	Music	
J Oxley	Team inspector	Physical education	
J Radford	Team inspector	Religious education Special educational needs	

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

The Minster College is a mixed comprehensive school for students in the 11-18 age range. There are 680 students on roll, fewer than at the time of the last inspection when there were 747 students. The school is smaller than most other secondary schools. It serves the market town of Leominster and a wide rural community.

The school's population is almost entirely white. Students come from the full range of social and economic backgrounds. The school's catchment includes a number of traveller families and almost 20 per cent of students have traveller connections. The intake is broadly comprehensive. However, fewer students than usual have above average levels of prior attainment. There are 138 students on the school's register of special educational need; this is a higher than average proportion of the school's population. There are 48 students at stages 3-5 of the code of practice, of whom 26 (3.8%) have statements of special educational need, which is well above the national average. There are 65 students eligible for free school meals, which is below the national average. However, because of the lack of a school meals service in recent years and the nature of the catchment area, this is not a true reflection of economic circumstances. Data provided by the school, and discussions with community representatives, indicate that there is greater social disadvantage than these figures suggest.

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

This is an improving school. The school is well organised and managed. Effective leadership has led to an improvement in teaching standards and this is having a positive effect on students' learning. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

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

- Good, enthusiastic teaching, which stimulates learning, is a strong feature of the school.
- Students respond well to the high quality teaching; attitudes and relationships in the school are good.
- Well-organised pastoral care contributes to students' good social development. Careers education and guidance are good.
- There is good provision for pupils with special educational needs.
- The school provides a very wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- The school has positive relationships with partner institutions and benefits from strong community links.
- The headteacher and staff in key positions provide effective leadership.

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

- Overall standards of attainment, particularly of the most able; standards of attainment in English at Key Stage 3 and in science at both key stages.
- Some teachers and parents do not expect high enough standards of students' performance, which leads to too many students not demanding enough of themselves.
- Opportunities to use information technology to support learning across the curriculum.
- The provision of religious education in the sixth form, and a daily act of collective worship for all students.
- Consistency of middle management in the use of assessment to help planning, and in monitoring and supporting teaching.

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

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION**

Against a background of declining levels of attainment on entry, the standards that students reach have been maintained at Key Stage 3 since the last inspection in February 1996. Standards at Key Stage 4 have been maintained and showed an improvement in 1999. Standards in the sixth form reflect students' prior levels of attainment. The school responded positively to the key issues of the

report, although it still does not provide a daily act of collective worship because of a lack of space. Provision for religious education in the sixth form is inadequate because of staff availability. Teaching of information technology across the curriculum is unsatisfactory principally because access to equipment is limited. The school has made good progress in responding to the concerns raised in the previous report concerning students with special educational needs. The school has increased the number of learning support assistants and the level of in-class support is now adequate. Overall, the school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection.

## STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
Key Stage 3 tests	C	B	C	D
GCSE examinations	C	D	C	C
A-levels/AS-levels	D	D	D	

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

Results of Key Stage 3 tests in 1999 matched the national average in mathematics, were below average in science and well below in English. Overall, results matched the national average, but were below average in comparison with similar schools. English results have fluctuated considerably over the last three years, while results in mathematics and science have remained steady. Figures from tests when students enter the school indicate that the majority do at least as well as they should and a substantial minority do better.

In the 1999 GCSE examinations, students' results were in line with the national average and the average for similar schools. These results are a considerable improvement over previous years. Results have improved since the last inspection, but at a slower rate than the national trend. Results at grades A\*-C were well above the national average in art and, from a selective entry, in French. They were well below average in English literature, and far below in geography and German. Students' best overall results, in comparison with their achievements in other subjects, were in history; the poorest results were in geography and German. The school set realistic targets, based on an analysis of students' earlier performance, and these were met. Results at A level were below national averages but in line with students' prior attainment. The entries in the majority of subjects were too small for meaningful comparisons to be made.

In work seen during the inspection, standards achieved in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 3 are in line with expected standards. They are below in English and science. In other subjects, the standards achieved are above the level expected in physical education; they match the levels expected in design and technology, geography, history, information technology and religious education. In all other subjects standards are below those expected for students of the same age nationally.

In work seen, the standards achieved by the end of Key Stage 4 are in line with the level expected in English, mathematics and science. In other subjects, standards are above the level expected in design and technology, information technology and religious education. With the exceptions of modern foreign languages and music, in which standards are below, standards in all other subjects match the levels expected.



In work seen in the sixth form, the standards achieved are above expected levels in art, design and technology, history, information technology, physical education and science. The expected levels are reached in English and geography. Standards are below those expected in mathematics, modern foreign languages and music.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Students have good attitudes. They are well motivated by good teaching.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is satisfactory overall. It is good at Key Stage 4 and very good in the sixth form. There are occasional lapses of behaviour out of lessons.
Personal development and relationships	Personal development is good. Students work well together and support each other. Relationships are good.
Attendance	Attendance is satisfactory overall. There is a much higher than usual amount of unauthorised absence.

Students have good attitudes to school. The great majority show enthusiasm and involvement in lessons. Their personal development is good; they are provided with a very good range of opportunities for social development. Standards of behaviour are satisfactory overall and improve as students move up through the school. In lessons, behaviour is usually good, but occasionally deteriorates out of classrooms. Attendance is in line with the national average, but the rate of unauthorised absence is well above average.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
153 lessons seen	Good	Good	Good

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

The overall quality of teaching is good at both key stages and in the sixth form. Teaching is at least satisfactory in 95 per cent of lessons; of these it is good in 46 per cent, very good in 17 per cent and excellent in a further two per cent. It is unsatisfactory in five per cent and never poor. The unsatisfactory teaching was limited to an occasional lesson in several departments across the school.

The quality of teaching in mathematics is good at Key Stage 3; it is satisfactory in English and science. At Key Stage 4, the quality of teaching in English and mathematics is good; it is satisfactory in science.

The good teaching has a positive impact on students' learning. Teachers know their subjects well and communicate their enthusiasm to students. They use a variety of methods to maintain interest and pace in lessons and deal well with some very challenging students. The school's literacy and numeracy policies are well supported by subject departments. Students with special educational needs are taught well in mainstream classes, and well-managed support makes a good contribution to their learning. There are too many instances, however, when not enough is demanded of higher attaining students with the result that they do not make the progress of which they are capable. Inconsistent use is made of information technology to enhance learning and to develop skills. The unsatisfactory teaching is the result of a lack of adequate planning.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school offers a satisfactory curriculum that is enriched by very good provision of extra-curricular activities.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	There is good provision overall. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory, provision for moral and cultural development is good and provision for social development is very good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school provides good pastoral care. Teachers know their students well. The school provides good support and guidance.

The school works well with parents, it seeks their views and takes notice of them. The school curriculum is broad and balanced, with the exceptions that provision for religious education in the sixth form and the teaching of information technology across the curriculum still do not meet requirements. Extra-curricular provision is very good and the school benefits particularly from its strong links with the community. Standards of care are high and the school has effective arrangements for safeguarding the health and welfare of students.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides very good leadership and is fully committed to raising standards in the school and providing an educational resource for the wider community. She is well supported by the complementary strengths of the senior management team.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors have a good working knowledge of the school's strengths and the challenges it faces. They support the school well. They do not meet their statutory requirements in respect of providing a daily act of collective worship, religious education in the sixth form and teaching of information technology across the curriculum.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Monitoring and evaluating the performance of subjects and individual teachers are done well at senior management level. There are inconsistencies in the way they are managed in departments.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes very good use of the resources available to it.

The school has adequate staffing, accommodation and resources for learning. The overall quality of leadership is good, although there are some inconsistencies in departmental management particularly in the monitoring of teaching and the use of assessment to inform planning. There are clear procedures for seeking best value throughout the school.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standards of care.</li> <li>• The positive attitudes and values promoted by the school.</li> <li>• The school is approachable and deals well with problems.</li> <li>• Extra-curricular provision.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management.</li> <li>• Behaviour.</li> <li>• Use and amount of homework.</li> <li>• Grouping arrangements in subjects.</li> <li>• The quality of reports.</li> </ul>

Parents consider the school broadly satisfactory. Inspectors agree with the positive views they expressed. Most parents who returned the questionnaire and attended the parents' meeting are pleased with what the school provides for their children, although there were some concerns. Some parents do not consider behaviour in the school to be good. Inspectors found that students' behaviour in lessons was generally good, but they agree with the parents' concerns about lower standards of behaviour out of class. Some parents have concerns about the amount of homework students are expected to do. The inspectors noted that a reasonable amount of homework was set in lessons observed during the inspection. Grouping arrangements, however, were found to be affecting standards in some Key Stage 3 English classes. Some parents are concerned about the quality of information they receive about their children's progress. The inspectors consider that the annual reports to parents give good information to parents at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form, but that the information provided at Key Stage 4 is more limited, although it does comply with statutory requirements. Some parents think that the school does not work closely with parents. The inspectors did not find evidence to substantiate this opinion. Some parents do not think that the school is well managed and led. The inspection team considers that leadership and management are good.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

1. The results of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests in 1999 matched the national average in mathematics, were below average in science and well below in English. Boys' and girls' results were similar in relation to their national averages. Overall, results matched the national average, but were below average in comparison with similar schools. English results have fluctuated considerably over the last three years while results in mathematics and science have remained steady. Figures from tests when students enter the school indicate that the majority do at least as well as they should, and a substantial minority do better.

2. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, the proportions of students gaining five or more grades A\*-C and five or more grades A\*-G were in line with the national average. Overall, results matched the average for similar schools. These results are a considerable improvement over previous years. Results have improved since the last inspection but at a slower rate than the national trend. Boys' and girls' results were similar in relation to their national averages. The gap between boys' performance and that of girls was slightly greater in 1999 than the difference nationally, but considerably smaller than in 1998. The school set realistic targets, based on an analysis of students' earlier performance, and these were met. This improvement reflects the effort that the school put in to mentoring students in their final year.

3. Results for GCSE grades A\*-C in 1999 were well above average in art and, from a selective entry, in French. They were above average in history and information technology, average in design and technology and English, but below average in English literature, mathematics and science. They were far below average in geography, German and business studies.

4. At GCSE grades A\*-G in 1999, results were above average in art and information technology, and in line with national averages in all other subjects except geography, where they were below.

5. Students' best overall results, in comparison with their achievements in other subjects, were in history; the poorest results were in geography and German.

6. Results at GCE A level in 1999 were below national averages but in line with students' prior attainment. The entries in the majority of subjects were too small to enable meaningful comparisons to be made.

7. In work seen during the inspection, standards of attainment in English at the end of Key Stage 3 are below average, reflecting the standards of students' attainment on entry. Lower attaining students have significant literacy difficulties, particularly in reading and writing. Grouping arrangements do not enable all students, particularly the highest attainers, to move on quickly enough to achieve their full potential. Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form broadly match expected levels. The work of lower attainers at Key Stage 4 continues to be marred by weaknesses in spelling and sentence punctuation. Standards of listening are good. The current Year 13 has few higher attainers. Their writing is generally clear, but unsophisticated in style and students are still struggling to find the fluency of expression that is necessary for the highest grades. Standards of

attainment are higher in Year 12.

8. In work seen during the inspection in mathematics, standards achieved at the end of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 by students aged 14 and 16 respectively are in line with those expected for students of the same age nationally. The overall attainment of students in the sixth form is below that expected, although they are attaining levels in line with their prior attainment. Their number skills are generally satisfactory, but algebraic skills are weak for other than the highest attaining students. Problem solving skills are not well developed for students on joining the school and, although they improve by the end of Year 9, are still not as good as they should be. They improve at Key Stage 4 and students develop a better understanding of identifying patterns and finding rules. Most students use calculators confidently and accurately. Data handling skills are satisfactory.

9. Levels of numeracy are generally satisfactory. Number skills are satisfactory; students in geography and science are comfortable handling numerical data. Appropriate measuring skills were evident in design and technology where students used millimetres accurately in cutting out materials. Data handling skills are satisfactory; in science most students are able to draw and interpret graphs and in geography collect and analyse data. Shape and space are being developed well; students in art demonstrate good spatial awareness.

10. In work seen during the inspection in science, the standards achieved by students at the end of Key Stage 3 are below the level expected of students of the same age nationally. The standards achieved by students at the end of Key Stage 4 are broadly in line with those expected of students of the same age nationally. Standards in the sixth form match course requirements. All students work well in pairs and groups and support each other in completing practical work. They are confident in measuring distance, time, mass and volume and maintain these skills across the key stages. Students are able to use appropriate scientific terms, but many lack the confidence in their ability to work independently. Teachers do not expect enough of higher attaining students and they are not encouraged to stretch themselves.

11. In work seen in other subjects during the inspection, the standards achieved by students at the end of Key Stage 3 are above the level expected in physical education; they match the levels expected in design and technology, geography, history, information technology and religious education. In all other subjects standards are below those expected for students of the same age nationally.

12. In work seen during the inspection, the standards achieved by the end of Key Stage 4 are above the level expected in design and technology, information technology and religious education. With the exceptions of modern foreign languages and music, in which standards are below, standards in all other subjects match the levels expected.

13. In work seen during the inspection, the standards achieved in the sixth form are above expected levels in art, design and technology, history, information technology, physical education and science. The expected levels are reached in English and geography. Standards are below those expected in mathematics, modern foreign languages and music.

14. Students with special educational needs usually attain the standards that their teachers expect of them, and some exceed their targets. Over the last three years the proportion of students in Year 11 who gained five or more GCSE passes or GNVQ equivalent at grades A\*-G was close to the national average and this indicates satisfactory

achievement for students with special educational needs. Most students make satisfactory progress in their different subjects and they make good progress in their special literacy programmes.

15. Students' overall levels of attainment are below average when they enter the school; many have well below average standards of literacy and numeracy. By the end of Key Stage 3, most have made good progress overall, in relation to their prior attainment, and are achieving at the level expected for students of the same age nationally in more than half of their subjects. They make satisfactory progress during Key Stage 4 and maintain broadly average levels. Overall attainment, particularly at Key Stage 4, is affected by a number of factors. The school accepts pupils who have had difficulties elsewhere. School monitoring of attendance shows that many of these students have high levels of absence, which affects the production of coursework and the completion of examinations. Over recent years, there has been a high level of staff absence through illness and staffing changes which have affected continuity of learning in a number of subjects, particularly English, geography and modern foreign languages. There is a general tendency for students to lack confidence in themselves and expect too little of their own performance. This is compounded by teaching which demands too little of them and particularly affects those with higher levels of ability, especially boys. The school has introduced a mentoring scheme with the aim of raising attainment. Students from last year's Year 11 commented that the scheme had helped them to gain higher grades than they expected.

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

16. Students have good attitudes to the school. They want to take part in lessons, for example in a Year 9 history group students showed enormous enthusiasm reproducing 1830 newspaper articles about the Liverpool to Manchester railway. In a Year 11 home economics lesson, students involved in the preparation of a community lunch were excited about how the food they had prepared would be received. This willingness to become involved is often in direct response to good teaching. Students also like the extensive range of extra-curricular activities. They appreciate the many opportunities they have to take part in sporting, musical and drama events, both in and out of school, as well as the trips and visits to places of interest at home and overseas. Most students with special educational needs have positive attitudes to school life and their work; they behave well and make substantial gains in self-confidence and organising skills as they move through the school.

17. Standards of behaviour are satisfactory overall. There is a difference, though, in the way students behave in lessons, where standards are usually good, with only occasional instances of disruption, and the standards of behaviour seen around the school. Most students behave well and are considerate in corridors and outside areas, but some students, mainly younger boys, are rougher. They race around and sometimes arguments turn into fights. The level of exclusions is slightly above average for a school of this type, but is decreasing, reflecting the school's drive to improve attitudes.

18. Relationships are good. Students work well together; they co-operate in lessons and support each other well. In a Year 7 science lesson, for example, one student helped another with special educational needs, who did not have a support assistant for that particular lesson. Physical education lessons throughout the school are characterised by the way students help and support each other. Bullying is not a problem. Students have confidence in members of staff and relationships are good. Although students are ready to take responsibility, for example as tutor group captains and prefects, they are slower and more reluctant to show initiative and learn to study independently, even when they are

given the opportunity. However, most students are aware that what they say, or do, can affect others and they are sensitive to differing opinions. For example, in a discussion of "Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry" in a Year 10 English lesson, the forceful contributions of some students were accorded the same respect as the more reflective ones of others.

19. At 90.6 per cent the overall attendance rate is satisfactory. This level is broadly in line with the national average. Authorised absence is 6.3 per cent. However, unauthorised absence is 3 per cent, which is well above the national average. The principal cause is a small number of students with very high levels of unauthorised absence. Students with high levels of absence, whether authorised or unauthorised, have lower levels of attainment. Lateness is not a significant problem, either on arrival in the mornings or in coming to lessons during the school day.

20. There has been some improvement in students' attitudes since the last inspection, but recorded levels of unauthorised absence have increased.

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

21. The quality of teaching is good at both key stages and in the sixth form. Teaching is at least satisfactory in 95 per cent of lessons; of these it is good in 46 per cent, very good in 17 per cent and excellent in a further two per cent. It is unsatisfactory in five per cent and never poor. The unsatisfactory teaching was limited to an occasional lesson in several departments across the school. There has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching since the previous inspection. This improvement has led to some higher attainment at Key Stage 3 and improving standards at Key Stage 4. Well-planned lessons, based on teachers' secure knowledge and understanding, motivate students and promote learning.

22. At Key Stage 3, the quality of teaching is at least satisfactory in 94 per cent of lessons seen; good or better in 56 per cent and very good in 15 per cent. Teaching is less than satisfactory in six per cent of lessons and never poor. Good teaching is the principal factor in improving standards at Key Stage 3. The quality of teaching is good in art, design and technology, geography, mathematics, physical education and religious education. It is satisfactory in all other subjects.

23. At Key Stage 4, the quality of teaching is at least satisfactory in 94 per cent of lessons seen; good or better in 72 per cent and very good or excellent in 16 per cent. The quality of teaching is less than satisfactory in six per cent of lessons and never poor. The quality of teaching is satisfactory in information technology, modern foreign languages, music and science. It is good in all other subjects.

24. In the sixth form, the quality of teaching is at least satisfactory in 97 per cent of lessons seen; good or better in 77 per cent and very good or excellent in 32 per cent. Teaching is very good in art and history, good in design and technology, English, geography and mathematics. It is satisfactory in all other subjects.

25. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen in art, design and technology, English, information technology and physical education. The five per cent of teaching that was unsatisfactory overall was limited to an occasional lesson in several subjects across the school.

26. The quality of learning matches the quality of teaching in almost all subjects. In geography, however, the satisfactory learning does not fully reflect the good quality of

teaching seen during the inspection. The quality of students' learning over time in geography has been adversely affected by long-running difficulties in staffing. Appropriate attention is paid to basic skills teaching at both Key Stage 3 and 4. The school's literacy and numeracy policies are well supported by subject departments. For example, in a Year 8 German class students converted the results of a survey into bar charts on which data was entered accurately. In design and technology the use of correct terms is encouraged by word displays and in Key Stage 4 history there is good preparation for extended writing.

27. Teachers know their subjects well, and this results in a confident approach in the classroom, helps to enthuse students and involves them in their learning. This is a particular strength in art, shown clearly in challenging lectures on artists given to sixth form students. In English, students gain rapid understanding of texts because of the clear way in which teachers are able to explain them. In mathematics, concepts are explained clearly to ensure students' understanding. Work and the pace of lessons are generally well matched to students' needs. Although extension activities are occasionally provided for higher attaining students, there are many instances across the school of higher attaining students being insufficiently challenged, because not enough is demanded, or expected, of them. This reflects concerns expressed by some parents. Although there are other shortcomings in some lessons, this is the most common in an otherwise very positive picture. For example, in a Year 9 science lesson the time of those students who finished their work quickly was wasted and they became restless, interfering with the general progress of the lesson. Higher attaining students in a Year 8 religious education class were presented with identical work to that given to a lower attaining group. An exercise planned for a Year 9 English group did not stretch them. A Year 9 German group worked below their level of capability because planning did not sufficiently take their prior learning into account. In a Year 7 history lesson, higher attainers were not challenged to think by questioning, and superficial answers were accepted.

28. The great majority of teachers use a variety of methods to ensure that students behave well and concentrate, so that they get the most out of lessons. The calm approach adopted in Year 9 French lessons leads to a good working atmosphere in which students make good progress. The effective use of well-timed praise was seen to improve performance in a Year 9 physical education lesson. High quality practical demonstrations in art reinforce lesson objectives and show students what they can achieve. Teachers know their students well; relationships are good and this creates a positive approach to learning. There are occasional lapses of behaviour, usually when lesson planning does not provide sufficient variety to maintain students' interest or motivation, and learning is affected. However, in work seen during the inspection, behaviour was satisfactory overall and was good in most lessons. Inspectors did not find evidence to support the concerns, expressed by some parents, that poor behaviour is impeding progress in the school.

29. Students with special educational needs are well taught within mainstream subject classes, and there is good teaching of basic skills in the small withdrawal groups. Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of their students' needs and adapt their teaching styles and learning materials effectively to enable their students to learn with confidence and to make sound progress. When students have support in the classroom, the good coordination between subject teacher and support staff has a positive impact on students' progress. For example, in Year 11 design and technology the support assistants were seen



clearly working as part of the teaching team and in Year 9 French they worked closely with the teacher to check how much help should be given to promote students' progress.

30. Most teachers use day-to-day assessment and marking effectively to support learning across the school, but there are exceptions. For example, the exercise books of a Year 8 music group have not been marked for two months, and the marking policies in mathematics and science are not applied consistently. Generally, however, marking is regular and usually tells students what they need to do to improve. Assessment is a particularly strong feature in design and technology at Key Stage 4. A series of tests and reviews keeps students well informed about their progress and also how they might do better. Targets are set and progress towards them checked. Good end of lesson reviews and well-managed discussions, for example in Year 9 mathematics, help to consolidate learning and check progress. However, assessment is not consistently used to inform planning and to set targets within all departments. There is scope for teachers to share existing good practice.

31. Inconsistent use is made of information technology to enhance and enrich the curriculum. Few teachers make effective use of information technology to support learning and opportunities are missed, for example, to develop research skills. In consequence, students' skills are not as well developed as they should be. In some cases this is because there is insufficient equipment to meet needs. For example, teachers in modern foreign languages are trained and willing to use information technology but their use of it is restricted by limited access to equipment.

32. The common feature of the unsatisfactory teaching seen during the inspection is a lack of planning which leads to other shortcomings. For example, opportunities were missed to extend learning in a Year 13 German class, and low levels of motivation in a Year 9 history class led to unsatisfactory behaviour.

33. Parents raised concerns about the amount and quality of the work students are expected to do at home. Inspection evidence indicates that the overall use of homework is satisfactory and in some departments, such as art, design and technology and religious education, it makes a good contribution to extending students' learning.

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

34. The curriculum is broad and balanced, and meets statutory requirements apart from in the provision of a daily act of collective worship, the provision for religious education in the sixth form and for the teaching of information technology across the curriculum. The curriculum includes all subjects of the National Curriculum as well as religious education and personal and social education. The length of the teaching week, at 25 hours, is in line with the model for comprehensive schools nationally at Key Stage 3 and for the DfEE recommended time at Key Stage 4. With the exception of German, the time allocation to subjects is appropriate. At Key Stage 4, all students follow a core curriculum with two further options. In the sixth form the range of courses reflects the abilities of the students, and includes GNVQ courses, as well as A levels. The school operates an inclusive policy for students with special educational needs and offers appropriate courses to meet the needs and aptitudes of these students. Provision is good for students with statements of special educational need across the school. The curriculum is accessible to all students on the special needs register, and older students benefit from being able to take vocational courses in addition to academic subjects. Literacy skills are taught effectively, particularly in the small withdrawal groups. Effective partnerships have been established with the

careers service, local training providers such as the Marches Consortium, and also the local community so that students can develop confidence and improve their skills through courses and work experience placements which are designed to meet their requirements. The school is in the process of developing its involvement in initial teacher training, the quality of which is already good.

35. The school has an effective literacy strategy, which enables students to gain full access to a wide range of experiences in their subjects. This is having a positive effect on their standards of literacy. A numeracy policy is in place, but it is not sufficiently detailed to provide clear direction on how to teach basic skills in subjects other than mathematics.

36. The school provides a very wide range of extra-curricular activities that enrich curricular provision. More than 50 per cent of the school's population takes an active part in extra-curricular sport, supervised by a total of 18 staff. Many departments offer subject help clubs in addition to out of school activities and educational visits. Homework clubs and mentoring groups contribute to raising standards.

37. There is equality of access and opportunity for students. This enables them all to benefit from the opportunities provided, according to their needs.

38. A well-planned personal development programme is provided for all students. Systems are in place to monitor the teaching and effectiveness of the programme, which is taught in a broadly satisfactory manner by form tutors. The programme includes health education, sex education, bullying and issues of drug misuse, which are comprehensively covered. The scheme builds progressively throughout a student's school life.

39. The provision for careers education and guidance is good. The programme at Key Stage 4 includes the opportunity for all students to have one week's work experience in Year 10 and another in Year 11. Members of the teaching staff monitor all work experience, with careful preparation and follow-up during and after the placement.

40. The school is a community school and is the base for the recently established Leominster Educational Resource Centre (LERC). Sixth form students will have access to the LERC facilities as it develops, providing a useful additional resource for the school. Plans are also underway for lifelong learning, which will also involve sixth formers and community groups. Many groups already use school facilities during the day, giving an opportunity for the public to join with the older students in sporting and leisure activities. The community contributes very well to students' learning, for example through the industrial mentoring scheme.

41. The school has very good relationships with partner institutions. The induction programme for Year 7 students is successful. A series of meetings and events enables Year 6 pupils to become familiar with the school and the transfer of information between schools is good. There are also effective links with further and higher education.

42. The school makes satisfactory provision overall for the spiritual development of students. It has not, however, adequately tackled a key issue of the previous inspection report, concerning its statutory responsibility to provide a daily act of worship for all students. Assemblies only take place on three days a week, with each year group attending one assembly. No provision is made for their spiritual development on the other days, when they meet in their tutor groups.

43. The school takes the conduct of assemblies seriously, and plans them effectively.

They have good moral and social content and make a positive contribution to establishing the school's values. Opportunities are provided to enrich students' experience through the use of poetry and music. They are, however, generally lacking in the key characteristics of worship, and in Christian or religious content.

44. Contributions to the spiritual development of students are made in some lessons, but opportunities are not consistently identified in planning and opportunities are missed. A good contribution is made in music; lessons include reflection on the effects of war on children, and music is used to portray feelings and to reflect mood. In a religious education lesson, Christian responses to contraception were discussed along with issues such as the sanctity of life, providing good opportunities for students to reflect on their own beliefs and values. In history a good contribution is made to students' understanding through the study of religion as a vital factor in the lives of people in past centuries.

45. The school makes good provision for the moral development of students. It has clear values, which inform its everyday life and contribute to the positive ethos of the school. Staff are good role models for students and expect them to behave well, care for others and have a clear sense of right and wrong. This is reflected in the overall quality of relationships in the school. The school code of conduct provides a clear framework for behaviour. Students are challenged by moral issues in the personal development programme and in a range of other subjects. In history, they discuss the slave trade, anti-Semitism in Hitler's Germany and child labour in the industrial revolution. In geography, the moral implications of catastrophes such as earthquakes are discussed. In science, videos are used to prompt thinking about environmental issues. These are also considered in design technology.

46. The school makes very good provision for the social development of students. There are many activities within the school that encourage students to form positive relationships. The personal, social and health education course makes a strong contribution through the consideration of topics such as first aid, personal finance, relationships and citizenship. Many local businesses and visitors from the community, the police force, the church and the armed forces are involved in supporting the curriculum. Individual departments provide a range of opportunities to work with a partner, and small groups develop co-operative work, listening, discussing and respecting each other's points of view.

47. The school makes good provision for the cultural development of students outside the classroom through visits to art galleries and sporting visits abroad. The school's contact with very many countries in Europe and further afield is a great strength. Links with Finland, established via the Internet, add a further dimension. Many boards of exciting photographs of expeditions abroad are displayed in the hall and reception area. These generate great interest among students and visitors and encourage multi-cultural interest.

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

48. The school provides good pastoral care. Tutors and, especially, the heads of year know their students well. Routine procedures to ensure their safety both in the school and on visits outside are effective: for example, risk assessments have recently been carried out. Child protection procedures are good. One of the deputy heads is the designated teacher.

49. The school is aware of the need to reduce the current high level of unauthorised absence. Students' attendance is efficiently monitored. Computerised registration is used both for the formal registration sessions and in lessons. This makes it possible for the school to follow up cases of absence, for example suspected truancy, swiftly. Parents are encouraged to report absence promptly, and the school has recently started to contact them on the first day a student is absent.

50. There are good procedures to enforce discipline and promote good behaviour. During the past year these procedures have been reviewed to ensure that all members of staff apply them consistently. The contrast between the generally good behaviour in lessons and the lapses seen around the school demonstrates that these measures have led to improved classroom behaviour, but that there is still some way to go before they are fully effective. Incidents of bullying are rare and are handled promptly when they occur. Good behaviour and achievement are rewarded through commendations and an annual awards ceremony.

51. The procedures to assess students' attainment and progress are good. Key Stage 2 National Curriculum test results, spelling and reading tests are combined to build up a clear picture of students' attainment when they arrive at the school. This information is analysed effectively and used well to monitor the progress students make during Key Stage 3. The school also has good procedures to assess and monitor progress at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, which take previous attainment into account. Heads of year, helped by their tutor teams, record and monitor personal development and overall progress. They keep careful records and notes which, combined with their good knowledge of students and good relationships, enable them to do this.

52. Satisfactory overall use is made of assessment to guide curriculum planning. Most subjects follow the guidelines on assessment effectively and relate them accurately to the National Curriculum. Some subjects, including history and design and technology, use the assessment data particularly well, but not all subjects follow such good practice consistently. This results in work not being consistently matched to individual needs and some students, notably higher attainers, not making as much progress as they could.

53. The support and advice that the school provides for students are satisfactory overall. There are some good initiatives, such as the New Start programme which has helped a group of low attainers to make better progress. Traveller students in the school receive special support. All students have personal interviews with their tutors to discuss their annual report. Heads of year note academic progress but, as these notes are based on reports, they provide an annual check rather than a continuous picture. The only exceptions relate to students who are already causing concern and those students in Year 11 who are making insufficient progress in GCSE courses. Tracking of students' progress is satisfactory, although at an early stage.

54. The school monitors the academic performance and personal development of students with special educational needs effectively. The systems for identifying students in need of extra help and the arrangements for monitoring and assessing the progress of students with statements of special educational need are good. Individual education plans are in place for all the students who need them, with clear targets for improvement in basic skills, behaviour and personal development, together with subject specific targets where applicable.

55. The quality of the support and guidance for students with special educational needs is good. The regular interchange of information between teachers, support staff and pastoral staff, together with the very good liaison between the school and local support agencies, such as the Travellers Education Service and the Youth Enquiry Service, ensure that students' needs are promptly identified and appropriate action is taken. Good support for learning and personal development is given through additional school activities such as the homework club, the paired reading scheme, and the buddying scheme. Students also benefit from initiatives such as the Voluntary Education Training Opportunities, the New Start Programme, and visits which are designed to enlarge their horizons and develop their social skills.

56. The good standards of pastoral care noted in the last inspection report have been maintained. The same is true of assessment, though there are still inconsistencies in practice between subject departments. There has been some improvement in monitoring students' progress.

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

57. Parents consider the school broadly satisfactory. Inspectors agree with most of the views they expressed. Most parents who returned the questionnaire and attended the parents' meeting are pleased with what the school provides for their children, though there were also some concerns. Some parents do not consider behaviour in the school to be good. The inspectors found that students' behaviour in lessons was generally good, but they agree with the parents' concerns about lower standards of behaviour out of class. There are some concerns among parents about the amount of homework students are expected to do. Inspectors noted that a reasonable amount of homework was set in lessons observed during the course of the inspection. The quality of information they receive about their children's progress concerns some parents. Inspectors consider that the annual reports to parents give good information to parents at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form, but that the information provided at Key Stage 4 is more limited, although it does comply with statutory minimum requirements. It is the opinion of some parents that the school does not work closely with parents. No evidence was found during the inspection to substantiate this opinion. Some parents think the school is not well led and managed. The inspectors consider that leadership and management are good.

58. The school has effective links with parents. It is keen to seek their views, for example by surveying parents in Years 7 and 9, and by inviting parents to contribute to discussions on the curriculum at the governors' annual meeting. Parents are given good information about the school and its activities through the prospectus, the governors' annual report, newsletters and other booklets. The quantity and quality of information about progress vary. There are currently three different versions of annual reports. At Key Stage 3 reports are very detailed and give parents clear information about what their children have studied, how well they have done, and what they need to do to improve. However, they do not contain a report on students' levels of competence in information and communication technology (ICT). Reports on post-16 students provide similar detail. In addition to subject and tutor reports, students have to assess and review their own performance. At Key Stage 4 the reports currently used – they are about to change – are not as good and give more limited information about progress, but they do comply with statutory minimum requirements.

59. The school has a good partnership with parents of students with special educational needs. Many parents contribute to the reviews of their children's progress, they often help their children at home and they are pleased with the way in which their children are

supported and integrated within the life of the school.

60. Although the school has good links with parents, the impact of their involvement with the school is only satisfactory. There is a home/school agreement. Not all parents sign homework diaries promptly – or at all. Attendance at consultation evenings averages about 53 per cent. The school survey indicated that many parents do not like the early timing of these evenings. However, the school does contact those parents who are unable or unwilling to attend. The Friends of Minster College raise funds and organise some educational discussions.

61. Standards are similar to those reported in the last inspection: there have been few changes.

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

62. The quality of leadership and management is good. The headteacher provides very good leadership and is fully committed to raising standards in the school and providing an educational resource for the wider community. She has established a clear direction for the work of the school and a sense of common purpose and shared values among staff. The school's aims and values are central to the work of the school and all policies and development plans are related to them. There is a clear commitment to providing equality of opportunity for all students. The headteacher is well supported by the complementary strengths of the senior management team. The strengths and weaknesses of the school are well understood and effective action is taken to manage improvement. The effectiveness of an approach that identifies priorities for improvement and then allocates resources and training to them can be seen in the improvements in behaviour management and teaching since the previous inspection. Some of the parents who responded to the questionnaire tended to disagree that the school was well managed. Inspectors' judgements do not support that view. Management, at all levels, is never less than satisfactory.

63. The overall quality of leadership at middle management level is good. Clear direction is established for subjects. Monitoring and support of teaching are generally satisfactory but vary in effectiveness. For example, in English new management has already brought about improvement; in modern foreign languages and science there is close monitoring of teaching and standards of students' work. Particularly effective support is provided in history and geography to maintain quality over a period of staffing difficulties which has required teaching in both departments by temporary, sometimes, non-specialist, teachers. However, monitoring of teaching in mathematics and physical education is insufficiently rigorous and this limits effectiveness. There is a strong commitment to improving standards in all departments. However, although departments analyse results carefully and set targets for improvement, expectations of students, particularly higher attainers, are not consistently high enough and the use of assessment to identify underachievement at an early stage is not consistent.

64. The governing body is well informed and has a good working knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. There is a planned programme of subject reviews and governors work with the senior management team to identify areas for development, set targets and evaluate progress towards them. Their wide range of expertise and their links with the community enable them to consult and reflect community opinions and to give good support to the work of the school. However, the governing body fails to meet some of its statutory requirements. The school does not comply fully with the requirements to provide a daily act of collective worship. Provision for religious education in the sixth form

does not meet the requirements of the Local Agreed Syllabus. The requirement to teach information technology across the curriculum is not met.

65. The school management has a strong commitment to special educational needs, and the designated governors bring experience and enthusiasm to their work. Management of special educational needs is now good. After a period of discontinuity a new special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) was appointed in September and has established effective systems for monitoring and evaluating progress. The school's policy for special educational needs is being rewritten. Statutory requirements in respect of students with statements of special educational needs are met. The school makes good strategic use of the resources for special educational needs, including additional funding and specific grants, such as that for the New Start programme, which has raised standards among a number of students, who were identified as being disaffected and disadvantaged.

66. Development planning is good, both at whole school and department level. Priorities are identified through consultation and review and are clearly linked to securing improvement in the short, medium and long term. Trends are observed and targeted. There are systems to compare the school's performance with that of others. The targets set for standards of achievement are realistic and challenging. With the exception of provision of a daily act of collective worship and provision of information technology across the curriculum, the action plan drawn up in response to the previous inspection dealt successfully with the issues raised.

67. Financial planning is very good. The school manages its budget effectively and has good procedures to ensure best value for money when allocating funds and purchasing goods and services. This does not yet extend to monitoring the long-term effects of training on classroom standards. Governors play an active role in strategic financial planning and management. A good working relationship between governors and staff is maintained through frequent contacts.

68. Routine administration of the school's budget is efficient; the auditor's report was positive and recommendations have been implemented. Competent administration ensures that the school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. The provision of non-teaching staff is well matched to the school's needs. They are well managed and provide effective support for the work of the school.

69. The school has sufficient qualified and experienced teachers. The match of teaching staff to curriculum needs is good and has improved since the previous inspection. There are a few exceptions, mainly in the humanities faculty where, despite the school's best efforts, long term absence through illness has affected students' progress at Key Stage 4. The comprehensive staff review carried out since the previous inspection has had a positive effect on standards of attainment.

70. Although the school has a high proportion of recently appointed teachers, the very thorough induction arrangements ensure that they are well supported. Heads of department give strong support to newly qualified teachers and they receive additional support from senior staff. The school is currently working on increasing its involvement in initial teacher training and is well placed both to participate and benefit from it.

71. The formal appraisal system is currently in abeyance. However, departments have agreed monitoring procedures to ensure that appropriate staff development needs are met. In-service training is closely linked to departmental plans and whole school initiatives.

72. The school's accommodation is adequate. Most subjects have at least satisfactory provision and the facilities available to physical education are excellent. Modern foreign languages and English are poorly served by comparison, being housed in buildings that form the oldest part of the school. These are in a poor state of decoration and repair; conditions generally are not conducive to raising standards or promoting the worth of these subjects. Music lacks sufficient practice rooms and space for larger teaching groups – deficiencies that were mentioned in the previous report. The stage at the back of the main hall is cluttered with discarded objects including desks, and the stage lighting board is too accessible to unsupervised students. In other respects, including outdoor areas, the school provides an attractive environment for students to learn and play.

73. The school has adequate resources to meet National Curriculum needs in most subjects and makes effective use of them to support learning and promote students' progress. The principal exceptions are music and modern foreign languages. In music the overall level of resources is unsatisfactory and, in particular, there is insufficient provision of classroom percussion instruments. In French and German, standards are affected by the lack of appropriate textbooks to meet the needs of the wide ability range and there are not enough books to allow students to take them home to support homework. Despite improvement since the previous inspection, access to appropriate information technology equipment is insufficient to meet the needs of departments across the school. This restricts the use of information technology to support learning and is affecting standards of competence.

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

74. To raise further the standards of work and the quality of education provided, the governors and senior management should:

1. Raise attainment, particularly in
  - English at Key Stage 3 by increasing the pace and challenge of lessons and reviewing grouping arrangements;
  - science at both key stages by:
    - consistent use of assessment to assist planning and learning,
    - improving the continuity of learning at Key Stage 3.

(See paragraphs 7, 10, 11, 13, 15, 77, 81, 86, 100, 101, 103, 112, 128, 152, 160, 161, 162, 163)
2. Raise expectations of teachers, students and parents so that all students, particularly the most able are sufficiently challenged.  
(See paragraphs 15, 27, 97, 103, 108, 117, 178)
3. Ensure consistency of management in departments to improve monitoring and support for teaching and to improve the use of assessment to inform planning and target setting.  
(See paragraphs 30, 52, 63, 109, 110, 135)
4. Meet statutory requirements in respect of:



a daily act of collective worship;  
the provision of religious education in the sixth form;

teaching of information technology across the curriculum to meet National Curriculum requirements and reporting competence to parents.

(See paragraphs 31, 34, 42, 43, 64, 66, 73, 99, 113, 118, 132, 144, 145, 147, 148, 157, 159, 179)

These were issues in the previous report and remain to be dealt with fully.

75. The following less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the action plan:

- Students' behaviour out of lessons.
- Access to appropriate facilities for teaching information technology across the curriculum.

(See paragraphs 17, 31, 50, 66, 73, 112, 113, 132, 144, 148, 150, 157)

### **Community links**

76. The links that the school has established with the community are very good. They contribute both to students' learning and to the life of the community. As the only secondary school in the town, the school considers it has an important part to play here. It is a focal point for many events. The list of contacts and links is extensive and varied. Most subjects of the curriculum and year groups are represented. They include hosting a Youth Festival or Arts, and making use of local resources in history and geography. The LERC is an important facility for the school and the community. Groups from the school, such as the Minstrels, take part in Arts Festivals in the area and visit local primary schools to perform. Students play an active part in the life of the community through work experience and charitable work. In return they benefit from links with local industry and business.

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	153
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	57

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	17	46	30	5	0	0

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

### Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	607	73
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	65	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	26	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	138	0

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	39
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	40

### Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	6.3
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	3.0
National comparative data	1.1

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	44	66	110

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	18	27	22
	Girls	49	40	32
	Total	67	67	54
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	62.6(81.4)	63.2(56.8)	50.5(55.1)
	National	63(65)	62(60)	55(56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	20.6(35.3)	37.8(33.9)	14(21.2)
	National	28(35)	38(36)	23(27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	16(48)	27(26)	17(48)
	Girls	53(42)	44(22)	31(34)
	Total	69(90)	71(48)	48(82)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	63(54.8)	65(38.4)	45(66)
	National	64(62)	64(64)	60(62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	24(17.7)	37.3(11.2)	14.5(12.9)
	National	31(31)	37(37)	28(31)

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	59	57	116

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	22(13)	53(60)	54(64)
	Girls	30(26)	53(57)	54(57)
	Total	52(39)	106(117)	108(121)
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	44.8(31.7)	91.4(95.1)	93.1(98.4)
	National	46.3(43.3)	90.7(89.8)	95.7(95.2)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	36(32)
	National	37.8(36.8)

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	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	12	16	28

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	12.9	16.5	14.9(14.6)	0	4	3
National	17.7	18.1	17.9	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	N/A
	National	N/A

### **Ethnic background of pupils**

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	679
Any other minority ethnic group	0

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

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	26	5
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

### **Teachers and classes**

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

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	38.85
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.9

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

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

Total number of education support staff	18
Total aggregate hours worked per week	362

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

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	79.6
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	26
Key Stage 4	23.6

### **Financial information**

Financial year	1998/99
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	£
Total income	1676615
Total expenditure	1694957
Expenditure per pupil	2515
Balance brought forward from previous year	117514
Balance carried forward to next year	99172

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	680
Number of questionnaires returned	111

### Percentage of responses in each category\*

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	24	60	14	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	30	56	14	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	17	51	23	5	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	15	55	25	4	1
The teaching is good.	22	67	8	1	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	23	49	20	8	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	47	40	11	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	44	47	6	1	2
The school works closely with parents.	23	49	21	3	5
The school is well led and managed.	15	56	18	2	9
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	24	60	10	1	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	30	52	11	2	5

\*Rounded to nearest whole number

### Other issues raised by parents

Lower than expected academic standards at Key Stage 3

Inconsistency of homework

Bullying

Poor behaviour affecting progress

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

### **ENGLISH**

77. Students' 1999 average points score at the age of 14 in National Curriculum tests was below average compared with all schools and well below average compared with similar schools. Although results have varied considerably over the last three years, there has been an improving trend. The average points scores in both mathematics and science were higher than English in 1999. The performance of boys was similar to that of girls in 1998, but considerably worse in 1999. The new head of department is vigorously tackling this issue in various practical ways underpinned by his own wide knowledge of the subject.

78. In GCSE examinations in 1999 the proportion of students gaining A\*-C grades was slightly below the national average in English and well below in GCSE English literature. Results for A\*-G grades at 100 per cent were above the national averages for both subjects. Students' average points scores were similar to those in mathematics and higher than for science. Drama results were poor in comparison with the national average.

79. At A level, results for English literature in 1999 were well below national averages in the award of A-B grades and below for A-E grades. In English language results for both ranges were slightly below average. Average points scores for both subjects were below the average for the school, considerably so in the case of English literature.

80. It is clear that standards of attainment and results have fallen since the last inspection. The present English department is virtually new, and is working hard to recover lost ground and restore confidence.

81. In work seen during the inspection standards of attainment at Key Stage 3 are below average, reflecting the standards of students' attainment on entry. Lower attaining students have significant literacy difficulties, particularly in reading, handwriting, and extended writing, but grouping arrangements enable extra help to be given and there is good support for students with special educational needs. Middle and higher attainers are not so well served by the grouping arrangements because they do not enable all students, particularly the highest attainers, to move on quickly enough to achieve their full potential. This judgement supports the view expressed by parents. The last inspection report judged standards to be as expected for the age group with below average results in the 1995 Key Stage 3 tests. The current position is similar.

82. In work seen during the inspection, Key Stage 4 standards of attainment are satisfactory overall. The written work of lower attainers continues to be marred by weaknesses in spelling and sentence punctuation but it shows understanding of key issues and some imaginative involvement. Other students produce more accurate and thorough pieces of work, and the higher attainers successfully attempt more sophisticated and extended explorations into their set texts, particularly when comparing short stories. Their work, especially for those capable of attaining the highest grades, would benefit from greater focus on key points justified by telling examples – at present length is preferred to quality. The standard of listening is a strong feature of attainment, particularly evident in a Year 10 class during discussion and debate on the text "Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry". In drama, on limited observation, standards of attainment are satisfactory. Students work well together and are willing to take responsibility for their own learning as they prepare for the performance element of their examination. The last inspection report recorded above average GCSE A\*-C grades in English and well above average GCSE English literature

grades. The current position shows lower attainment in comparison.

83. In work seen during the inspection standards of attainment in the sixth form are satisfactory overall. The current Year 13 has few higher attainers. Their writing is generally clear but unsophisticated in style and students are still struggling to find the fluency of expression that is necessary for the highest grades. They show good understanding of set texts but in critical analysis English language students, in particular, are still awkward in their use of theoretical knowledge of grammar, speech style and use of vocabulary to underpin their examination of texts. Higher standards of attainment are apparent in Year 12, where, for example, students show a pleasing involvement in their work and some perceptive insights into *King Lear*.

84. Most subjects make at least a satisfactory contribution to standards of literacy. All subjects expect and obtain a good standard of listening, which is an improvement since the last inspection when this skill was regarded as under-developed. There are satisfactory and often good opportunities for reading, writing and speaking in history, mathematics, science, religious education, design and technology and information technology. In particular, science provides a focus on technological and scientific terms to raise attainment at Key Stage 4, and teachers' marking includes correction of spelling and punctuation. Design and technology and information technology offer many opportunities to practise key skills through reading, research, writing and discussion activities. In religious education students' literacy skills are developed at all levels of ability, with emphasis placed on paragraphing, punctuation, and self-evaluation. Reading and speaking opportunities are restricted in art and modern foreign languages, and there is also little writing in the latter. In geography students have few opportunities for extended writing at Key Stage 3 and lack the appropriate vocabulary to convey their ideas when joining in discussion or answering questions. The school's literacy policy is in place and, although not fully implemented, it is having a positive effect in raising awareness of the importance of standards of literacy across the curriculum.

85. Attitudes to learning are good overall. The virtually new teaching team has worked hard on classroom management and has established good relationships between teachers and students. As a result, students' attitudes to English are positive. Most students are willing to cooperate, behave well and find the learning interesting. For example, a student with special educational needs in Year 8 volunteered to read aloud for the first time in a lesson. Higher attaining students in Year 10 gave their total attention throughout the period and contributed intelligently and perceptively to debate and discussion with their teacher on a coursework text. Students in Year 12 showed keen interest and involvement as a result of following their teacher's carefully structured group work on *King Lear*. There remain some students in Year 11 who are still reluctant to make an effort and use group work as an opportunity to chat rather than work. It is apparent, however, that most students are growing more confident in their ability to succeed as a result of the greater continuity and quality of the teaching they receive. In drama, on limited observation, students are well motivated and thoughtful about their work as a result of their teacher's involvement and expectations.

86. The quality of teaching is good overall, being satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Teachers have detailed knowledge of texts and how language is used. In the sixth form, for example, key points about prose style were illustrated from the work of a wide range of writers to the benefit of English language students. Teachers manage their classrooms well and have established good relationships with students and a context for learning with consequent positive effect on students' attitudes. Teachers have a good range of methods at their disposal to interest and motivate



students including frameworks for writing, charts to assist in character analysis and sequencing activities to establish plot outlines. The best teaching provides extra challenge to students' thinking by probing questions and active involvement of all students in discussion and debate. At times, teaching lacks pace and challenge. For example, in a Year 9 lesson preparation for writing a horror story was over-detailed and did not permit higher attainers to move on fast enough. Occasionally, the order of activities works against the learning atmosphere, as it did in a Year 8 lesson when ending with reading rather than writing would have produced more productive work. In drama teaching is good, characterised by high expectations, good advice and guidance to individuals and encouragement of independent learning.

87. The quality of learning is good overall, and substantially reflects the teaching, being satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. At Key Stage 3 learning is often good in developing structures for writing, practising reading, gaining understanding of texts and widening vocabulary. However, at times not all students are involved or productive throughout the lesson. At Key Stage 4 there are often rapid increases in understanding and opportunities to be intellectually challenged by the work. Students are usually productive and sustain interest and concentration for lengthy periods. In the sixth form students make good gains in knowledge and understanding, and most importantly are gaining confidence in their ability to succeed as a result of the continuous and consistently intelligent teaching they receive. In drama students show increased motivation and gains in confidence.

88. Although accommodation for the English department is adequate, classrooms in the antiquated building are worn and tired. The poor quality of the teaching environment does not support the strong ethos for learning and positive attitudes towards English that the new leader and his team are successfully promoting.

89. Since the last inspection, staffing difficulties have led to a fall in standards of attainment and examination results. The new team, though still lacking its full complement, provides teaching quality at least as good as that referred to in the last report, and with its intelligent leadership and sense of common direction it has good potential to improve.

## **MATHEMATICS**

90. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is close to the national average. In the 1999 National Curriculum tests, the proportion of students achieving the nationally expected levels 5 and 6 was close to the national average. Attainment was in line with national averages for schools taking students from similar backgrounds. Girls and boys achieved similar results. Results in mathematics are better than those in both English and science. Over the three years 1997 to 1999 students' average levels have improved at a similar rate to national averages.

91. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, the proportion of students gaining grades A\*-C was close to the national average. These results represent a significant improvement on 1998 results and are as high as they should be taking into account students' prior attainment. The proportion gaining A\*-G was above results nationally. Girls and boys achieved similar results. Students' results in mathematics were significantly better than their results in other subjects. Results in mathematics were similar to those in English and better than those in science. In 1999, only two students were entered for GCE A level mathematics. The size of the group makes any comparison with national averages unreliable. Both students were successful with one student obtaining grade A.

92. In the work seen during the inspection standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are in line with those expected at the age of 14. Number skills are generally satisfactory; Year 8 higher attaining students can handle percentages confidently. Algebraic skills are weak for other than the highest attaining students; work in books showed many students having difficulty with solving equations. Satisfactory measuring skills were evident in design technology where students are able to use millimetres accurately when cutting materials. Shape and space are developed well; students in Year 7 are able to identify lines of symmetry and in Year 9 higher attaining students are able to use the concepts of trigonometry confidently. Problem solving skills are not well developed for students on joining the school and, though they improve by the end of Year 9, are still not as good as they should be. Good progress is made with data handling skills; lower attaining students in Year 8 were seen dealing confidently with different measures of average.

93. At the end of Key Stage 4, standards in the work seen are in line with those expected at the age of 16. Number skills are satisfactory; students in science handle the calculations of speed confidently. Algebraic skills are still weak for all but the highest attaining students; lower attaining students in Year 10 can plot co-ordinates whilst higher attaining students can factorise algebraic expressions. Most students use calculators confidently and accurately. Data handling skills are satisfactory; students are able to demonstrate good graphical skills in geography. Shape and space are being developed well with students in art showing a sound understanding of the concepts of perspective. Problem solving skills improve with students developing a better understanding of identifying patterns and finding rules.

94. The overall attainment of students in the sixth form is below that expected at the age of 18. Students are attaining at levels in line with their prior attainment. Students were seen using graphical calculators confidently to sketch curves and developing well the ideas associated with projectile motion, probability and calculus.

95. Learning is good at Key Stage 3. Below average levels of attainment on entry are improved significantly during the key stage. Higher, average and lower attaining students all make good progress. Students with special educational need make good progress as a result of the good support they receive in lessons. There is no significant difference in the progress of boys and girls though the boys do not apply themselves as well as the girls in some lessons. Progress at Key Stage 4 is satisfactory for most students. Students with special educational need make good progress and this is reflected in the 1999 GCSE results where all students gained at least grade F. Progress in the sixth form is good.

96. Attitudes to learning are good throughout the school. Students usually behave well. Most students concentrate on their tasks though there are some lessons where students are allowed to waste time talking. Listening skills are good; students usually listen attentively when teachers are talking. Most students show interest in what they are doing and appear suitably motivated by teachers. When required to work together students share ideas well. The presentation of results is usually good. Most students take a pride in their work; they draw tables, diagrams and charts neatly. The attitudes of students in the sixth form are good.

97. Teaching is good. It is best at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form. This good teaching is contributing well to the good learning at Key Stage 3 and improving standards. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are able to explain concepts clearly, which helps students with their understanding. Lesson planning is good; good links are made with the content of earlier lessons and those planned for the future. Learning support assistants are used well and contribute effectively to the good progress of students with special

educational needs. Lessons are usually conducted at a brisk pace ensuring that the learning is good for different groups of students. Where the pace is not as brisk, for example with the Year 8 higher attaining students, then the rate of learning is slower than expected. Questioning of students is generally good though some teachers do not explore sufficiently students' knowledge and understanding. Good use is made of different levels of tasks to develop students' skills, knowledge, and understanding. Where teaching is least effective the management and control of the students are weak.

98. The subject is well managed and the subject co-ordinator provides a clear direction for the subject. There is a commitment to raising standards. Resources are mostly adequate, although there are insufficient textbooks for the new scheme in Year 7. Although mental arithmetic is developed in lessons the schemes of work do not include effective strategies for its delivery. Problem solving activities are also not included as a regular part of the programmes of study. Opportunities are limited to use computers to support learning. Good support is given to teachers by the subject co-ordinator but opportunities to monitor teaching within the subject have been limited. The numeracy policy does not provide sufficient detail about how the basic skills should be developed in other subjects.

99. Standards of attainment at Key Stage 3 have improved since the last inspection, as has the overall quality of the teaching. The use of computers for learning has improved but there is still insufficient access to them. The pace of lessons has improved but marking still does not sufficiently inform students about how they can improve.

## **SCIENCE**

100. At age 14 the standards achieved by students at the end of Key Stage 3 in National Curriculum tests are slightly below those achieved by students of the same age nationally. They are better than standards in English, but worse than mathematics. Results are below those of students of the same age in similar schools and show a slight decline over the last three years. There is no significant difference between boys' and girls' attainment.

101. In GCSE examinations in 1999 the proportion of students gaining grades A\*-C was below the national average, although the proportion of those gaining A\*-G grades was above national averages. There has been a slight annual improvement over the last three years in the numbers of students obtaining combined science double award but results remain below English and mathematics. Girls' results are better than boys'.

102. Standards at A level are below national averages and, although there was a 100 per cent pass rate in 1999, the average point score was below the national average. Over the last three years results have been closer to national averages, with girls performing better than boys. Many students leave the school at the age of 16 and sixth form classes are very small, so that the opportunities for stimulating discussion and sharing ideas are not available.

103. In work seen during the inspection, the standards achieved by students at the end of Key Stage 3 are below the level expected of students of the same age nationally. All students work well in pairs and groups and support each other in completing practical work. They are confident at measuring distance, time, mass and volume and maintain these skills across the key stages. However, many students have difficulty in retaining, or recalling, knowledge from earlier lessons. Many show genuine excitement at what they do, for example using a pin hole camera correctly and setting up complex electrical circuits, but they lack the confidence and motivation to describe their success. They can design simple experiments using one variable whilst keeping other factors constant. They can predict

what might happen and, where there is sufficient challenge by the teacher, they are able to explain their observations using appropriate scientific terminology. However, there are too many occasions when not enough is demanded of students, particularly higher attainers, and they are insufficiently challenged. In a small minority of lessons at Key Stage 3 the behaviour of a few students prevents progress and interferes with learning.

104. In work seen during the inspection, the standards achieved by students at the end of Key Stage 4 are broadly in line with standards expected of students of the same age nationally. However, many students at Key Stage 4 lack confidence in their own ability and are reluctant to talk about their work. When encouraged, they can describe what they are doing using appropriate scientific terms, they can follow instructions and work in small groups at their own pace. Few of them have the confidence to work independently and only a few of the most able students have the skills to make critical enquiry.

105. In most lessons, support for students with special educational needs is used effectively to support their learning and they make satisfactory progress towards their targets. Teachers do not expect enough of higher attaining students, so that even when work is matched to students' needs, the most able students are not encouraged to stretch themselves.

106. Standards in the sixth form match course requirements. The very small numbers in some classes prevents real interaction and the students lack confidence to work independently.

107. Standards of numeracy in science are good. There is a clear policy on the use of units and practical work is an important part of the curriculum. Students can draw graphs with proper labels, they can do calculations of forces, molecular masses and they understand terms such as wavelength, frequency, timbre and pitch. They can measure voltage and current, time, volume, mass using the correct units. There is a departmental policy on the use of language and on the consistent use of structure in reporting experiments. Although the use of scientific language is good there are inconsistencies in the reporting of practical work so that, for example, some students do not distinguish between apparatus, method and results.

108. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall at both key stages and in the sixth form. Only a very small proportion of teaching was unsatisfactory. All lessons are well planned and students are prompt, with equipment ready, so that no time is wasted in getting down to work. Resources are used well to support learning, which helps students to use equipment confidently. Teachers have good knowledge of their subject and, in the better lessons, communicate their enthusiasm to their students so that scientific terms are used and understood and the practical applications of science are discussed. Teachers are aware of the differing needs of all the students and support for students with special educational needs is used well. Learning is less than satisfactory when teachers' expectations are low and they do not challenge their students sufficiently. This shows itself in students' lack of motivation to complete work, poor presentation of written work, lack of concentration and a reluctance to answer questions. There is insufficient challenge for the most able students and marking is not used consistently to inform students of their progress or to help lesson planning. At Key Stage 3 the rotation of groups to specialist teachers is having a detrimental effect on the continuity of learning for some students.

109. Management of the department provides clear leadership and ensures that teaching is supported. The curriculum meets statutory requirements. Resources are generally used well to support learning. However, insufficient use is made of information and

communication technology, with the result that students do not automatically think about data logging, simulating experiments and researching topics as a matter of routine. Field courses are offered and visits are made to biotechnology companies. Assessment of students is detailed and used to target support. It is not yet used to inform students of what they need to do to improve, so that they can take responsibility to set targets for themselves. There is still some reluctance by teachers to match tasks in lessons to individual needs, other than for students with special educational needs. The head of department monitors teaching, marking and homework. However, inconsistencies in the marking of work mean that students are not sufficiently clear about how they are progressing and there are unacceptable variations in the standards between classes. The department has no overall policy on the completion of work following a student's absence, which affects overall standards.

110. Improvements since the last inspection include the implementation of monitoring of teaching, homework and marking. By reordering the modules of the curriculum, the length of time that a group of students are with a particular teacher has been extended, so that they can build up relationships and improve classwork. A revision scheme is being built into modules so that specific skills are targeted. The focus on literacy at Key Stage 4 is contributing to raising standards. There are a number of areas requiring further development. These include the consistent use of assessment to assist planning and learning; continuity of learning at Key Stage 3 and higher expectations of more able students throughout the department.

## **Art**

111. Teacher assessments for the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 show that girls are attaining standards in line with national expectations and boys below. The figure for all students is below. Results in GCSE examinations in 1999 were well above national averages for the proportion of students gaining grades A\*- C, with boys' results above and girls' well above. All students achieved grades A\*-G, which is above average. At A level the number of students entered has been small and the results have been disappointing.

112. In work seen during the inspection, attainment at the age of 14 is below national expectations. Students experience an appropriate range of painting and drawing opportunities, artists and styles and art vocabulary. However, the acquisition of observational drawing skills, including the use of perspective, painting skills and knowledge of artists are below national expectations. Many students have difficulty in retaining knowledge, for example the names of artists studied. The range of media experienced is limited, with very little three-dimensional work. There are very good facilities for ceramics and the use of information and communication technology, but large class sizes prevent their use in the relatively small room.

113. In work seen during the inspection, attainment at the age of 16 is in line with national standards. Most students in GCSE classes have satisfactory observational drawing and painting skills and good research skills. They know and understand a good range of artists' work and use art vocabulary appropriately. With two or three notable exceptions, very few have attempted work in three dimensions, and little use is made of information technology.

114. At the age of 18 attainment is above average. The small number of students studying for A level exhibit good drawing technique, for example some fine studies of horses, and portraits. They have a good knowledge of art history and artists' techniques,

which they apply successfully to the interpretation of paintings by Reynolds and Gainsborough. Good use is made of the department's main computer to obtain information.

115. The quality of learning at Key Stages 3 and 4 is good and in the sixth form it is very good. In lessons observed there were clear gains in knowledge and understanding. For example a Year 9 class, containing 12 students with learning difficulties, made distinct gains in learning about colour mixing, composition and perspective and all the students made good progress. Such progress is heavily dependent on good teaching, which routinely revisits previously taught ideas to remind the students and reinforce and consolidate important concepts.

116. Students' attitudes to the subject are positive and there is a reasonable take-up for GCSE courses. Behaviour in the department is good. Although students are carefully directed in their studies at Key Stage 3, they increasingly take responsibility for their own work at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

117. The quality of teaching is good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in the sixth form. At Key Stage 3 non-specialists take a small number of lessons but overall quality is not adversely affected by this. Teachers' knowledge and understanding are very good; planning and methods are effective. In an effective sixth form lecture on British art, and in particular the work of Gainsborough, very good use was made of an appropriate video and relevant articles from the Microsoft art gallery on the computer, when the machine's ability to enlarge details was used with very telling effect. Management of students is very good and makes a significant contribution to the quality of students' learning. Expectations of students, particularly higher attainers, at Key Stage 3 are not consistently high enough and this is reflected in overall standards of attainment.

118. Although the Key Stage 3 curriculum meets statutory requirements, the range of media used is too limited. There is very little three-dimensional work or use of information and communication technology. Class sizes prevent the effective use of the school's information technology suite and use of the department's very good ceramics facilities. This is an inefficient use of resources and denies students the opportunity to explore media. There is a need to broaden the art curriculum.

119. Since the last inspection when overall GCSE results were reported to be below national averages, and boys' were well below, striking improvements have occurred each year. There has been a marked upward trend so that in 1999 overall results were well above average and boys' results were above average.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

120. Attainment in GCSE design and technology in 1999 was above the national average, for the award of grades A\*-C, in food technology. However, in resistant materials students' attainment was below average. The trend since 1997 has been improvement for both areas of technology, but the improvement in standards in resistant materials is slower. Points scores from GCSE results indicate that girls' attainment in design and technology is above their attainment in other subjects; conversely boys' attainment is lower in design and technology than other subjects. Sixth form students follow the General National Vocational Qualification in health and social care. Results in 1999 were in line with national averages for the nine students entered for the examination. All students passed with 22 per cent gaining distinctions and 33 per cent gaining merits.

121. Teachers' assessments show that standards at the age of 14 in design and

technology are below the national average. From work observed during the inspection, attainment is now in line with national expectations. A range of strategies has led to the improvement, including work that focuses on common skills, such as presentation, and improved assessment, moderation of marking and monitoring students' attainment across the modules of technology. Despite this boys remain less successful than girls. Several factors are depressing boys' development of skills, knowledge and understanding: they find personal organisation very difficult and do not persevere when plans go wrong. This limits their research, their planning of the stages for making their product, its further development and their evaluation of the final outcome. For example, during the project 'keeping it contained', boys did not make good use of group work discussions and missed opportunities to improve their designs. Generally their presentation and technical drawing skills lack the precision and finish achieved by the girls. Students' practical making skills are generally stronger than their designing.

122. In work seen during the inspection, the overall standards achieved by students at the end of Key Stage 4 match the level expected of students of the same age nationally. Students continue to develop at a steady rate during the key stage, but boys' progress still lags behind the girls'. Projects are purposeful and enable students to solve problems that relate to personal experience. For example, the project brief on storage brought a range of interesting challenges. Solving the problem of storage for the tackle needed to care for her horse encouraged one student to try a range of possible improvements on equipment produced commercially. Some other students tried to solve the problem of transporting a football safely on the back of their bicycles, which challenged several students to make a totally new invention. Good written and verbal feedback to individual students enables them to see how designs can be modified to meet needs. Girls make better use of this information than boys do and their results improve accordingly. All students make good use of their Key Stage 3 learning. Both practical and theoretical skills develop through practice and an increasing appreciation of a wide range of commercial designers and manufacturers. The design process presents difficulties for many students, especially the boys. The craft skills course at Key Stage 4 maintains the strength of the practical expertise of students and they experience a good range of catering, food technology and resistant material skills that are central to students who may seek a craft apprenticeship in the future. Students learn skills, such as preparing a core box for casting metal. They cut, shape and finish complementary materials to produce garden tools and also experience preparing and costing menus for school occasions, such as 'the community lunch' during the inspection week. Students with special educational needs generally make satisfactory progress. Their practical work is good and their designing is enhanced when they have additional specialist support from learning support assistants.

123. Sixth form groups are small, but the standard of research, mature discussion, rigorous investigation and effective presentation ensure improving standards. This group attracts girls and once again their skills in lateral thinking, research and personal planning have a positive impact on learning.

124. Attitudes in design and technology are good. Students enjoy practical work and have a clear understanding of the health and safety issues in each aspect of the subject. There is a buzz of excitement in practical lessons and the opportunity to evaluate each other's work brings a glow of pride to those who have been most successful. Practical work is an area where lower attaining students gain success which positively influences their self-esteem. Behaviour is good throughout the department, with the exception of a minority of boys in Years 8 and 10 whose immaturity has an impact on the work of others.

125. The quality of teaching is good overall, with some very good teaching. Staff are committed to improving standards and are enthusiastic about their subject. These two factors have prompted the development of a range of teaching and learning styles to raise standards for all students, and have led to the regular sharing of good practice to increase the consistency of teaching. All teachers make effective use of time-targets in lessons. This maintains pace and gives individual students targets to meet as evidence of their success. Effective review and discussion involve all staff. For example, it identified the need for core technology at Key Stage 3 to improve the design skills common throughout the subject. All teachers have high expectations, illustrated by their personal presentation of high quality worksheets and overhead projector presentations, as well as carefully chosen resources to consolidate learning. Display is good; exemplar work is used to set a benchmark for standards expected. Planning, to meet the needs of individual students, is very good. Learning support assistants are involved in planning and make valuable contributions to lessons. Good relationships between students and adults are based on mutual respect that helps to establish confidence in learning. The use of assessment is improving in the department. National Curriculum levels are well used in planning programmes of work, but students have limited knowledge of what they mean. In particular, more able students are not clear as to how they can make improve their work independently to move from one level to the next. Good planning to include literacy and numeracy strategies in design and technology encourages students to apply their English and mathematics skills. For example, all classrooms display technical words used regularly to aid spelling accuracy and this is improving the quality of written work. Students have very good opportunities to use information technology to improve designing.

126. The head of department has a clear vision of how the subject should develop and involves all teachers in development planning and review of the subject. The principle of sharing good practice and planned observation is having a positive impact on all areas of the department. A main thrust of development is the area of independent learning. At present this is hampered by the lack of working space in all areas. Although some rooms have been remodelled, the space cannot be used effectively for practical work and cramped conditions impede progress. The information technology programme, developed to enhance learning, is also hindered by the lack of computers and the fact that the design and technology computers are not linked to the school network. Strong links between the department, the community and industry are having a positive influence on the subject, with a range of retail outlets and manufacturers indicating their commitment to the department. In addition the department gives good support to the community, for example with projects such as the designing and making of a Santa's grotto for the local hospital.

127. The department's response to the previous inspection report has been good. Issues about behaviour, marking and subject rotation have been solved, but standards in the resistant materials courses remain an issue.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

128. The proportion of students attaining A\*-C grades in GCSE examinations at the end of Key Stage 4 is below the national average. In 1999 results were well below. The trend over the last four years has been downwards. This is largely due to the long-term absence through illness of key staff and the subsequent use of many supply teachers. The proportion of students obtaining GCSE grades A\*- G is broadly in line with national averages.



129. In Years 12 and 13 the numbers of students following A level courses are too small to identify trends. However, the pass rate in GCE A level examinations in 1999 was above the national average, with 100 per cent obtaining pass grades and 83 per cent obtaining grades A-C. The points score has risen steadily over the last four years. A level geography students do at least as well, and frequently better, in the subject than in their other subjects. From work seen during the inspection, students show a good grasp of the relationship between geographical theory and practical observation.

130. In work seen during the inspection at Key Stage 3, students enter the school in Year 7 with attainment levels in geography that are predominantly below, or well below, expectation. The trend in these attainment levels, over the four years since the last inspection, is downwards. At the end of Key Stage 3 many students are attaining at level 5 or above. Given the low level of attainment on entry this represents a significant improvement. This is a result of the determined efforts the department makes to ensure that basic key skills are taught well. Students gain a satisfactory understanding of latitude and longitude, can use co-ordinates and Ordnance Survey maps, interpret models and use their atlases well. However, lower attaining students, especially boys, continue to attain below the expected level, mainly because of continuing limited literacy skills and poor retention of knowledge. Overall, by the end of Key Stage 3, attainment matches standards expected nationally. Students with special educational needs are supported effectively in the classroom and attain well in relation to their prior attainment levels.

131. In work seen during the inspection, the attainment of students at Key Stage 4 matches expected standards, which indicates that the department is beginning to redress the difficulties it has experienced recently. For example, in a Year 11 lesson on river valleys students showed clear understanding of geographical terms such as 'erosion', and 'flow through'. However, many students still have difficulty in retaining what they have learnt. Teachers attempt to overcome this by repetition and detailed revision of previous lessons.

132. One significant weakness that is widespread throughout all stages is the poor use of information and communication technology. Limited access to ICT resources and staff expertise contributes to a low level of attainment in this aspect of the subject. This was an issue in the last report.

133. Learning at all stages over time is satisfactory overall. It is similar at both key stages and in the sixth form. With the exception of one lesson in Year 10, when students made only limited gains in knowledge and understanding because of unsuccessful lesson planning, students work with enthusiasm. They clearly enjoy geography. Careful selection of appropriate resources ensures that the differing needs of students are met well, including those of higher attainers. In many lessons, extension work ensures that they remain on task and use lesson time effectively. Good use is made of question and answer sessions where students are eager to show what they already know and have discovered. The inclusion of regular and appropriate practical fieldwork makes a valuable contribution to the learning of students throughout the school and the development of their social, cultural and moral understanding. Behaviour in classrooms is very good at all key stages. Students arrive promptly and settle to work quickly. Relationships are good both between students and with teachers.

134. In spite of the school having to use a variety of temporary teachers over the last few years, teaching continues to be enthusiastic and energetic. Teachers have good subject knowledge and meet the needs of the National Curriculum. The considerable support given

by the head of department ensures that the difficulties created by long term staff absence are largely overcome. Lesson plans are detailed, are appropriate and follow good schemes of work. There is no doubting the commitment of teachers; they use a wide range of teaching techniques and vary the activities and pace of lessons to ensure successful learning. All teachers bring much patience, tolerance and good humour to their lessons, resulting in good support in the classroom. The overall high quality of teaching leads to students making good gains in knowledge and understanding. Teachers are particularly skilled at motivating passive students, as was seen, for example, in a Year 13 lesson when pace was maintained by a variety of teaching approaches.

135. Day to day marking is generally good and includes helpful commentary. Longer-term assessment is more variable. It is better at Key Stage 3 than at Key Stage 4. The new scheme of assessment implemented at Key Stage 3 is working well and is to be modified to include Key Stage 4. Assessment in Years 12 and 13 is still in need of refinement.

136. Leadership and management of the department are good. There is a clear recognition of what needs to be improved and good methods are developed to rectify deficiencies. Temporary staff are supported well by the head of department to reduce the level of disruption created by present staffing difficulties. Although the great majority of lessons are taught in specialist rooms there are some difficulties created by lessons taught in non-specialist rooms and with rooms that are too small for the number of students occupying them. Learning resources are adequate overall but there are deficiencies in numbers of text books at Key Stage 4, which the department partly overcomes by producing good worksheets and other resource materials.

137. Since the last inspection the department has had to cope with considerable staffing difficulties. Under the new head of department management and leadership have improved. Although there has been a temporary reduction in overall attainment at Key Stage 4, the department is now in a good position to improve further.

## **HISTORY**

138. 1999, in the end of Key Stage 3 teacher assessment, the proportion of students achieving expected levels broadly matched the national average. This was confirmed by inspection findings. At age 16 in GCSE examinations in 1999 the proportions of candidates achieving A\*-C grades and A\*-G grades were above the national average. Half the candidates entered achieved A or B grades. There have been very similar good results for three years. These figures show both good value added and good performance compared with other subjects. There have been between four and eight candidates for A level in the past three years. In the last three years there has been a 100 per cent pass rate and six students out of eighteen have achieved A-B grades. This represents added value.

139. In work seen during the inspection, standards were broadly in line with national expectations at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 and in Year 12. In Year 13 they were above. Overall this indicates good progress from the time of entry to the school. At Key Stage 3 students show their knowledge and understanding of the topics studied by presenting their work in many styles, using various kinds of diagrams and extended writing. There is evidence of investigative history and of problem solving. Time lines are used imaginatively. The standard of work on local history is particularly good and the best written and audio guides to the remains of the local canal are displayed in the Leominster Tourist Office. Most students in Year 7 write enough, but standards of spelling and handwriting are often weak. Greater challenge is sometimes needed for Year 7 to ensure that they make as much progress as they should. At Key Stage 4, higher attaining students write fluently, showing

a well-developed ability to use historical information to identify causes and consequences of events. Lower attainers tend to give briefer and more superficial information but all students make good progress through the two years in the evaluation of written and pictorial primary sources. They assess well the usefulness and reliability of sources, such as political cartoons. This also helps them to develop a very useful examination technique. Students are insufficiently self critical about spelling, even of historical words. In the sixth form, the standard of higher attainers is impressive and others are responding well to the mature teaching of the sixth form. They are learning to organise large quantities of material and to use it selectively. Some need to give more evidence to support adequately the arguments they make. Sixth form students respond very well to opportunities for group research and debate. They are frequently articulate and present cases competently using mature historical vocabulary. Their personal studies are on diverse subjects: they range from local history to national topics such as the 1975 Referendum and images of past historical figures. There is evidence of depth of research and of involvement and the general standard is high.

140. The quality of teaching of the two permanent specialist members of staff is a great strength. They believe in the value of the subject for the young. Their enthusiasm is infectious and has a strong impact on students' learning. For example, in a Year 9 class, students' work illustrated the effective way in which good research skills and information technology competence are taught. The students were excited by the teacher's presentation of a new project, on producing a newspaper for 1830 on the Liverpool-Manchester railway, and collaborated quickly and intelligently. The head of department takes great care to present various topics in different ways to different age groups and levels of attainment. Many high quality source sheets are used although the department makes the buying of textbooks a priority, rightly believing in training students to research from books. Realistic targets are set for individual students from Year 7. Good cross-curricular links are made, such as with religious education, geography and politics, as well as links between the past and present day national and international affairs. Revision programmes and booklets are firmly in place. There is a tradition of hard work in the department. The subject engages many students and there is much evidence in prolific and colourful classroom displays of extra work done because of interest in historical topics. Although some group work is highly successful, it goes on too long for students with lower levels of concentration. The atmosphere in class is serious and hard working, especially at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Throughout the department, students with special educational needs are well integrated and have appropriate written tasks provided, enabling them to make similar progress to other students. Extension work is also regularly set for higher attainers. Homework is used well to extend classwork. Overall, students respond positively and well to interesting teaching and to orderly classrooms.

141. Leadership and direction for the subject are very clear and purposeful. At all stages there are balanced elements in the teaching of hard historical facts, of causes and results and of interpretation. Many local expeditions, such as to the monastery and to coaching inns, support learning by bringing history to life. The head of department monitors teaching and assessment. Detailed lesson notes and resources are provided for non-specialist supply teachers. The use of information technology is well advanced in the department as a tool for history. At Key Stage 4 the take-up is increasing and in Year 13 a third of the year who are taking A levels are taking history.

142. Issues from the last report have been tackled although the use of non-specialist staff, because of long term staff absence at present, has increased.

## **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

143. In 1999, in the end of Key Stage 3 teacher assessments, the proportion of students achieving the expected level matched national standards. In 1999 the proportion of students achieving grades A\*-C in GCSE examinations was above the national average. A small number take a business competence qualification and their pass rate is in line with national standards. Sixth form students following the GNVQ course meet the standards required.

144. Although teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 matched national standards, this was not confirmed by work seen during the inspection. National standards are not reached because there is not a consistent programme of study across the key stage. In Year 7 students follow a very good IT skills course throughout the year, and become competent computer users. The course contains relevant homework to extend learning and an effective assessment task to design a Christmas card, towards the end of the autumn term. This test establishes students' level of skills, knowledge and understanding, but there is no similar test of competence on entry to Year 7, missing the opportunity to build on students' prior learning. During Years 8 and 9, IT is taught through subjects but the use of IT to support learning and to develop skills is inconsistent across the school. There is a clear programme available to support all subjects, including guidelines for assessment. Few subjects use the programme effectively. Subjects such as religious education, history and design and technology use IT to help teaching and this is improving learning. However, subjects such as modern foreign languages are unable to make adequate use of IT to support learning because of limited access to equipment. At the end of Key Stage 3 there is no report of ICT competence in the end of year reports to parents.

145. In work seen AT Key Stage 4 during the inspection, students who have chosen to take information technology GCSE reach the required standard. They are able to use a good range of programmes and are competent in using word processing, spreadsheets, databases and desk top publishing, as well as knowing about and forming an opinion on the impact of information technology on society. Their projects illustrate that they can decide on the most relevant programmes and know about commercial applications of IT. For example, when designing a presentation for an event to be held locally. The majority of students follow a short course AT Key Stage 4, covering basic skills, in personal and social education. This does not adequately extend students' skills and there is no reported statement of competence at the end of Key Stage 4.

146. The quality of learning of students with special educational needs matches that of their peers at both key stages. They are well supported by teachers and classroom assistants, several of whom have IT qualifications.

147. In the sixth form, the GNVQ course is managed well. A good task-based course develops skills that for some students were last experienced in Year 7. In addition, students can continue the business competence course started AT Key Stage 4, by adding more demanding modules and working independently. Generally, work in the sixth form is hampered by the lack of consistency in teaching IT at Key Stages 3 and 4; however standards match course requirements.

148. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory. In specialist IT lessons, it is good and occasionally very good. Cross-curricular teaching of applied IT skills is restricted to religious education, history and design and technology. The lesson planning of specialist teachers has clear objectives and time targets, which challenge students. Effective use is made of healthy competition in lessons to promote progress and make learning fun. Students respect teachers' expectation of good behaviour and this contributes to the good

atmosphere in lessons. Teachers use a range of skills and methods to reinforce learning, including group demonstrations. The impact of these sessions is reduced because of the lack of good quality large screens for students to follow demonstrations of new skills. Teachers successfully use tests, individual discussions and class questions to probe knowledge and understanding. Across the school, the overall level of teachers' competence is unclear. The last review of skills was completed in 1997 and there have been many changes of staff since then. Unless teachers apply basic computer skills to the needs of their subject, students' skills dwindle and interest wanes. It is clear, in subjects like history, that research and modelling provide effective learning opportunities and students see IT as a tool to help learning. However, the majority of subjects in the school do not meet the statutory requirement to teach IT. In part, this is because of difficulties in obtaining access to facilities when they are needed. This limits the development of students' computer skills and the quality of learning at both key stages.

149. Attitudes are good. Students enjoy using computers, as can be seen from the popularity of the "drop in" sessions at lunchtime and after school. Behaviour is good. The majority of students sustain their effort and work well throughout their lessons. In Key Stage 4 GCSE courses and sixth form GNVQ courses, most students develop good levels of independence and respond well to the challenges of courses.

150. The IT department is at present reduced in size by teacher absence and effective supply teaching is maintaining the planned curriculum. The lack of effective curriculum continuity for IT is compounded by the insufficient time for co-ordination and the need for a management structure for the monitoring of ICT in subjects across the curriculum. Many departments express frustration at the lack of access to the IT rooms and booking records show there is very little room for flexibility of use.

151. The previous inspection identified a range of issues generally associated with the lack of a full foundation programme at Key Stage 3 and cross-curricular ICT. These included lack of time for teaching and a lack of opportunity for use. These issues still exist although the quality of the Year 7 programme has improved and examination results indicate good standards for a minority of students.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

152. Standards in both French and German are below average at Key Stages 3 and 4, but they are in line with what they should be, given the below average attainment of students on entry to the school. Students in the sixth form are working satisfactorily and attainment is as expected from their GCSE results, although below the national average.

153. In 1999, students were assessed by their teachers as working slightly below the national level by the end of Key Stage 3. This is a significant improvement from the previous year. In work seen during the inspection students were achieving below the national expectations.

154. Examination results at GCSE have fluctuated in both French and German in recent years. In 1999 results in French were below the national figure for those gaining A\*- C grades, and well below in German. Students who take GCSE examinations in languages gain results that are about half a grade below other subjects. The figures are distorted by the fact that only about two-thirds of the year group are following GCSE courses. The achievements of boys and girls follow the national pattern, with girls' results being consistently above those of boys. Students who take the Certificate of Achievement course gain grades appropriate to their ability.

155. At A level, there have been no entries in either French or German since 1997 when results were below the national average. One student gained a very high grade pass at AS level in German in 1999.

156. From work seen during the inspection, students show a good understanding of spoken language throughout the key stages, and in the sixth form in German. This is because teachers use French and German as their main means of communication in class and students respond well to this. In the best lessons, students are also able to use the language effectively to communicate with the teacher. Speaking is underdeveloped overall and students need to be encouraged to extend their answers and to talk to each other in the language. High attaining students show a good grasp of grammar in both languages, but at Key Stage 4 would benefit from more opportunities to relate this directly to examination type work. In a few lessons, students of all levels of attainment are supported by material that is appropriate to their needs and this enables them to make good progress. A level students cover a wide range of topics, but lack the background knowledge essential to good progress in French. Since the last inspection, it has become a requirement to study a language at Key Stage 4 and standards have remained broadly the same, in spite of the wider range of students now following courses, because of the quality of teaching.

157. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, with over one third of the lessons being good, or very good, and only one seen during the inspection deemed unsatisfactory. This leads to the quality of learning being satisfactory overall and enables students to make satisfactory progress. Lessons are characterised by good use of the foreign language. Most lessons are well planned to take into account the needs of individual students, including those on the special educational needs register. The best lessons have a range of activities, which cover the four attainment targets of listening, speaking, reading and writing. A very good lesson at Key Stage 3 enabled students to make very good progress in their learning because it was carefully planned and the teacher had high expectations of the students both in terms of their behaviour and their full participation in all the activities. The higher attaining students were given additional writing tasks to encourage their independent learning. They responded with enthusiasm, showing real enjoyment of the language. In a less successful lesson, slower progress was made because the lesson had not been planned in enough detail. Time was spent on activities that could have been done independently. Teachers use assessment at the end of each unit of work to judge the progress their students are making. This is currently not linked closely enough to National Curriculum levels, but is under review. Students need to be aware of the levels at which they are working and what they need to do to reach the next one. There is some use of

information technology, but opportunities are not yet highlighted in schemes of work because there is not enough access to the network for it to be regularly used.

158. Most students show interest in their work and have a positive attitude to it. Behaviour in lessons is good. Where teachers have high expectations of their students in terms of behaviour, this leads to good progress. In the sixth form, students are diligent in class and most homework is completed. They are working to their potential. Students show satisfactory and sometimes good learning in their foreign language. At Key Stage 3, students who study a second language for one hour a week make slow progress because of the small amount of curriculum time allocated to it. Students who choose to study German instead of French at Key Stage 4 make faster progress and start to close the gap. Very few students study both languages at GCSE.

159. The head of faculty has a clear understanding of her role and has made significant steps to move the department forward. Monitoring of teaching and learning now takes place regularly and this is an improvement since the last inspection. The most pressing issue is resources for the teaching of languages. The French course book is being replaced because the one currently in use no longer meets the needs of students. No books are available for students to take home, however, and this is having an adverse effect on their learning, because it limits homework tasks and means that class time has to be spent copying from the book. The current curriculum model needs to be reviewed with regard to the allocation of time, and a clear rationale needs to be developed for the teaching of German, so that strategies can be put in place to encourage more students to continue to study two languages at Key Stage 4. This will then make teaching at Key Stage 3 more efficient. The planned use of information technology remains to be implemented, although all teachers are now trained in its use and keen to develop it when access is made available. Visits to France and Germany are organised regularly, and the members of the department are working to establish an exchange with a French school so that more students can benefit from a cultural experience.

## **MUSIC**

160. Standards of students' attainment at age 14 in teacher assessments are below the levels expected nationally for students of the same age. There is also a greater variance between the attainment of girls and boys than is found nationally, with a difference of 23 per cent between those who are attaining at or beyond the expected. Standards of attainment for students aged 16, in GCSE music examinations in 1999 were below national standards. At GCE A level, the single candidate achieved a B grade. The number taking the subject is too small to make useful comparisons.

161. In work seen during the inspection, the standards achieved by students at the end of Key Stage 3 are below those expected for students of the same age nationally, but are broadly as high as they should be in view of students' attainment on entry to the school. Analysis of students' work produced in Year 7 shows that the majority of students enter the school with a level of attainment that is below average for their age. They perform an individual part on a range of instruments with confidence and control, both in solo and ensemble performances, with an awareness of pulse and beat. By the end of the key stage, lower attaining students can perform on classroom instruments with some degree of control, but with a lack of fluency and insecure rhythm. Higher attaining students can compose in a variety of forms and are able to develop their ideas. Lower attaining students compose using

basic ideas and forms, for a limited range of instruments, but with little extended development of ideas. In the work seen there was no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls.

162. In work seen during the inspection, the standards achieved by the students at the age of 16, are below those expected nationally for students of the same age. However, students in Year 10 are attaining at a level that is in line with expectations of students of the same age nationally. In their performances, many students are achieving at the expected levels. The range of peripatetic teaching and quality extra-curricular opportunities available supports this standard. Students perform with confidence and control on their chosen instrument. Ensemble work is being developed and they recognise when to take the lead and when to support others. They compose in a variety of styles and forms, and use a variety of instruments on which to perform their work. Students make appropriate use of the available information technology in their compositions and performances. In listening to and appraising music, they identify the resources and conventions used. They are able to evaluate their own work, and that of others. However, the majority of students do not use an extensive technical vocabulary in their analysis. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls by the end of the key stage.

163. In work seen during the inspection, students in Year 12 are attaining at a level that is below that expected for students of the same age nationally. In listening exercises they recognise keys, melody structure and cadences. However, they are insecure in the use of appropriate technical vocabulary with which to describe their analysis. They compose to various stimuli but are still teacher dependent for much of their learning.

164. Teachers have good class management, subject knowledge and understanding, which produces confident teaching and a respect for the students. This leads to students working with enthusiasm and interest. For example, in a Year 10 lesson, when students were working on individual and group arrangements, the teacher was able to move between students offering individual help and advice, whilst the other students worked on the task, supporting and advising each other very effectively. This is also an example of the good relationships that exist between students and between students and the staff. Teachers make good use of target setting in order to motivate students. In a Year 8 lesson, this enabled all the students, in a short period of time, to rehearse and perform a vocal piece in three-part harmony. At both key stages, teachers make effective use of question and answer, to reinforce students' knowledge and understanding, and as an effective way to involve all students in the lesson. These skills are used to assess students' knowledge and understanding informally and supplement the formal system for assessment of students' attainment and learning.

165. Occasionally the inappropriate behaviour of a minority of students disrupts the flow of lessons, as happened in a Year 8 lesson. Students were performing in small groups, whilst the teacher circulated; the concentration of some students lapsed and resulted in low levels of chattering and inappropriate behaviour.

166. Leadership of the subject is effective and there is clear direction, with the work of class teachers being monitored and evaluated. Students with special educational needs are well integrated and make similar progress to other students. The department operates an equal access policy for all students at both key stages and effective use is made of new technology although resources are limited. There are insufficient percussion instruments to



meet the needs of the curriculum. Teaching and learning in the department are adversely affected because the accommodation is inappropriate in shape, size and layout, and in addition, there are insufficient practice rooms.

167. In the last inspection report there were no clear judgements made about the level of attainment and students' learning. However, the report did say that the main music room was too small for many groups and that there was need for more specialist accommodation. This is still the case.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

168. The standards of physical education are above national expectations at Key Stage 3 and in line at Key Stage 4. The 1999 teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 indicate that 74 per cent of students are achieving or working beyond the expectation. The proportion of A\*-C grades gained in the 1999 GCSE examinations was below the national average; the proportion of A\*-G grades was above average.

169. In work seen during the inspection, attainment by the age of 14 is above national expectations in gymnastics, soccer and swimming. In gymnastics sequences are performed with increasing fluency and in soccer students show skill in passing and tactical awareness. All students can swim and they demonstrate efficient stroke technique and sustained physical effort. They evaluate their own and others' work and make suggestions for improvement. The Year 10 and 11 GCSE groups are producing some good quality written work and show a sound knowledge of technical terms. There are some high achievers in badminton, where overhead shots are hit with depth, and in advanced routines on the trampoline. Articulating answers in oral work is not well developed. There are some outstanding achievements by teams and individuals in many sports and there is county and national recognition. Many students, who are lower attainers in other subjects, achieve at a high level in physical education and represent the school, mainly in team games. Post-16 students have one hour a week for physical education and follow options of soccer and weight training skilfully and vigorously. Another group attends an advanced accredited course in sports injuries, taught by an outside specialist.

170. Students show very positive attitudes towards the subject and a willingness to cooperate in pairs or small groups. The relationships between students are excellent and a sense of fun pervades the lessons. Students take responsibility for their own learning and help each other to progress. They warm up before each lesson without teacher intervention. They are enthusiastic, well motivated and show concentration in practices which improves the level of their skills.

171. Overall, teaching is good and there is some very good teaching in the department. Swimming lessons are well paced, varied in methodology and very efficiently organised, so that students make progress in stroke patterns and water confidence. In soccer, the objectives are clear and students develop their tactical awareness and improve passing skills. Demonstration and praise are used to promote students' self esteem and quality of movements, both in gymnastics and games. Instructions are usually effective in the improvement of skills, but on occasions lengthy dialogue limits activity. The planning of lessons is very good and feedback given during and at the end of lessons helps student understanding. The GCSE groups are developing good learning skills as a result of a varied teaching style. Individuals are targeted with questions appropriate to their skill level and paired discussion work aims to develop oral work. Resources are used well and students gain a wider knowledge and understanding from the variety of practices that ensue. Teaching that is matched to their needs helps lower attainers to progress as well as

other groups of students. For example, in volleyball students played a modified game that decreased the chance of error by letting the ball bounce. Safety requirements are taught thoroughly; students carry apparatus sensibly and are thoughtful and co-operative with one another. Expectations are generally high and all abilities are considered and given equal access to the subject.

172. Although there are no dance or outdoor and adventurous activities, the curriculum meets statutory requirements and GCSE physical education is now offered. The excellent extra-curricular programme offers opportunities to all and the sessions are attended by half of the boys and more than a third of the girls. Assessment procedures are detailed and the recording system covers the relevant criteria. Development planning and schemes of work are up to date and prepared for the new statutory orders. The leadership and management of the department are very good and all the specialist staff contribute to the effectiveness of the subject. Little monitoring of teaching takes place but there is support for each other and the work rate is high. All specialist staff and many non-specialist staff contribute to the extra curricular programme, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and the overseas sporting and skiing excursions. There are very good relationships with the leisure centre staff and visiting coaches. The expertise provided by these links promotes student opportunities and attainment. The indoor accommodation including the 30 metre swimming pool, the playing fields and hard play areas are excellent teaching spaces. The facilities have a great impact on attainment.

173. Since the last inspection GCSE physical education has been introduced with an increasing number choosing the option. The extra-curricular programme has further improved. Leadership is strong and more experienced. The quality of teaching has improved and the documentation is up to date.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

174. The proportion of students gaining GCSE grades A\*-C in 1999 in religious studies was above the national average. This was the first year in which students were entered for the short course examination and there were 82 candidates. In the previous two years much lower numbers of students were entered for the full course examination. Results were above the national average in 1998, but below in 1997. In both courses, girls achieved higher results than boys. The 1999 results compare well with results in other subjects in the school and represent high attainment in a department with only one specialist teacher.

175. In work seen during the inspection, students' attainment at the age of 14 matches the expectations for students of that age, as set out in the Local Agreed Syllabus, and standards are consistent with those found in the last inspection. By the end of Year 9, most students have a sound knowledge and understanding of the main beliefs and religious practices of Christianity and of major world religions, such as Hinduism. Students can explain clearly the importance of rules such as the Ten Commandments, and accurately describe the concept of re-incarnation. In many areas of written work students' attainment is above the expected standards. For example, students of all levels of attainment are adept at collecting and evaluating evidence, such as that gained from their own questionnaires on how religion affects people's lives, and then presenting this evidence in a very effective way using information technology. The majority of students produce a wide range of good quality display work. This includes cartoon stories and well designed newspapers featuring events in the life of Jesus, as well as clearly presented results of surveys using pie charts and graphs. The overall quality of work in exercise books is not as high, as a significant number of lower attaining students have difficulty in

coping with sustained writing. However, their work is improved when they use well-structured learning materials such as writing frames. Higher attainers have good literacy skills. They have a good grasp of punctuation and paragraphing, and their handwriting is easy to read.

176. By the age of 16, the standards of attainment of the majority of students are above the national average. Work observed during the inspection shows that students have a good knowledge and understanding of Christian beliefs about the meaning and purpose of existence and of the stances taken by different sections of the Christian church towards moral issues, such as the sanctity of life. For example, students clearly understand the purposes of Christian worship and the different ways in which devotion to God is manifested in daily life. They are confident in exploring spiritual and moral themes, as was seen in a Year 10 lesson where students were discussing the concept of forgiveness, as expressed in the Lord's Prayer, and how people put it into practice in very difficult circumstances. Students of all levels of attainment use technical language confidently in discussions. The majority of students present their arguments well in written work and make good use of evidence from biblical and modern sources.

177. Religious education in the sixth form is taught as part of the general studies course. However, this course is followed by very few candidates, and is only taken in Year 13. Students attained average standards in the lesson seen during the inspection. They could explain clearly why some of the methods used to justify scientific theories produce results which are open to dispute.

178. The quality of teaching is good and this has a positive impact on students' attitudes to learning and the progress made. This is because of the excellent way in which the subject is managed. The specialist head of department gives very clear educational direction. He has a very good knowledge and understanding of the subject. The high quality of the overall planning and coordination, together with the careful preparation of lessons, enables non-specialist teachers to teach confidently and effectively. Teaching was satisfactory or better in almost all of the lessons seen and it was very good in a third of the lessons. In one lesson in Year 10, the teaching was of the highest quality, and students attained above average standards in their understanding of how different denominations in the Christian church come to terms with the spiritual and moral issues involved in different methods of contraception. One of the strengths is the way in which teaching methods and learning materials are adapted to the needs of lower attaining students. For example, in a Year 9 lesson where many of the students in the class had special educational needs, the teacher made the aims for the lesson very clear at the outset. Class and group activities were well designed to develop students' oral and literacy skills and classroom support was used effectively. By the end of the lesson, students had become familiar with the new vocabulary so that they could express themselves simply but clearly as they explained how "near death experiences" influenced people's ideas on the existence of the soul. Most teachers manage their students well. Behaviour is almost always very good and the majority of students are well motivated. They are attentive listeners and the good relationships in the classroom encourage them to feel confident in taking part in discussions, in the knowledge that their contributions are valued. They respond positively to the very good opportunities offered for personal development which include visits to local places of worship, the Salvation Army hostel, and music and drama activities presented by visiting groups which are sponsored by the local Baptist church. However, there are a few shortcomings. In some lessons, not enough attention is paid to the needs of the higher attaining students, and they are not sufficiently challenged. Occasionally the lack of precision in the lesson aims results in activities that are not structured effectively. As a consequence, a minority of students do not sustain their concentration, and begin to talk

among themselves. The pace of the lesson slackens, and students do not made enough progress in their learning by the end of the lesson. This was the case in the one lesson in which the teaching was unsatisfactory. However these weaknesses are outweighed by the overall strengths of the teaching.

179. The school has responded positively to the majority of the concerns raised in the previous report and the progress made is satisfactory. The amount of time allocated to the subject at Key Stages 3 and 4 has been increased and the Local Agreed Syllabus is now adequately covered at Key Stage 3. The department has been successful in improving the standards of written work at Key Stage 3 through the development of learning materials which meet the needs of the majority of students, and because of the high priority placed on teaching students how to make effective use of information technology. The introduction of the short course in Years 10 and 11 has contributed to the rise in standards at Key Stage 4. However, there are still two issues that remain unresolved. The school is not meeting the statutory requirements for the provision of religious education in the sixth form. Also lack of continuity in the staffing of the subject means that the responsibility for maintenance of standards, coordination of the teaching, and curriculum development still rests with the one permanent member of the department.

## **VOCATIONAL COURSES**

180. The school offers a range of vocational courses, developed to meet students' needs. In the 1999 examinations, students taking GNVQs achieved a 100 per cent pass rate. In the A level course all students achieved an A\*- E grade.

181. In work seen during the inspection, students following the GCE AS level course in economics are attaining at a level below that expected nationally for students of the same age. They have an appropriate understanding of the market place and the effect of market forces and can, for example, explain the formula to discover the maximum point of profitability in lay terms, but are less confident in the use of the appropriate technical vocabulary. In the GNVQ courses, students are attaining at a level that is appropriate compared to students of the same age nationally. They present their work well, using information and communication technology effectively. Key skills are being acquired, consolidated and developed. Students respond to suggestions appropriately, modifying and refining their work. They have a good understanding and knowledge of the courses and produce and research projects in appropriate ways, using information and communication technology confidently. However, the level of attainment in the use of appropriate technical vocabulary and numeracy skills is below that expected.

182. Across the vocational courses, there is effective teaching, which leads to good learning by students. Teachers manage classrooms well and maintain the pace of lessons, promoting very good behaviour and a positive attitude to work. For example, in a Year 12 lesson the way in which the teacher reinforced learning targets resulted in the students completing their tasks in a well-finished and appropriate form. The staff have very good subject knowledge which enables confident teaching. In a Year 12 economics lesson this created a positive atmosphere of mutual respect between the teacher and the students, so that they felt confident to ask questions and to extend their learning through being effectively challenged. Teachers make good use of question and answer technique, combined with good analytical and observational skills. This results in good clarification and reinforcement of teaching. This was seen to good effect in a Youth Award lesson and led to a very enthusiastic response from the student. These techniques are used very effectively to involve and motivate all students resulting in good progress. Lessons end with a review of the work covered, which consolidates students' understanding and homework is

then set to develop and challenge students and to encourage them to take responsibility for developing their work.

183. The vocational courses are well co-ordinated and there ARE clear leadership and educational targets for the various areas. All students in the sixth form must choose an option from Young Enterprise, Youth Award or Community Study. These are well monitored and students' progress and attainment tracked. The accommodation is appropriate, and includes a dedicated business studies room. Resources are adequate to meet the demands of the courses and the qualifications and experience of the teaching staff are well matched to the needs of vocational courses. Teaching is well supported by assessment schemes that fully meet the demands of the various courses.

184. The last inspection report said that standards were commensurate with the abilities of students and that courses were well organised. This is still the case. However, it did criticise the lack of a business studies suite and said that resources were hardly adequate, with a shortage of text books in some areas and not all rooms having black/white boards. These matters have been resolved. There has been good progress since the last inspection.