

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **ASTOR SCHOOL**

Dover

LEA area: Kent

Unique reference number: 118807

Headteacher: Mr Chris Russell

Reporting inspector: Mr R Peter J McGregor  
3525

Dates of inspection: 28 February – 3 March 2000

Inspection number: 187271

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Modern (non-selective)

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 - 19

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Astor Avenue  
Dover  
Kent

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Telephone number: 01304 201151

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Appropriate authority: Governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr J Peall

Date of previous inspection: 4 March 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
R Peter J McGregor	Registered inspector		How high are standards?
			How well are pupils taught?
Susan Cash	Lay inspector		How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Jon Lovgreen	Team inspector	English	
		English as an additional language	
Barry Juxon	Team inspector	Mathematics	
Michael Newman	Team inspector	Science	
Raye Allison Smith	Team inspector	Art	
Vivian Harrison	Team inspector	Design and technology	
John Carnaghan	Team inspector	Geography	
		History	
George Raynor	Team inspector	Information technology	
Roslyn Fox	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
Robin Coulthard	Team inspector	Music	How well is the school led and managed?
		Religious education	
Betty Colley	Team inspector	Physical education	How well does the school care for its pupils?
Olivia Hall	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
Vivien Johnston	Team inspector	Equal opportunities	

The inspection contractor was:

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The Registrar  
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Alexandra House, 33 Kingsway, London WC2B 6SE

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Astor School is a mixed, county high school for pupils aged 11-19, with 1363 pupils on roll. The school is much bigger than most secondary schools. In the last year, 31 pupils joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission and 75 left. Very few of the pupils at Astor speak English as an additional language, and an extremely small number are at the early stages of learning English. Very few are from ethnic minority backgrounds. 354 pupils are on the school's register of special educational needs, 235 of whom are at the lower stages 1 and 2. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is above the national average, but the number with Statements is about average for a school of this size. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at 22% is above the national average of 18%. About 30% of pupils in the local education authority area attend selective schools. Pupils of a full range of ability choose to attend Astor because of its particular ethos and successes. Current entry standards overall, however, are well below average in Year 7, significantly lower than those for Year 11, because an increasing proportion of pupils have been selected to attend grammar schools over the past five years.

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

Astor school is effective and provides good value for money. It has significant strengths but also some weaknesses. Teaching observed was sound in Key Stages 3 and 4 and good in the sixth form. Pupils' achievements are sound or better in most subjects, and in the sixth form good, although their attainment is well below the national average. Pupils are extremely helpful and enjoy much of their life at Astor School. The headteacher leads by example and is a great asset to the school. Management is decisive and all decisions have the best interests of the pupils at heart.

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

- A strong community, with shared values and a committed staff team
- Many well-motivated pupils – co-operative, polite and with high self-esteem
- Very good or excellent teaching in some subjects, resulting in very good achievement, particularly in information technology and art; good learning support for pupils with special educational needs
- Very good behaviour
- Excellent clubs and visits, and very effective social, moral and cultural development for the pupils
- Extremely positive attitudes of sixth formers seen in their contribution to many areas of school life
- The leadership of the headteacher, ably supported by deputies and a strong governing body

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

- Underachievement in geography and some aspects of science, resulting from weaknesses in teaching
- Inconsistencies in monitoring teaching and learning, making insufficient use of assessment data
- Insufficient curriculum time so standards are lower than they could be
- Inadequate information and communication technology resources and too little use made of computers in many subjects means that the National Curriculum is not fully implemented
- Some inadequacies in buildings and resources which detract from the quality of the pupils' learning environment and the work they can do
- Arrangements for eating lunch and the unhygienic quality of some lavatories
- Pupils do not experience a daily act of collective worship, and sixth form religious education does not meet requirements

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

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

A positive response has been made to the key issues of the last report, with success in some areas but others requiring further attention. High expectations, identified four years ago, are still maintained by most, but not all

staff. Matching work better to pupils' needs is now emphasised in several departments. Sound progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching, maintaining many of the strengths and making some inroads into areas of weakness. The curriculum provision in the school is evaluated well and adapted to meet changing needs of the pupils and requirements. Provision for the sixth form is much improved and now very good, with a balance of GNVQ and A-level courses. Marking is better but still inconsistent. Religious education is now appropriate in Key Stage 4 but still does not meet requirements for the sixth form. The high quality provision for social, moral and cultural development has been maintained and progress has been made in the spiritual aspirations of the school. Assemblies are good but a daily act of collective worship does not take place. Praise for the school's pastoral systems four years ago is equally appropriate today. A few health and safety issues remain and there are new problems. Target setting and pupil performance review have been introduced reasonably well, but staff are inconsistent in their approach and some do not fully appreciate how available data should be interpreted.

The strong and effective leadership reported at the time of the last inspection has been maintained, as has the effectiveness of senior staff in ensuring that the school functions in an orderly manner. The common purpose, good governors and high quality relationships are also as strong today as they were four years ago. The development plan is less effective than that described in the last report and evaluation strategies have not developed as much as other areas of school life. Managers and governors are aware of strengths and weaknesses in the school, but their response to areas of concern has been less rigorous than their promotion of the many successes.

## STANDARDS

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

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

**Key**

well above average    A

above average        B

average                C

below average        D

well below average   E

In this report, the term 'standards' refers to pupils' attainment relative to some clear benchmark, such as National Curriculum levels, or descriptions, at the end of a Key Stage. 'Above average' standards, for example, means that a higher proportion of pupils of a particular age are succeeding at or beyond the level set than in the majority of schools. 'Achievement' on the other hand, reflects the accomplishments of pupils in relation to what you would expect of these particular pupils. The pupils' prior attainment, what they can already do, is the reference point for pupils' achievement.

Key Stage 3 assessments in 1999 were well below the average for schools nationally and below the standards achieved by similar schools. English results were a little better than those in mathematics with the science grades lowest. Standards currently in Year 9 are similar to those reported last year in English and mathematics, but higher in science. The trend in the school's average points score for the three core subjects has been broadly in line with the national trend over the past four years.

The proportion of pupils gaining five A\*-G grades was similar to the national figure and above that achieved by similar schools. The average total GCSE points score per pupil was below national averages, but compared with like schools nationally, results were broadly similar. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE A\*-C passes was well below the national average and below the proportion achieved by other non-selective schools. The trend in the school's average total GCSE points score is below the national trend and downwards. In mathematics GCSE standards are improving, with results above those for similar schools. Current standards are similar and pupils' achievements are usually good. English language GCSE results in 1999 were below results

for similar schools, and science well below, but current standards in both are as expected for pupils of their prior attainment. Results compared with national standards were well below average in English and science and below average in mathematics. Standards of the current Year 11s are similar, except in science where they have improved and are now below average. The highest GCSE standards in the school in 1999 were in information technology courses, with good achievement in art, drama and history. Standards were lowest in French, electronics and geography.

Attainment in A-levels in the sixth form is well below average, but in comparison with non-selective schools standards are broadly average. GNVQ course attainment was below average in 1999. Pupils' achievements, however, are generally good. Highest achievement has been, and is, in information technology, sociology, business and art. The lowest standards have been in geography.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very positive. Pupils are keen to learn and most want to come to school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good, in spite of bottle-necks at key points on the site.
Personal development and relationships	Very good, but poor eating habits at lunchtime. Pupils and staff get on well together. Pupils co-operate very well and care for and respect one another. Excellent sixth formers who take responsibilities seriously.
Attendance	Well below average and unsatisfactory last year. Currently attendance is much improved and average.

Temporary exclusions were high but appropriate and effective in maintaining a firm grip on pupils' conduct.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	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.*

95% of teaching observed was satisfactory or better, 20% very good or excellent, and 5% unsatisfactory or poor.

The quality of teaching was weakest in Year 11 and best in Year 12. Pupils with special educational needs are well taught. Teachers throughout the school have good subject knowledge, with the exception of the use of information and communication technology within their areas, which is weak. They manage the pupils well. Relative weaknesses sometimes resulted in lessons being judged sound rather than good or better. Teaching of English and mathematics was sound, as was teaching of literacy and numeracy. The best teaching was of specific information technology, religious education, art, history, modern foreign languages and dance. Weaknesses were greatest in geography and some teaching of science, although overall the quality of teaching of science was satisfactory. There were unsatisfactory elements in a range of subjects.

A strength in the pupils' learning was their willingness to apply themselves to tasks, although less so in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form. In most lessons, learning was sound or better and pupils acquired appropriate skills and knowledge.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Broad and relevant, with equality of access. Unsatisfactory overall because information technology and religious education requirements not fully met. Good sixth form courses. Good careers advice and work experience. Shortage of curriculum time.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Effective planning for withdrawn groups. Inconsistent planning in subjects. Sound individual education plans, but lacking subject targets. Good assessment
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Excellent for social development and very good for moral and cultural. Spiritual provision is sound overall. Daily collective worship does not take place. All in the school community support one another. Staff are very good role models for pupils. Increasing responsibilities given to pupils as they get older.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good pastoral care and behaviour management. Bullying is not accepted in the school. Health and safety issues that need to be resolved. Poor arrangements for lunch. Excellent pupil induction.

Extra-curricular activities are excellent in a great range of areas, many involving visits abroad. Several schemes of work are good; others need improvement. Pupils are secure and very well cared for, pastorally. The pupil mentoring system and the use of data to review learning are not as well developed. Although attendance by the pupils in Year 11 is unsatisfactory, the procedures the school is using to try to improve attendance are efficient. The school has excellent links with parents although reports could be improved.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Outstanding leadership and clear vision by the headteacher. Good support from the deputy headteachers and other managers – a sense of common purpose. Substantial strengths in departmental management but some weaknesses.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Knowledgeable and effective. Very supportive of the school. Good 'critical friend' roles with clear strategic direction. Monitoring role underdeveloped.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Sound and improving. Attainment data is interpreted, but not yet thoroughly enough. The evaluation of teaching and learning has too low a priority.
The strategic use of resources	Financial planning good. Conflicting demands on available money; expenditure appropriate and balanced. Information and communication technology resources and use are unsatisfactory.

The headteacher's outstanding leadership results in a school popular with parents. Energy and time have gone into maintaining successes such as the sixth form and pupils' personal development. The quality of staff is good with a good balance of expertise. Apart from computers, most subjects have the resources they need, but there are shortages of textbooks. Some accommodation is excellent, such as the theatre, but the temporary classrooms are poor. School priorities for improvement are clear and appropriate but the development plan does not provide a good basis for a review of success. Available money is used to good effect for the pupils – best value principles are understood and applied, for example in the provision of courses in the sixth form. The school provides good value for money.

## 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>• High teacher expectations and good teaching</li><li>• Their children make good progress</li><li>• A welcoming school where you can ask questions and get answers</li><li>• Very good leadership from the headteacher</li><li>• All pupils feel valued</li><li>• Firm and fair discipline</li><li>• The sixth form is very good; pupils do well there</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The temporary classrooms are overcrowded</li><li>• The WCs for the temporary classrooms are dreadful, as are some others.</li><li>• A minority believe the right amount of homework is not set</li><li>• The arrangements for pupils to eat lunch are poor</li></ul>

Inspectors generally agree with both positive and negative views of parents. They found, however, that the school is working to improve inconsistencies in setting homework and the condition of some toilet facilities. Many aspects of teaching are good and most teachers have high expectations of pupils, but this is not true of all staff.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

1. The proportion of pupils gaining five A\*-G grades, at 94%, was similar to the national figure in 1999 and above that achieved by similar schools. The average total GCSE points score per pupil was below national averages but, compared with like schools nationally, results were broadly similar. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE A\*-C passes, at 24%, was well below the national average in 1999 and below the proportion achieved by other non-selective schools. Although girls' results were higher than those of boys in 1999, when compared with national data for each gender, their results were similar. Over the past three years girls' and boys' results have fluctuated significantly. In 1997 girls greatly out-performed the boys, but in 1998 boys out-performed girls. No simple explanation can be given for these changes given the stable staff and consistent approach in the school, other than differences in the prior attainment of the pupils. The trend in the school's average total GCSE points score per pupil has fluctuated over the past six years but the overall trend is below the national trend and downwards. Although detailed entry data is not available, these figures reflect the changing entry into the school as selective schools have taken a higher proportion of the available pupil population.

2. In mathematics, GCSE standards are improving, with results above those for similar schools in 1999. Current standards are similar to those for 1999 and pupils' achievements are usually good. English language GCSE results in 1999 were below results for similar schools, and science well below, but current standards in both are as expected for pupils of their prior attainment. In English literature, the low proportion of the Year group entering in 1999 achieved above average results compared with similar schools. The 1999 results compared with national standards were well below average in English and science and below average in mathematics. Standards of the current pupils in Year 11 are similar, except in science where they have improved and are now just below average.

3. In comparison with all GCSE subjects taken by pupils at Astor, mathematics shows an improving picture, with scores above the school average, English has remained around average, and science below, for several years. These relative standards were generally reflected in the teaching and work seen, but with improvements in science.

4. The highest GCSE standards in the school in 1999 were in information technology courses, well above the national average, as they have been for the past three years. In lessons and work seen standards were equally high and pupils' achievements were very good. As in Key Stage 3, however, pupils make very little use of computers in other subjects and standards here are very low.

5. In-school comparisons of pupils' GCSE grades show that achievement is good in art, drama and history, where although standards are below or close to those achieved in similar schools, pupils are doing well for their prior attainment. This is also true for the present Year 11 pupils. In French, attainment was well below average in 1999, and low compared with other GCSE results at Astor, but current standards are higher and achievement is good. Few pupils take Spanish and German, but those that do are successful, gaining grades in line with national averages; the pupils achieve well.

6. Standards in electronics, within the design and technology faculty, were very low in 1999, reflecting poor pupil achievement. Other results in the faculty, in resistant materials, graphic products, child development and catering, were below average but sound for the pupils' abilities. Electronics is now taught more effectively and current achievements across the faculty are sound. Geography results have declined and were below those gained in most other subjects. Pupils have underachieved in geography and current work reflects these unsatisfactory standards.

7. Standards in music and physical education, for the small numbers taking GCSE, are in line with their prior learning. GCSE results in the past have been below or well below average. The standards of both subjects generally in the school, however, are good with opportunities in a range of extra-curricular activities. Standards

in dance are high compared with all schools. No pupils take GCSE religious education but achievement in lessons is very good for their prior learning.

8. The school's results at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 were well below the average for schools nationally and below the standards achieved by similar schools. English results were a little better than those in mathematics, with the science grades lowest. In English and mathematics the proportion of pupils attaining level 5 was above that seen nationally, but a below average proportion reached levels 6 and 7. Girls have out-performed boys in English at a similar rate to that seen nationally. In science and maths, where nationally boys do slightly better than girls, the picture varies from year to year. In 1999 boys at Astor did relatively better than girls. Data on pupils' prior attainment on entry shows that the standard of the pupils currently in Year 11 was below average, but of the pupils currently in Year 7, it was well below average. The fall in entry standard does not result from a change in the popularity of the school, but from an increase in the proportion of local pupils gaining places at grammar schools. Standards currently in Year 9 are similar to those reported last year in English and mathematics, but higher in science as a result of changes in the curriculum and teaching.

9. The trend in the school's average points score for all core subjects was broadly in line with the national trend, over the past four years. Based on the average points score achieved by pupils in their end of Key Stage 3 tests, there is a rising trend in English standards, running counter to the attainment levels of pupils on entry. Mathematics results have remained broadly the same. Results in science have fallen significantly for three years but indications are that there will be improvements this year. Judgements on the work seen in lessons and in other written tasks indicates that pupils' currently in Year 9 and those in Year 10 who took the end of key stage tests in 1999 are achieving soundly for their prior attainment.

10. In the non-core areas the picture is more mixed with very good work as well as some underachievement. Where standards are highest, it is as a direct result of effective teaching. In religious education, pupils have very good understanding of many pertinent issues although their written work and recall of factual information is below average. In information technology, pupils' knowledge and understanding are very good. Their skill levels in several areas are above national expectations for pupils of their ages, although pupils have little understanding of the value of computers in other subjects as a result of their minimal use for this purpose. In physical education, particularly dance, in drama, art, history and French pupils are achieving well, although attainment is below or well below the national standards expected in these subjects. Achievement is sound in design and technology and music, although there are weaknesses in some National Curriculum areas in music. In both subjects standards are well below national expectations. In geography, pupils underachieve and standards are too low.

11. The school runs an effective combination of GNVQ and A-level courses in the sixth form. More pupils currently follow A-level courses than GNVQ, but the number choosing GNVQ is increasing. Overall results at A-level in comparison with non-selective schools are broadly average. In comparison with all schools they are well below average and have been for several years. Intermediate GNVQ course attainment was also below average in 1999. The non-selective entry into Astor School results in few pupils with high prior attainment going on into the sixth form. Those pupils that do opt for A-level and GNVQ courses generally achieve well for their abilities as a result of good teaching, and their own positive attitudes and endeavour.

12. In most individual subjects, pupils' A-level results are below national grade levels, but where comparative information exists on subjects for non-selective schools, Astor pupils' attainment is often similar to the national picture. In English standards are similar to those gained in other non-selective schools, and they are below average in mathematics. In the sciences numbers are low and comparison made with all schools shows that attainment is average in chemistry but well below in physics and biology. In English, mathematics and the sciences, pupils' achievements are sound overall. In most other A-level subjects – history, French, Spanish, physical education, psychology, politics, and theatre studies – pupils do well for their prior attainment, and in sociology, business and art, their achievements are very good. In design and technology achievements are sound but weak in geography.

13. GNVQ results in 1999 at Advanced level in health and social care were good; all pupils passed. A below average proportion of candidates passed at Intermediate level. Achievements this year are good. In leisure and tourism achievements in lessons were sound and all candidates passed in 1999. Standards in business were above average at Intermediate and Advanced level and achievements very good. Some students in Key Stage 4 take

professional examinations in word processing (100% pass), spread sheet (42% pass), and desk top publishing (67% pass).

14. Variations in standards in subjects in Key Stage 3 and GCSE are caused to a certain extent by differences in prior attainment of groups of pupils. More low attainers opt for some subjects than others, but inconsistencies in standards throughout the school, in any one year, are more to do with the variation in the quality of teaching than pupils' prior learning experience. Relatively low numbers and fluctuations in entry standards for sixth form courses make inter-subject comparisons much less significant.

15. The school's literacy guidelines are having a positive impact on pupils' acquisition of basic skills. Across the curriculum, their listening skills are very well developed and the use of spoken English is satisfactory or better in most subjects. Written work is generally sound and used for a good variety of purposes. Reading is promoted but opportunities to improve standards are not always taken in lessons. Pupils' basic numeracy skills are sound for their abilities and improve during their time in the school.

16. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well in all key stages. They make good progress in developing literacy skills, for example, in the voluntary tutor reading scheme where pupils' reading levels are significantly increased after a short intensive programme. In science, pupils are encouraged to explain clearly, record and tabulate results with increasing accuracy. A withdrawn group for numeracy support learned how to work with sustained concentration and effort on sorting numbers using information communication technology and most achieved accurate results adding a series of simple numbers. Where pupils with special educational needs achieve very well, the role of the learning support assistant is one of confidence boosting, so that pupils develop their own learning.

17. The school has very challenging GCSE targets agreed with the local education authority for 34% five A\*-C and 95% one A\*-G grades. The school intends to achieve the agreed targets in 2000, though with reducing entry standards into the school this will prove difficult. Although GCSE results have fallen since the last inspection, pupils' achievements overall are sound in Key Stages 3 and 4, and good in the sixth form. In general, pupils of all abilities achieve similarly, but in a minority of lessons, pupils of high prior attainment did less well, relatively, than others.

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

18. Pupils come to school keen to learn, arriving in a self-controlled and positive manner, in spite of the poor conditions they sometimes experience on access routes in bad weather. Almost all are calm and polite and relate very well to adults and their peers. Relationships and pupils' personal development are great strengths of the school. They show respect for the feelings and opinions of others and have high self-esteem. As a result of the school approach – particularly the careers teaching, pupils expect to have successful futures. The buildings and equipment, whether the school's or their own, are well looked after, with minimal graffiti or damage apparent around the school. There is litter but staff work hard to contain the problem. The school site is complex, with various separate buildings set into the hillside. Movement between buildings is difficult, with bottlenecks at key points, such as between the new science block and the old building, and a steep path connecting the twenty temporary classrooms to the main buildings. Pupils move quietly between rooms and areas of the school, however, and usually wait sensibly for their teachers. A substantial duty roster of teachers ensures an effective presence before and after school and during breaktimes, but as pupils know what is expected of them, few cause difficulties. No instances of serious misbehaviour were seen during the inspection.

19. During the lunchtime, when few teaching staff were on duty, conduct was similarly good, but pupils' eating habits were poor. The lack of space in the dining block, and poor arrangements for pupils to eat elsewhere in the school, are the principal cause of the problem. Areas of the school are locked unnecessarily during breaks and lunchtimes, even when it is raining, engendering negative attitudes amongst the pupils which are at odds with their general views of school life.

20. Parents reported in their questionnaire responses that their children like school and most believe that behaviour is good. At the parents' meeting before the inspection, the 45 attending were extremely positive about children's attitudes and behaviour. The pupils report that when behaviour problems do occur they are dealt with

quickly and effectively by senior managers for the benefit of the whole school community, with good consultation with parents and the pupils themselves. Almost all pupils consulted spoke positively about school life. Clubs are popular and large numbers are involved in school theatrical productions. Equally large numbers are involved in a good range of sports fixtures and many take part in visits abroad. Pupils make good use of opportunities provided at lunchtime and after school to discuss problems they may be having with revision for GCSE and sixth form courses. Some Year 11 pupils, although co-operative and friendly, are finding the pressures to achieve at GCSE hard to cope with. Sixth formers were exceptionally positive, however, enjoying their responsibilities and contacts with the staff, appreciating the time staff give them. For example, some staff had arranged extra lessons in the Easter holidays to help with revision. Sixth formers are excellent role models for younger pupils in the school. The management of the sixth form, its social and learning areas and the community spirit generated, were seen to be significant causes of sixth formers' academic successes.

21. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons were good in Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in the sixth form. The attitudes of the pupils in Year 13 were outstanding. In the few lessons where pupils did not respond well the cause was invariably unsatisfactory teaching.

22. In a Year 9 top set English lesson, teaching was very effective and the pupils responded very well to the challenging work set. They were a 'delight to teach', sustaining their concentration as they enthusiastically discussed the poetry being studied. In an A-level art history session, teaching was just as effective and the sixth formers became very involved in their discussions about pre-Raphaelite painters. They confidently expressed their views, but with sensitivity and after thorough reflection. A class of Year 11 pupils being taught religious education were equally attentive and involved as they discussed sexual relationships from personal and religious points of view. Here too very effective teaching facilitated learning and the pupils were only too pleased to respond to the challenging questions and ideas. They showed great maturity in discussing a potentially difficult area.

23. Overall behaviour and attitudes during the period of the inspection were very good, both in and out of lessons.

24. The number of fixed term exclusions is high but evidence shows that the school has had good cause for its actions. Pupils and parents say that the headteacher and governors take a firm and appropriate line on ensuring that school behaviour policies are implemented. The number of permanent exclusions is similar to that for other schools of this size, indicating the success of using temporary exclusions as a 'cooling off' period. There are few repeat offenders.

25. In 1998-99, attendance fell to 87.7%, which was low and well below the 90% benchmark. At 1%, unauthorised absence was similar to the national picture. The principal cause of the poor attendance was a disillusioned minority of Year 11 boys and the inclusion of study leave as authorised absence. In the current year, following substantial checking and celebrating the good attendance of many of the pupils, the figure is much higher at 91.1%, which is similar to the national average.

26. Strengths in pupils' conduct, their relationships, and their approach to work, referred to in the last report, are now even greater.

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

27. The quality of teaching observed in the sixth form was good and sound in both Key Stages 3 and 4. Teaching was good or better in around 75% of the lessons observed in the sixth form, about 60% in Years 7, 8 and 9 and over 50% in Years 10 and 11. Although a full range of teaching quality was seen, from excellent to poor, the number of weak lessons, where pupils underachieved significantly was very small in each key stage. The quality of teaching was least strong in Year 11, where just over half the lessons were good or better and most effective in Year 12, where there were no lessons with significant weaknesses and almost nine in every ten were good or better.

28. Teachers throughout the school have good subject knowledge, which enables them to respond accurately, sometimes anecdotally, to pupils' questions, retaining their interest and enthusiasm. They also manage the pupils well: pupils are aware that good conduct is necessary for effective learning and respond accordingly. In Key Stage 3, time, support staff and resources are often used well, helping to retain pupils' interest. Teachers' detailed planning is good in the sixth form, ensuring that learning objectives for lessons are clear to the pupils. A relative weakness in several Key Stage 3 lessons was that teachers did not use the knowledge gained from assessing pupils' understanding and learning, to plan ahead. Other weaknesses, found in all key stages, often detracted from an otherwise good lesson and led to a judgement of satisfactory teaching. Examples of such weaknesses were: lack of pace and challenge, resulting in too little work done or work too easy for pupils; tasks not matched to the range of ability and knowledge in a class; insufficient or inaccurate marking – sometimes over-generous – leaving pupils unsure how to improve; and failing to allow for the different ways boys and girls learn, in some cases letting enthusiastic boys dominate discussion.

29. A strength in the pupils' learning was their willingness to apply themselves to tasks. In Key Stage 3, most pupils worked hard, intellectually, physically and creatively; they were enthusiastic and keen to do well. Although Key Stage 4 pupils did not have the same thirst for knowledge as younger pupils, they persevered and acquired the necessary learning skills and knowledge. Sixth formers concentrated well in lessons and used their non-contact time to good effect. They have a good understanding of their level of achievement and appreciate what needs to be done to attain a particular grade or pass in GNVQ and A-level. There were few weaknesses in the quality of learning, except in individual lessons where teaching was ineffective.

30. The quality of teaching in each of English, mathematics and science was satisfactory overall. Examples of very good or excellent teaching were seen in all three but there were also a few lessons where weaknesses restricted pupils' progress. Instances of unsatisfactory teaching occurred more frequently in science. Staff in all three subjects had good subject knowledge and most used this well to make work interesting and challenging. The active involvement of pupils in lessons was also a strength in all three. In English, good humour and stimulating work led to good progress. Well-planned tasks in mathematics led to good work, and in science quiet and orderly lessons were conducive to effective learning. Weaknesses in teaching were specific to individuals, for example a lack of overt control of boisterous behaviour, ineffective planning so that too little was taught and unclear learning objectives for pupils. A number of lessons, although satisfactory, could have led to higher achievement by pupils if teaching strategies had been different: for example, being more aware of the needs of passive girls in English, providing greater challenge for higher attainers in mathematics, and more rigorous, constructive marking in science.

31. Specific information technology lessons are taught very well, resulting in the highest GCSE standards in the school. Very well taught procedures and techniques, well chosen examination courses which suit the needs of pupils, and skilful listening to pupils' questions enable teachers to promote very effective learning for the pupils. Teaching and achievements have been very good for several years. Strengths in specific lessons are countered by great weaknesses in the use of information and communication technology in most other subjects. Few staff have the expertise to use the school's computer resources for the benefit of their subject. The requirements of the National Curriculum are not being met.

32. The impact of the school's literacy initiative is variable, but in most subjects teachers are making good efforts to ensure that written work is accurate and covers a good range of applications. In general, reading to find information is under-used. Good emphasis on technical language in design technology, history, geography and physical education is proving helpful in teaching the subject as well as improving pupils' vocabulary. In science, appropriate vocabulary is emphasised but there is insufficient correction of colloquial language in class discussion, or of errors in written work. In art, planning for oral work is inconsistent. Modern foreign languages teachers use literacy opportunities well.

33. Numeracy skills are taught well in several subjects besides mathematics, but not in all. In science and design and technology, pupils are taught to measure, to calculate by substituting in equations and to collect data and interpret results using graphs and bar charts. Graphs and bar charts are also used in history, geography and modern foreign languages. In information technology, pupils model various designs and perform calculations to solve problems.

34. Teaching of religious education is very effective, as it is for much of the physical education programme, particularly dance. In religious education interesting ideas engross pupils, as do lessons where work is related to them and skilful questioning and support for individual pupils result in very good progress. In dance, pupils review their own performance through very effective use of video and here too, there is strong support for the individual. Art, history and modern foreign languages are taught well. High expectations in all three subjects result in challenging work. A focus on examination techniques in history, on thorough questioning in A-level art and on the use of established routines in modern languages are all aspects of effective teaching which help pupils learn.

35. In the range of GNVQ courses and additional subjects in the sixth form, teaching is sound overall, but often good. The strengths and relative weaknesses were similar to those observed elsewhere – enthusiastic teaching of relevant material with good questioning and pace leading to good achievement, but occasionally low expectations of what should be achieved in the lesson, resulting in unsatisfactory progress.

36. Teaching of music, design and technology and drama is sound, but the quality of planning and the demand placed upon pupils are not as high as they could be. In the best lessons, pupils participated wholeheartedly in practical activities and made good progress. Standards could be higher if there was greater consistency of good practice. The majority of geography teaching throughout the school was unsatisfactory, leading to underachievement of pupils. Such teaching was characterised by lack of pace, an unstimulating approach and work not matched to the ability of pupils.

37. In the personal, health and social education lessons observed, a good range of interesting topics was discussed, with some very effective outcomes for the pupils. In Year 7 and the sixth form, pupils were involved in drugs awareness lessons that were very demanding for both teachers and pupils. In the sixth form session, the story of a girl who died from the use of drugs unfolded as they watched a harrowing video. The short discussion that followed was excellent, indicating how the messages had been clearly understood. These lessons were judged to have positive learning outcomes and pupils made real gains in knowledge. Careers lessons observed were also effective, enabling pupils to learn from the carefully structured course.

38. For pupils with special educational needs, the quality of teaching and pupils' learning is good overall. The quality of learning support is good and a strength of the school with a significant improvement since the last inspection. Learning support assistants are positive and conscientious and are successful in stimulating pupils' learning. In the best lessons, teachers and support assistants plan well together and establish good relationships with pupils to help them improve their standard of presentation and enquiry. Subject teachers generally have a good knowledge of pupils' strengths and weaknesses and, in particular, their literacy skills. Individual education plans are appropriate and accessible in departments to enable staff to check pupils' needs, though some subject specific targets are insufficiently challenging and need to be reviewed regularly. Planning for pupils with special educational needs is effective for withdrawn groups, but greater planning detail is needed in mainstream lessons. Day-to-day assessment is good. Pupils with Statements make effective written evaluations on their own progress though targets are rather general making it difficult for pupils to make comments on how they have improved. Management of pupils' learning and behaviour in lessons is good and those pupils needing individual attention are well supported by specialist teachers who work regularly with them to improve their behaviour and attitudes to learning.

39. The quality of teaching is a little better than that reported at the time of the last inspection. The good teacher expertise, high expectations of pupils' behaviour and very good relationships, reported four years ago, all remain as strengths. Improvements have been made in the quality of marking, a key issue in the last report, although greater consistency is still needed. Many lessons then, as now, are effectively planned, although occasionally detail is insufficient in planning and work is not well matched to the varying needs of the pupils. The good quality teaching of information technology and physical education reported four years ago has been maintained and joined by religious education, art, history and modern foreign languages. Sound progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching overall, maintaining many of the strengths and making some inroads into areas of weakness.

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

40. Curriculum provision is broad, balanced and relevant. The quality and range of learning opportunities are very good throughout the school. At Key Stage 3, all pupils, including those with special educational needs, have equal access to a full range of National Curriculum subjects enhanced by the addition of drama. At Key Stage 4, a choice of subjects, including Spanish and double science, ensures greater variety, with very good curricular opportunities in art. At the end of Key Stage 4, most pupils enter for GCSE examinations and a few are entered for Certificate of Achievement courses in science and information technology, although these latter courses are not offered in subjects such as French and English. The planning strategy for teaching literacy is good but planning for numeracy is not as well developed.

41. Sixth formers are offered a wide variety of choice and combinations of subjects, with 18 subjects at A-level and 3 GNVQ courses. A positive feature of sixth form provision is that the school selects appropriate, useful courses, which grow in popularity ensuring that they become economically viable. The GNVQ health and social care course, for example, offers the addition of a first aid certificate and a basic food hygiene course. Planning for the new requirements at A-level is well advanced. The school is retaining its balance of vocational and academic courses.

42. Within this good overall provision there are some weaknesses. Although information technology as a subject is a very strong area of the curriculum, the measuring aspect is not currently taught and planning for information and communication technology across the curriculum is unsatisfactory. In the sixth form, there is inadequate coverage of religious education. In these two areas the school is not meeting its statutory requirements. Physical education is voluntary in the sixth form, which does not result in all pupils learning to appreciate a healthy lifestyle.

43. Planning supports the curriculum well. It is most effective in mathematics, English, religious education and history where there is a good emphasis on literacy. It is least effective in music, where there is little mention of the National Curriculum in the schemes of work, in art, where long term planning does not include clear learning outcomes linked to assessment criteria and in science and modern languages, where documentation is not as thorough as actual practice.

44. The total curriculum time is in line with nationally recommended figures and time allocations for subjects are broadly in line with recommendations. No allowance is made for travel between areas within the school, however, with the result that pupils travelling between the upper buildings and the mobiles lose learning time. It is particularly difficult to teach practical subjects such as science under these circumstances. Lessons often start ten minutes late which means that overall, the curriculum time available is considerably less than that recommended, which restricts what the pupils can achieve.

45. A variety of grouping arrangements generally enhance learning. Parents feel that the mixed ability grouping in Years 7 and 8 is good, and it works very well in subjects such as religious education because planning and teaching are appropriate. Setting, which happens from Year 9 in several subjects, is effective in most. It restricts the range of prior attainment in each class, helping most teachers to respond more effectively to pupils' needs. It is not effective in English, where unsatisfactory assessment has led to inappropriate groupings. In religious education, the requirement for setting against French in Key Stage 4 results in at least one group containing an overwhelming number of boys, restricting opportunities for appropriate and meaningful debate on topics such as marriage. Current arrangements would benefit from refinements.

46. The provision for extra-curricular activities is excellent. Combined Cadet Force provision is balanced by many cultural and academic opportunities. The school believes in developing the individual pupil within an international environment. Curriculum links have been established not only with near neighbours such as the Pas de Calais, but also as far afield as America and Siberia. There are outstanding opportunities for pupils to broaden their horizons, involving direct curriculum and examination work, which contribute not only to improved attainment but also to pupils' attitudes to their learning. Parents talked enthusiastically about the art exhibition and dance visit to Siberia, which took place in January 1999. In November 2000, members of the school will visit Croatia, to work on a major production of My Fair Lady with the Croatian National Theatre, alongside a

school they helped to refurbish after the war. A good range of conventional activities involve many pupils in the school, such as team games in physical education, and a variety of musical activities, even with current staffing difficulties in the music department. Sixth formers experience a wide variety of visits, such as cross channel journeys, to support GNVQ courses. A number of activities support in-class learning such as the history club, which develops pupils' history skills through project work on international history, and optional revision classes or 'clinics' for a variety of subjects at GCSE and A-level.

47. Since the last inspection, the allocation of time for music and religious education at Key Stage 3 has been increased to the recommended level. Study skills for the sixth form have been included in the personal and social education programme and independent learning study periods have been introduced. Sixth formers now have access to their own independent study area.

48. Curriculum provision for pupils with special needs is good at all key stages. Pupils are generally well integrated in lessons. A few pupils are withdrawn in rotation for additional reading and numeracy skills teaching. Some younger pupils consequently miss lessons such as music and religious education for up to three weeks, which impacts unfavourably on their progress in these subjects. Effective links with outside agencies have been established and pupils have appropriate individual education plans with related targets. Statements are monitored well and interim and annual reviews are appropriately carried out. These arrangements have been improved since the last report and now comply with statutory requirements.

49. At Key Stages 3 and 4 personal, social, and health education is appropriate and concerned with developing skills, communicating, making choices and coping with change. At Key Stage 3, the programme is well structured, consisting of five strands of study covering citizenship, health, economic and industrial awareness, personal development and social awareness. At Key Stage 4 the programme has fewer issues but these are covered in greater depth. Emphasis is on appropriate issues such as self-esteem and problem solving. In the sixth form, the course deals with topics relevant to that age group - applying for further and higher education is an important aspect - and also includes the mentoring of Year 7 pupils. The programme is taught by the form tutor in a weekly lesson, with good continuity from Years 7 to 11, as tutors stay with their classes as they move through the school.

50. The school was a pilot for the 'Careers Excellence Award' begun in 1997 and gained accreditation early in 2000. The programme is delivered in Years 8 to 11 on a rota basis, one lesson a month, and it is appreciated by the pupils. In the sixth form, two conference days are provided on careers, and tutors provide ongoing support. Workbooks are used at Key Stages 3 and 4 designed to enable pupils to assess their own learning and development and to complement the work in other departments of the school with links to target setting and self-assessment. Documentation is thorough and well planned with clearly defined objectives. The careers room is well resourced. A work experience programme is in operation in Year 10 for two weeks, with preparation beforehand and a de-briefing afterwards. Sixth form GNVQ pupils have work experience as part of a unit of their activity and other sixth formers' individual requirements are accommodated very well, either as a regular weekly activity or as a block of time. The school has planned, for the coming year, to include a core studies module for sixth formers covering careers education and guidance, personal, social and health education and general studies. This area of the school curriculum has a positive influence on the learning experiences of the pupils, as it did at the time of the last inspection.

51. Through its strong caring ethos, the school provides very good opportunities for the personal development of pupils. Provision for their social development is excellent. Pupils are encouraged to look after each other, to work together and to take on increasing levels of responsibility. One of the first things that new pupils do in Year 7 is to write what they hope to achieve while they are at school onto a 'leaf', which is then stuck on to 'The Astor Family Tree'. Pupils value this in helping them to quickly feel that they 'belong'. All pupils are encouraged to play in a sports team or take part in a production. Pupils can also serve on year and school councils, through which they exert considerable influence on the work of the school. At the school council meeting attended, the pupils spoke strongly and convincingly about the poor state of the lavatories and agreed ways of gaining more money to purchase tables to sit at outside, to eat their lunches. Older pupils hear younger ones read, act as anti-bullying counsellors, help with Year 7 form tutor periods and welcome visitors to the school. Some become prefects, helping to maintain order and acting as go-betweens between pupils and staff. They assist the teaching staff in carrying out a number of onerous duties. Pupils and their parents are very appreciative of the time and

effort given by all staff in providing the very wide range of visits, trips abroad and extra-curricular activities in the holidays and at weekends as well as on school days. Teachers do not always encourage pupils to work together in lessons as much as they might, but by the time pupils leave school they are confident, helpful and mature young adults.

52. Pupils' moral development is very well promoted, particularly through the personal, health and social education programme and religious education lessons. Issues surrounding sex education, drugs, abortion, corporal punishment and euthanasia, for example, are discussed carefully and sensitively. The school has a firm code of behaviour that is consistently reinforced. Pupils have received great praise for their good behaviour when they go on visits. When visiting the battlefields of the Somme, they were reminded of the respect due to the dead and responded very well indeed. Relationships throughout the school are very good, with staff providing very good role models and effective support for those who find it difficult to behave well. Pupils are also encouraged to think of less fortunate people. Last year they raised over £8,000 for 'Fight for Sight', organising many of the events themselves. Several groups expressed concern about the future of the people of Mozambique after the floods and were beginning to think how they might help.

53. There is a strong international cultural element in many of the visits and opportunities within the school. For example, several pupils undertake work experience placements in France and there are strong curriculum links with schools in Germany, Italy and France. The history department recently organised an Anglo-German conference on the Holocaust, with a former member of the Hitler Youth telling of his experiences. Art makes an outstanding contribution to pupils' cultural development through visits to galleries, here and abroad, and the displays of artwork around the school. The school has staged six major art exhibitions in France, Italy, Croatia and Siberia and one in the Croatian embassy in London. There is an annual art exhibition in school and in the town hall to which the local community is invited. Art and music also contribute to pupils' understanding of cultures from other continents. Pupils studying textiles research the cultural background of African influences on design, while those taking religious education GCSE learn about the major world faiths. The school's provision for cultural development is very good overall, and excellent in extra-curricular activities. In lessons, opportunities to develop cultural awareness were not always taken.

54. Opportunities for spiritual development, while satisfactory, are less pervasive than those supporting the other aspects of pupils' personal development. One of the school's key policies is its 'Praise Policy', which it regards as vital to the health of the school - pupils should be praised for effort and encouraged to make further progress in all aspects of their personal development. Assemblies provide good opportunities for full recognition of success and so support pupils' moral and social development well. They also encourage pupils to reflect and pray, but religious assemblies occur only once a week. As at the time of the last inspection, on other days there is no act of collective worship and in this the school is failing to fulfil a statutory requirement. Very few teachers take the opportunity to reflect on a thought for the day, though when this happens it is done well. Opportunities for reflection on spiritual matters are a strength of most religious education lessons, which are very effectively taught. However, departments are not expected to think how they might support pupils' personal, spiritual development and include it in their plans, and so opportunities in lessons are missed. Posters around the school contain messages with a spiritual dimension, which many of the pupils read and think about.

55. Since the last inspection four years ago the high quality provision has been maintained and progress has been made in the spiritual aspirations of the school - although further improvements are needed in this area if it is to be of a similar quality to those for social, cultural and moral development.

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

56. The pastoral system of the school is well structured with both deputy headteachers having oversight over a team of heads of year. The year heads and tutors stay with their year and group as the pupils move through from Year 7 to Year 11. Staff know their pupils very well and are respected by them. Contact with parents is good at all stages and is maintained on a daily basis through a contact book, which is also a homework diary. Form tutors play a successful role in the discipline and progress of pupils. The well-planned personal and social education programme is taught by form tutors, who have some flexibility over what they select to cover. Its

delivery varies in quality, but is mostly good, enabling pupils to acquire useful social and learning skills which improve their potential for academic success and help them integrate into school life.

57. The induction scheme for pupils is comprehensive and of high quality. The headteacher, who provides a permanent point of contact with primary schools, and the new head of Year 7 each year, develop close links ensuring that the school has good knowledge of the pupils before they arrive. Curriculum links with primary schools are good, co-ordinated by a teacher who has that specific responsibility. For example, combined choirs from pupils in Year 6 in primary schools and Year 7 at Astor give concerts together. In mathematics, primary teams solve problems in a 'maths is fun' exercise and in science there is a bridging project called 'Bubbles' which shows the connections between pupils' work in Years 6 and 7 in science and covers, for example, the surface tension of bubbles. These links lead to very good attitudes in pupils as they arrive at their secondary school.

58. Induction into the sixth form is just as thorough as into Year 7. The head of the sixth form co-ordinates a very effective process which ensures that pupils have a good knowledge of what takes place at Astor before they make their decision on what to study and where, post-16. The process includes visits to, and lessons in, the sixth form so that the pupils can appreciate the different working atmosphere. The involvement of sixth formers throughout the school also enables pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 to have a clear understanding of the school's expectations of them and what they do.

59. The school provides substantial support for all new pupils, whatever their background, into any year group. The school's inclusive approach is appreciated by parents.

60. The very good behaviour management policy includes a range of appropriate rewards and sanctions, and parents are kept well informed of their children's successes as well as problems. 'Excellence vouchers' given by staff are regarded as a real incentive by most pupils. In the classroom, most teachers adopt non-confrontational approaches when problems arise, effectively defusing most problems, and where difficulties persist procedures are clear and used progressively. An inclusion room provides a 'cooling off' area for pupils who have been disruptive and is used effectively as a re-integration area for pupils returning after temporary exclusion.

61. Bullying is not tolerated at the school. Immediate and effective action follows any occurrence; this is well known to pupils who believe they are safe and secure. The headteacher is involved at an early stage with any incidents. A weekly briefing with each head of year keeps him fully informed. The school's anti-bullying policy is fully enacted. Measures include a mentoring system involving specially trained sixth form pupils, which is valued by the Year 7 pupils towards whom it is directed. Pupils have use of a box outside the staffroom where any concerns can be stated in writing, but virtually all pupils felt that they could speak to many members of staff if they had any concerns.

62. All members of staff are well informed about child protection procedures and overall responsibility is held by a senior member of staff. In-service training has been provided and the staff handbook is clear and informative. Child protection is an essential part of all staff induction. A member of staff cares for sick or injured pupils and there are nine qualified, first-aid trained, members of staff on site. The centrally placed, well-equipped medical room is used to good effect for pupils who are unwell. Teachers are aware of pupils who have medical problems which may affect behaviour and therefore progress in the classroom, and know how to respond to the best advantage of all concerned. This approach is very good and similar to that reported in the last inspection.

63. A comprehensive health and safety policy is in place and several practical areas have their own health and safety files and appropriate precautions. Expectations of pupil behaviour, and consequently safety, are made very clear in practical subjects. Risk assessment procedures are carried out. Many of the health and safety issues raised in the last report have been dealt with, but a few are outstanding and additional areas need attention. The nature of the site, on a steep hill, and the open and diverse arrangement of buildings, causes difficulties. A pathway that serves the temporary twenty classrooms is steep, rugged and slippery in wet weather, resulting in a number of unpleasant falls. Lavatories for pupils are of an unacceptable quality, particularly for girls in the sports hall, where they are unhygienic, and those outside the temporary block of classrooms. Cleanliness in some areas of the site is unsatisfactory, a situation made much worse when approaches to many of the buildings become muddy. The lack of doormats exacerbates the problems in some classrooms. Some temporary classrooms have dampness problems and there is inadequate lighting; conditions for pupils and teachers in these rooms are

unpleasant and detract from the quality of work. Dust extraction in some design and technology areas needs to be improved.

64. Arrangements for pupils at break and lunchtime are unsatisfactory when pupils are left outside, sometimes in rain, and there is poor access to toilet facilities. The lunch area is small and of poor quality, resulting in mess and the development of poor eating habits. Few pupils sit down on a chair at a table to eat their lunches, many wander around eating and sometimes try to eat a hot meal on a plate sitting on the floor. The care and welfare experienced by the pupils at these times is well below that seen in all other areas of school life at Astor.

65. Attendance is monitored carefully by form tutors and reviewed formally by deputy heads of year. Incentives have been introduced to improve attendance in the form of certificates and these are valued by many of the pupils. Truancy is effectively tackled and unauthorised absence is minimised. A list of all absentees is circulated to teachers so that they can check who should be present in lessons. Form tutors and heads of year are informed of any discrepancies, and they follow up suspected truancy. One head of year compiles statistics for the whole school and identifies individual problems, so assisting others to target and improve attendance. Even with these detailed, time consuming and thorough systems, attendance is too low in Year 11.

66. School systems for assessment are improving, with some very good practice. Pupils are provided with good feedback on their work in mathematics and science, in history and physical education. This keeps pupils well informed about strengths and weaknesses in their work, enabling them to improve further. Some departments, however, such as modern foreign languages, do not focus sufficiently on assessing pupils' attainment, and there is some overestimation of achievement in English and design and technology which is unhelpful to the pupils. Marking is often thorough, for example in religious education, but there are still inconsistencies in practice within departments – a few pupils' books showed poorly presented work where the quality was not commented upon, some tasks were merely ticked and other recorded work was not marked.

67. Increasing use is made of assessment information to guide curriculum planning and to help inform the setting process. The best teachers make use of assessment information to match work carefully to pupils' knowledge and understanding. Data on pupils' achievements is used very well in some departments, such as science, design and technology and physical education, to identify where teaching has and has not been successful. Other areas including geography, art and music make too little use of data.

68. Regular performance reviews have focused on pupils in Year 11 who are underperforming or on the C/D GCSE grade boundary. This scheme is effective in improving some pupils' performance, but not all pupils involved find the process helpful. Others in Year 11 referred to how useful such target setting would be for them, if they could be involved. Plans to use tutor time, and tutors, in the coming year for target setting with individual pupils should go some way to improve upon the current situation. Lunchtime and after school help and homework clubs are very good, providing additional help for those who need it. Termly reports are sent home to inform parents about their children's attainment.

69. There is a tendency for a few middle managers, who provide and interpret pupil assessment data, to imply that it can overestimate pupil achievement. Such an approach is unhelpful and runs counter to the ethos and work of the school.

70. Progress has been made in some areas since the last inspection and strengths have been maintained, but a number of issues remain unresolved.

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

71. Through the hard work and commitment of the headteacher and his staff, the school maintains excellent links with parents. Parents at their meeting, and in their responses to the questionnaire, showed a high degree of satisfaction with the school. It is approachable and supportive and parents are given a warm welcome. They are frequently invited to performances, rehearsals and other social events. Parents are kept well informed about what is going on at school through weekly newsletters and other communications. Meetings are held to discuss progress each year after annual reports have been issued and these are well attended. Reports provide good

information about the progress pupils are making and about their attitude to work. They also indicate what pupils must do to improve. The detail is too variable, however, about what each pupil can actually do. Termly reports are prepared which provide useful information on progress and attainment, but they are difficult for some parents to interpret; they are not very 'parent friendly'. When important decisions about GCSE options or sixth form courses have to be taken, pupils and their parents are given clear information in detailed booklets and are given the opportunity to discuss choices with staff; they are fully consulted. A minority of parents who cannot come into school to see teachers are visited at home; this is excellent practice. Heads of Year and form tutors maintain close contact with pupils' homes when necessary; for example if behaviour or attendance needs to improve or if a pupil needs extra support.

72. Parents are generally very supportive of the school. A dedicated group of parents runs a small parents, teachers and friends association, which raises considerable sums of money. This is spent on extra items to support teaching so that it is of direct benefit to pupils. For example, the modern foreign languages department was given a new TV aerial so that pupils can watch French programmes. The association also funded much of the stage lighting which is used to such good effect in the many productions that the school puts on. These productions are highlights of the school year and are very well attended by parents and the local community. The school is very firm in insisting that pupils complete all homework that is set, despite mixed feelings about homework expressed by some parents, not all of whom see it as a valuable part of their child's education. The school has maintained the high quality of its partnership with parents since the last inspection.

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

73. The school has a combined vision and aim, clearly stated in the prospectus, which is: to strive for academic excellence, and to value the uniqueness of every pupil within a caring and compassionate environment. The headteacher promotes this vision vigorously with pupils, parents and the community. He shows active concern for pupils' welfare and progress and is an outstanding ambassador for the school, locally and in many of the places abroad where the school has forged educational and cultural links. Parents readily express their appreciation of the effectiveness of his leadership. There is unanimity of purpose between the headteacher, deputy headteachers and the senior management team. The success of this large and complex school has been endorsed recently by the attainment of the Chartermark Award and Investors in People status. Senior staff have started to analyse available data on pupils' attainment and potential more thoroughly, so that appropriate provision can be made for the great range of pupils at Astor School. The school's vision is further promoted by means of a successful sixth form and an excellent range of flourishing extra-curricular activities.

74. The school is well managed. There is effective delegation with clear lines of accountability. One deputy headteacher, as director of studies, has responsibility for management of the curriculum and academic performance; the other heads the personnel development group and manages the non-teaching, administrative and site staff. The sixth form is very effectively managed as a unit, one where the pupils are expected to be a role model for younger pupils and this they do in an exemplary manner. Members of the academic board, the curriculum development group and the senior management team are given the responsibility of presenting papers to their groups, for example on assessment or budgetary implications. Staff can contribute to decision-making by commenting on the minutes of the various groups. These processes provide them with very good opportunities for professional development. Communications amongst staff are very good. Most departments include worthwhile subject aims in their handbooks, but the principal aims of the school are not included. Most departments are well managed, some very well, but the management of geography has serious shortcomings. Management of music is in abeyance until a new head of department is appointed.

75. The governing body is kept very well informed by the head and by regular reports from an appropriate range of sub-committees. Members are well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They receive detailed reports of academic progress and developments. They show close pastoral interest in the welfare of staff, and receive detailed information about any deficiencies of provision. Problems concerning the site and premises are known in detail. The chair of governors consults regularly with the headteacher and strategic planning takes place after close consultation between the governors and senior managers. Governors discuss and approve the school's development plan, although this is less effective than most other school documents. They learn of curricular developments through regular presentations by heads of department and others with responsibility, as well as

through the headteacher's reports and their own visits to the school. Two governors visit the school each term but there are no criteria for making judgements on these occasions, nor is there formal reporting back to the governing body on findings. Governors are knowledgeable and effective, however, take pride in all of the school's achievements and actively support the many school events.

76. The school has a system for monitoring of teaching and learning, but this is in the early stages of implementation. Heads of department are accountable for results in public examinations and there is a well-established procedure for these to be discussed with the headteacher and for targets to be set for development. These are monitored in follow-up meetings but 'cause and effect' have had insufficient emphasis. Little monitoring within departments has taken place to identify teaching, curriculum and assessment strengths and weaknesses, corresponding to pupils' learning successes and failures. In English, improvements in the quality of teaching have been achieved, because a good start has been made in evaluating its effectiveness. A school-wide system has now been set up whereby members of the senior management team will each monitor one or two departments. The introduction of this system has been too recent for its impact yet to be felt. Currently one deputy head undertakes the line-management of all departments. This ensures good communications between middle and senior management, but the role of line manager is inadequately defined and several departments perceive it as informal and purely pastoral. A formal and constructive line-management responsibility for all departments is an excessive burden for one person. The system at present does not guarantee that the school's vision is being promoted effectively within each subject.

77. The special needs department is well managed though the manager has insufficient time to track pupils' progress effectively. The governors support the department appropriately and comply in fulfilling their statutory duty to report special needs arrangements and funding to parents. Resources are adequate, but there is a lack of specialised software particularly for improving spelling. This was a priority for improvement in the last inspection report.

78. The school's development plan is too broad and wide-reaching a document. It focuses largely on reviewing and re-organizing provision and insufficiently on raising standards of attainment and the quality of teaching. Departmental and whole-school priorities are not co-ordinated, and criteria for judging the success of each initiative are unclear. The envisaged timescale for the re-organisation and upgrading of provision for information and communication technology is unrealistically short. The plan requires substantial revision if it is to provide a satisfactory means of addressing the school's current priorities. These are: to maintain pupils' attainment at GCSE, in a context where the academic entry standard of pupils has fallen for five years as a result of increasing numbers attending grammar schools; to improve the attainment of boys; to establish information and communication technology across the curriculum; to develop monitoring, both of teaching and of pupils' progress; and to set suitable targets for pupils' attainment. Departmental development plans, included in the whole school document are written to a common format, with senior management involvement. Each addresses the areas of curriculum, staffing, resources and in-service training, with start and completion dates, but here too criteria are unclear and teaching and learning have too low an emphasis in several.

79. The staff are very committed to their subjects, to the pupils and to the school. Their generally successful response to delegation confirms a unity of purpose and a positive will to succeed. There is a very good capacity within the school's personnel to develop further.

80. The strong and effective leadership reported at the time of the last inspection has been maintained, as has the effectiveness of senior staff in ensuring that the school functions in an orderly manner. The common purpose, good governors and high quality relationships are also as strong today as they were four years ago. The development plan is less effective than that described in the last report and evaluation strategies have not developed as much as other areas of school life. Managers and governors are aware of strengths and weaknesses in the school, but their response to areas of concern has been less rigorous than their promotion of the many successes.

81. A positive response has been made to the key issues of the last report, with success in some areas but others requiring further attention. High expectations, identified four years ago, are still maintained by most, but not all staff. Matching work better to pupils' needs is now emphasised in several departments. Sound progress has been made in improving the quality of teaching, maintaining many of the strengths and making some inroads into areas

of weakness. The curriculum provision in the school is evaluated well and adapted to meet changing needs of the pupils and requirements. Provision for the sixth form is much improved and now very good, with a balance of GNVQ and A-level courses. Marking is better but still inconsistent. Religious education is now appropriate in Key Stage 4 but still does not meet requirements for the sixth form. The high quality provision for social, moral and cultural development has been maintained and progress has been made in the spiritual aspirations of the school. Assemblies are good but a daily act of collective worship does not take place. Praise for the school's pastoral systems four years ago is equally appropriate today. A few health and safety issues remain and there are new problems. Target setting and pupil performance review have been introduced reasonably well, but staff are inconsistent in their approach and some do not fully appreciate how available data should be interpreted.

82. The school has a good balance of newly qualified and experienced teachers, sufficient appropriately qualified technicians and support staff, and a good, very supportive team of administrative staff, who help to ensure smooth day-to-day management of the school. The staff handbook provides valuable guidance on many areas of school life. Use of new technology is well established in the financial administration of the school, for general administration and for curriculum management. However, there is less use of computers amongst senior and middle management than is usually the case and the school does not make use of a computerised system for checking attendance. There are good professional relationships between adults and between adults and pupils. The arrangement that links learning support assistants to particular departments is very effective and provides good support to pupils who have special educational needs. This situation is similar to that reported in the last inspection.

83. New arrangements for teacher appraisal and performance review are currently being developed. The strategy is sound and set to be in place in the first term of the next academic year. It ensures that all staff will have begun their appraisal before the end of 2000. The school recognised that the previous arrangements, although reported as appropriate in the last inspection, were unworkable. Several staff had not been appraised for a number of years. The new strategy will link more closely with departmental planning and management, and is intended to make the impact of training, based on targets and improved standards, easier to monitor - a weakness highlighted in the last report was inadequate monitoring of the effectiveness of in-service training. The quality of support for newly qualified teachers and other new staff is very good. A programme of induction meetings, lesson observations and feedback, together with a mentoring scheme is very effective and valued highly by teachers.

84. Accommodation is a mix of great strengths, and important weaknesses which disadvantage the pupils. Since the last inspection there have been significant improvements. The school buildings are now on one site and a major building and refurbishment programme has been completed that includes a new science block. A theatre provides an excellent facility with good quality lighting and seating. Sixth form accommodation is good, with well looked after social and work areas. The standard of display in the foyer and around the school, consisting of large scale paintings, textiles, ceramics, art and design work, is exceptional. Pupils learn from it and treat it with respect. On the other hand, the poor quality temporary accommodation - almost 40% of the school - seriously affects standards in, for example, modern foreign languages lessons. The pathways are inadequate and pupils bring a constant trail of mud into the buildings whenever it rains. The quality of the dining room accommodation is very poor and fails to encourage a healthy approach to eating and appropriate attitudes and social development. The dance studio roof is not high enough to allow stretching and jumping safely and ventilation is compromised, and complicated, by its proximity to other buildings where noise from music may interfere with other lessons. The school is taking steps to remedy the poor state of the lavatories and to identify the few pupils who intentionally cause damage. At the time of the inspection, however, some were locked and others were most unpleasant and unhygienic.

85. In all subjects, except business studies, there are too few computers available to provide the level of access required for the curriculum. Subjects based in the twenty classroom block of temporary accommodation are particularly disadvantaged as computers cannot be placed there for fear of theft. The school does not provide access to the Internet; a serious shortcoming in provision at a time of such rapid educational development. A number of the pupils with whom inspectors had discussions do not have access to computers at home, and for them learning at school about the role of computers is particularly important. The situation is worse than that reported at the time of the last inspection. Most subjects have sufficient book and equipment resources but there are shortages of textbooks in science, modern languages and in mathematics, and pupils are not provided with

sketchbooks for art. The library, although heavily used by pupils at breaks and lunchtime, has insufficient books and is not a resource centre with good quality multi-media computers with Internet access. The library has insufficient facilities to stimulate pupils' interest and curiosity in reading and research. Resources overall are insufficient to meet the needs of the pupils.

86. Financial planning is good, as it was at the time of the last inspection, even though resources are in short supply in some areas and significant accommodation problems cause difficulties. Senior managers work extremely hard to balance the budget with conflicting demands on available funds: expenditure for day to day purchases such as textbooks and computers, versus longer term substantial investments to improve the accommodation and the learning environment. All financial systems are sound and recommendations from the county auditors have been implemented. Expenditure patterns in most areas are similar to those nationwide, with above average expenditure on resources and administration. The budget proportions spent on the sixth form and Key Stages 3 and 4 is broadly as expected. Although sixth form A-level standards are well below average, good achievement in both A-levels and GNVQs, good teaching and young adults with high self-esteem indicate that the cost-effectiveness of post-16 provision is good. Grants obtained for specific purposes, for example, for special needs provision or from the Standards Fund, are scrupulously spent as intended. The school secures very good value for money by acting as a contractor for its own cleaning force. Costs for the maintenance of buildings are reduced by the permanent employment of two handymen. The bursar works assiduously to secure 'best value' in negotiations with suppliers and best value principles are applied in much of the work of the school. The school compares its results with other Kent high schools and ensures that it provides cost-effective courses. The headteacher and staff keep abreast of the wishes and needs of all in the school community and work to provide the best education they can. School expenditure per pupil for the past year was well below the national average yet achievement was sound in Key Stages 3 and 4 and good in the sixth form. Pupils' behaviour was very good and they have high self esteem, particularly sixth formers. Leadership is outstanding, management effective in all areas except monitoring which is improving, and parents are very pleased with the quality of education provided for their children. The school is therefore judged to provide good value for money.

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

87. The governors should include in their post-inspection action plan the way in which they are going to respond to the following issues, in order to raise standards in the school. The governors, headteacher and staff should:

- Increase the frequency, rigour and follow up to monitoring of teaching and learning, making better use of assessment data, ensuring identification of weaknesses that result in pupils' underachievement, particularly in geography and some aspects of science;  
Paragraphs: 30; 36; 67; 76; 80; 81; 108; 134-137
- Improve identified weaknesses in teaching. These should include:
  - lack of pace and challenge to work
  - work not matched to the range of pupils' prior learning in both setted and mixed ability classes
  - insufficient and in some cases inaccurate marking. Too generous marks, suggesting to pupils that their work is better than it is and insufficiently constructive criticism.
  - lack of awareness of differences in how boys and girls learn;  
Paragraphs: 28; 30; 36; 66
- Increase the amount of curriculum time available. Current shortfalls result in standards lower than they might otherwise have been. Time is lost on this complex and difficult site as no movement time is included in the school day;  
Paragraph: 44
- Improve the inadequate information and communication technology resources and ensure that much greater use is made of computers in many subjects, so that the National Curriculum is fully implemented. Immediate access to the Internet is needed for the current Year 11 and Year 13 leavers;  
Paragraphs: 31; 42; 85; 153

- Work with the local education authority to improve the quality of school buildings and resources, which detract from the quality of the pupils' learning environment and the work they can do;  
Paragraphs: 84; 85
- Improve the arrangements for eating lunch and the unhygienic condition of some lavatories;  
Paragraphs: 19; 63; 64; 84
- Ensure that pupils experience a daily act of collective worship, and that sixth form religious education meets the Agreed Syllabus requirements.  
Paragraphs: 42; 54; 81

#### 88. Other less important issues

##### **Teaching**

- Share existing good practice (36, 108, 163)

##### **Curriculum**

- Increase the sixth formers' involvement in physical education and arrangements for non-participants in all years (175)
- Ensure that curriculum planning is equally effective in all subjects, improving provision in music, art, modern foreign languages and science (43)
- Review pupil grouping arrangements to ensure that teaching is as effective as possible (45)
- Develop a spiritual dimension within the taught curriculum through focused work in subject lessons (54)

##### **Care**

- Ensure that attendance checks are rigorously applied and followed up to try to further improve attendance of pupils in Years 10 and 11 (65)
- Improve the quality of performance review for pupils in Year 11 (68)
- Resolve minor, but important, health and safety issues: the unsatisfactory path between the two main sets of buildings; damp in some temporary classrooms; dust extraction in some design and technology areas (63)

##### **Parents**

- Improve the consistency with which teachers report on pupils' achievements in annual reports, ensuring that parents are told what pupils can do in each subject; make the useful termly reports easier to understand (71)

##### **Management**

- Improve the quality of the school development plan, ensuring that it represents the school's priorities and has clear success criteria as well as deadlines and responsible staff (78)
- Agree criteria for governors' visits and the way in which information gained should be fed back to the governing body (75)
- Improve some senior and middle managers' understanding of the value of performance data in evaluating the quality of teaching and the relative success of pupils (81)
- Review the proportion of non-contact time available for the special educational needs manager, ensuring that there is sufficient time available to track pupils' progress (77)
- Ensure that there are sufficient textbooks for all subject areas (85)
- Improve and update the library provision as a multi-media resource centre with sufficient books and computers (85)

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed

187

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

About 80

### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection*

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
4	16	41	34	3	2	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*

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1184	179
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	270	5

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	29	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	354	1

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	5

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	31
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	75

### *Attendance*

#### **Authorised absence**

	%
School data	11.2
National comparative data	7.9

#### **Unauthorised absence**

	%
School data	1.0
National comparative data	1.1

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

		Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		1999	95	111	206
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year					
National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science	
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	39	53	37	
	Girls	74	47	31	
	Total	113	100	68	
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	55 (45)	49 (53)	33 (46)	
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)	
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	9 (13)	20 (23)	6 (7)	
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)	

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	42	49	46
	Girls	61	64	56
	Total	103	113	102
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	50 (53)	55 (53)	50 (49)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	24 (20)	24 (22)	15 (9)
	National	31 (30)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

		Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		1999	106	110	216
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year					

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	18	100	103
	Girls	33	102	103
	Total	51	202	206
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	24 (32)	94 (93)	95 (95)
	National	46 (45)	91 (90)	96 (95)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	31
	National	38

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

## Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	38	43	81

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	9.5	13.7	12.0	3.4	3.9	3.5
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	94
	National	N/A

### Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	4
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	0
Indian	8
Pakistani	4
Bangladeshi	3
Chinese	2
White	1336
Any other minority ethnic group	3

### Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	140	8
Other minority ethnic groups	2	

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)	78.1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.4

FTE means full-time equivalent.

### Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	21.5
Total aggregate hours worked per week	644

### Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.7%
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### Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	26.4
Key Stage 4	21.3

## Financial information

Financial year	1998/99
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	£
Total income	3,082,726
Total expenditure	2,994,397
Expenditure per pupil	2,240
Balance brought forward from previous year	- 90,328
Balance carried forward to next year	- 1,999

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1363
Number of questionnaires returned	176

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	43	48	7	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	48	44	6	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	27	54	8	1	10
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	27	50	16	7	1
The teaching is good.	41	55	2	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	39	45	11	3	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	59	34	5	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	67	29	2	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	39	47	11	2	2
The school is well led and managed.	51	39	4	2	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	43	47	5	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	47	39	4	1	9

### Other issues raised by parents

The sixth form is very good; pupils do well there. The temporary classrooms are overcrowded. The lavatories for the temporary classrooms are dreadful, as are some others. Girls will not use the lavatories available in school. The arrangements for pupils to eat lunch are poor.

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

### **ENGLISH**

89. The general profile of attainment of pupils on entry to the school has gone down and is well below the average for all schools. GCSE results have declined since the last inspection. The proportion gaining A\*-G passes is in line with the national average. The 1999 A\*-C pass rate in English language was below the average for all schools and below that in similar schools. English literature results were above those in similar schools, but with a much smaller percentage of pupils entered. Judged by work seen in lessons and in work scrutiny, attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 remains well below national averages, particularly in the case of boys, but in most classes the achievement of pupils is satisfactory in relation to their prior attainment. Files are well organised and show an appreciation of the need for structure and technique in writing, but work which demonstrates flair and insight is rare.

90. Attainment in English by the end of Key Stage 3 has been erratic, but there is a rising trend at odds with the falling standards of pupils on entry to the school. The results in the 1999 national tests were better than those in maths and science, but well below the national average and below those for schools with a similar intake of pupils. The proportion of pupils attaining level 6 was low, confirming that teacher assessments at this level were over-generous. Current Year 9 pupils' attainment is also well below average. The achievement of most pupils is satisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress: their needs are known and catered for, and good quality support is provided for them. All pupils attempt to write in a range of styles, and understand the importance of planning and correcting work, and presenting it neatly. They try to vary vocabulary, and descriptive work is lively and imaginative.

91. Over a period of several years, A-level English literature results have been below the national average, but equal to those in similar schools. Pupils make appropriate progress in relation to prior achievement, especially as the entry requirement for the course is lower than that normally expected. In lessons, pupils demonstrate a sound understanding of narrative, character, and situation, but are not skilled in seeing implied meaning in texts, or relating texts to their social and cultural background.

92. Teaching is satisfactory, and characterised by much hard work, both in and out of the classroom. Half of the lessons seen were at least good; unsatisfactory teaching is rare. Some teaching is excellent. The quality of teaching in Key Stage 3 is mainly good, with the occasional lesson that is less than satisfactory, and sound in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Pupils learned most effectively when they were expected to take an active part in lessons, and given a clear idea of the purpose of the lesson and how it linked in with previous work. A Year 9 class studying 'Romeo and Juliet' quickly saw links between plot, motive and character, and began to debate the most suitable quotations to support their views. The teacher had given considerable thought to materials, time use, and the composition of discussion groups. Learning was less effective when work was presented as a requirement rather than as an interesting challenge. The teacher of a Year 11 higher ability class rightly highlighted the value of skimming an article being studied, but a writing frame being used to summarise issues from the article resulted in a restriction of ideas rather than an exploration of them. Despite some unimaginative teaching, many lessons were stimulating, well paced, and appreciated by pupils. Teachers handled class discussion well, although quieter pupils (usually girls) were too often overlooked. Few teachers make sufficient use of pair and group work. Other strategies are effectively used, combining with good-humoured relationships, and very good levels of organisation and pupil management, to create a positive atmosphere in most lessons. Given the wide range of ability in many classes, teachers do not plan sufficiently to cater for differing needs, so that some more able pupils are given undemanding tasks. This is compounded by an issue related to assessment. Teachers mark work regularly and give pupils good advice about how to improve, but too often give over-generous grades, especially to more able pupils. This leads to over-confidence about achievement and a lack of clear targets for pupils to pursue.

93. Pupils' attitudes to English are normally good. The very good behaviour generally seen, and the correct and sensitive relationships between pupils and with teachers are strengths. There is much courtesy and co-operation. Good attitudes to work and study, as evidenced in the quality of written work seen in the scrutiny, improve the

speed and quality of pupils' learning. Boys' efforts are more variable than those of girls, but boys are more enthusiastic in class discussion. On rare occasions mild misbehaviour, overlooked or uncorrected, deteriorated into unacceptable behaviour. The high absence level of a number of pupils at Key Stage 4 impedes their progress.

94. The department is competently managed and led. The scheme of work, criticised in the last report, is a thorough document, which ensures a more balanced coverage of the National Curriculum. Administration and organisation are good, and have resulted in more varied teaching strategies and some useful monitoring of teaching. However, the issue of raising the standards of pupils' attainment is not yet being addressed with the vigour and decisiveness required. Accommodation is good, and resources adequate although mixed editions of some set texts cause difficulty, and some worksheets are visually drab.

95. Since the last report there have been improvements in the quality of teaching, planning, the scheme of work and the accommodation for teaching the subject. Standards of attainment have declined, but this is because of a decrease in the number of academically able pupils joining the school. Whilst overall progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory, not enough has been done to ensure that work matches the needs of pupils in classes with widely differing abilities. Given its willingness to work hard and reflect on what it does, the department has a good capacity to improve further.

### **Literacy**

96. In subjects other than English, standards of literacy are below average, but improving. The school has identified the need for a common approach and practice both to build on the work of primary schools, and to tackle the difficulties which many pupils experience with basic skills. Co-ordinated by a deputy head, an action plan has resulted in the issue of literacy being discussed by all departments. There is agreement about the value of writing frames and of displays of subject-specific key terms in classrooms, and the importance of oral work in all subjects. In future an additional English lesson for Key Stage 3 pupils will focus on literacy skills. Money has been set aside for differentiated dictionaries to be provided in all subjects; weaker readers are identified on entry to the school and are given extra reading support, including sixth form 'reading buddies'. Some thought has been given to the readability of materials which pupils are expected to work from.

97. The impact of these very good initiatives is variable, but most subjects are accepting responsibility for improving literacy skills. Most pupils are aware of the need to present their work well. In Key Stage 3 information and communication technology lessons, pupils prepare written accounts of what they have learnt. Emphasis on technical language is good in design technology and physical education, where pupils are expected to know and use correct terms and annotate diagrams correctly. In science, some teachers do not correct colloquial language in class discussion, or errors in written work, but appropriate vocabulary is emphasised in worksheets and definitions are expected. In art, the use of oral work is too inconsistent and not sufficiently planned for. Modern foreign languages uses literacy opportunities well, but pays less attention to memory retention skills. Good examples were seen in history and geography of teachers defining and clarifying key terms, including the full implication of 'symptoms' of the 'Black Death'. Whilst there is consistent practice in history, that observed in geography was more haphazard. In religious education, pupils are encouraged to discuss religious ideas and relate them to their own lives. In general, reading to find information is under-used, and few teachers differentiate skimming and scanning from detailed reading techniques. The library is popular and increasingly well organised, but has too few books. It lacks the range of research facilities to enable it to develop into a learning resource centre for study. Teachers in most subjects expect pupils to write at length; too few correct basic errors.

### **MATHEMATICS**

98. GCSE results in 1999 for A\*-C grades were above average when compared to similar schools but below the national average for all schools. They are an improvement over 1998 results and above those at the time of the last inspection. Results for A\*-G grades were in line with the national average. Overall, results are above those obtained by the same pupils in other subjects. Results in the 1999 National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 were well below the national average of all schools and below average when compared to similar schools.

They were slightly below those obtained in 1997 and 1998. A-level results were well below the national average of all schools, below the average of similar schools for A-E grades and below those obtained in 1998. At all levels no consistent significant difference was identified between the results obtained by boys and by girls.

99. In lessons and other work, the overall attainment of pupils is well below the national expectation at the end of Key Stage 3. Some lower attaining pupils have weak numeracy skills. They have difficulty in using the number rules and little understanding of place value. Most other pupils understand and use fractions, decimals and percentages. They measure lengths and angles and calculate areas and volumes. They conduct simple investigations, developing and using their own strategies for solving problems. Many higher attaining pupils reach standards in line with the national expectation. At the end of Key Stage 4, overall standards have improved since the last inspection and are below average. Most pupils can solve problems using calculators, but otherwise have difficulty unless the numbers are small. Many higher attaining pupils reach standards in line with, and occasionally exceeding, the national expectation. They have well-developed algebraic and graphical skills. They solve simultaneous and quadratic equations, using algebraic and graphical methods. When conducting investigations they generalise their solutions and justify their reasoning. Standards on A-level courses are variable. Most have a satisfactory understanding of topics in algebra, calculus, mechanics and statistics. Some, but not all, reach the national average.

100. The quality of teaching was good in over half the lessons observed and satisfactory overall. Sixth form teaching was good. Evidence of pupils' earlier work, examination success and the quality in observed lessons indicates that pupils throughout the school generally have made good progress and achieved well, considering their prior attainment. Teachers know their subject well. Most lessons are well planned, although occasionally pupils are given insufficient time to learn independently. In most lessons pupils are fully involved in whole-class activities. For example, in a Year 7 lesson, a group of pupils were arranged in order of height. This helped lower attainers to find and understand the 'median'. They were then able to find it in other situations. In the majority of lessons, careful questioning and discussions assist pupils to clarify their understanding. In a Year 9 lesson, some higher attaining pupils had difficulty understanding percentage increases. Pupils were helped to work through problems on the board, so that methods became clear and pupils were able to solve other problems. Teachers have good class management skills and control their classes effectively. This ensures that pupils settle down quickly to their work and make good use of their time. In the less successful lessons teachers failed to provide sufficient challenge for the highest attainers who spent too long repeating work they had already learnt. Pupils with special educational needs are given good support, which assists their learning and improves their numeracy skills; they achieve well for their abilities. Homework is used effectively by most teachers. It is usually well marked and errors identified. However, some teachers fail to indicate ways in which pupils can improve.

101. Pupils behave well in lessons, have positive attitudes to their work and are keen to do well. They are attentive during oral work and respond freely to questions. High levels of concentration were sustained in most lessons although occasionally a minority of pupils failed to focus properly on their work and their progress was limited. Pupils with special educational needs work hard to improve their numeracy skills. Most are very dependent on their teachers for support. Almost all pupils enjoy good relationships with their teachers and appreciate the help they receive.

102. The department is well led. Relationships are good and all staff are committed to raising standards. The ethos for learning is positive and supports the school's aims. The curriculum is broad and balanced with good provision for pupils with special educational needs. Setting arrangements are satisfactory although some teachers find difficulty in coping with the wide range of attainment in some classes. Whilst resources are generally satisfactory, a shortage of textbooks in some years means that books need to be shared between classes. At present there are no opportunities for pupils to use computers.

103. The department has made sound progress in the four years since the last inspection. There has been an improvement in GCSE results for A\*-C grades although a slight decline in National Curriculum results. A-level results for A-E grades improved considerably in 1998 but declined in 1999. The quality of teaching has improved with a higher proportion of lessons graded good or very good, although higher attainers are still insufficiently challenged in some lessons.

## **Numeracy**

104. Pupils enter the school with well below average standards of numeracy. They improve these skills as they move through the school not only in mathematics lessons but also by using mathematics in some other subjects. In science, for example, they measure temperature, mass and volume, and calculate force, work and energy by substituting in equations. In design and technology, pupils calculate proportions, volumes and weights. They collect data and interpret results using graphs and bar charts. In information technology, they investigate in two and three dimensions the relationship between the area of a surface and the number of tiles needed to cover it. Graphs and bar charts are also used in history, geography and modern foreign languages. In all subjects, pupils' numeracy skills facilitate their progress. These skills continue to improve and at the end of Key Stage 4 the great majority of pupils have acquired basic competence in using number, measurement, data handling and graphs.

## **SCIENCE**

105. GCSE results in science in 1999 were lower than those reported in the last inspection and well below average compared with all schools nationally and those with a similar intake. Attainment by girls was higher than that of the boys in the school, although they did less well in science than in most of their subjects. Pupils' attainment in observed lessons and in their written work was higher than the 1999 test results, although below average. There were some examples of high achievement, in relation to prior attainment, for example in investigatory work by pupils following the 'Science Plus' course. Most pupils showed laboratory skill levels appropriate to their prior learning. Science standards have been below those of other subjects in the school for a number of years but they are currently improving with a new head of department monitoring and managing effectively to bring about important changes in teaching, and other staff changes.

106. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 has fallen over the last three years and is well below national averages. It is also below that of similar schools. However, standards seen in written work and lessons this year were more varied and higher than the results for 1999 would indicate. In some classes, they were above average, for example in practical and revision work on chemical reactions, and electricity and magnetism in Year 9. In other classes, attainment was lower. Overall attainment was below average but achievement in relation to prior attainment was sound. Many pupils were able to handle measurement work in forces, temperature and electric circuits and to present their data effectively as line graphs.

107. Comparison with other schools is less meaningful in the sixth form because of small group sizes and absence of data for similar schools. A-level physics and biology results were below average in 1999; in chemistry they exceeded national figures. Attainment seen in written work, course work and lessons was below average, or well below. However, there were examples of sound achievement in careful investigations and in genetics calculations. Results at A-level are likely to remain below or well below average as the entry standard into the sixth form to take A-level sciences is a double grade C or above at GCSE. At Astor, where there are few A and A\* grades at GCSE, the overall A-level attainment levels are lower than in schools where higher proportions of pupils gain these high GCSE grades. Nevertheless, the pupils' achievements, relative to their prior attainment, are sound or better and pupils with special educational needs make good progress.

108. Teaching was sound or better in about nine in every ten lessons observed. It was at least good in half the lessons and very good or excellent in a quarter. Overall teaching is sound across all key stages but there are a large number of teachers teaching science and weaknesses in individual teachers need to be addressed. The best teaching included spellbinding demonstrations, for example of models of electron capture in chemical bonding and of the role of amniotic fluid in protecting a baby. Good teaching was characterised by careful assessment of pupils' work and very good planning to meet the needs of the whole class. This included good laboratory work by pupils with special educational needs and opportunities for high attaining pupils to be challenged, for example in research on the planets. Good teaching was directly linked to good learning and accounted for the pockets of high achievement in Key Stages 3 and 4. This strong nucleus of good teaching in the department can serve as an exemplar for the improvement of practice throughout. In the unsatisfactory lessons, planning was insufficiently thorough, learning objectives not clearly defined and there were lower expectations of what the pupils could achieve. This disparity was also seen in the work samples, where good teachers were able to drive up standards by careful and constructive marking; yet in other classes some work had not been marked for several weeks. A

lack of thorough marking allows standards to drop as teachers are not able to match work to pupils' current needs. These weaknesses lead to underachievement in some aspects of science.

109. The level of teachers' knowledge was good throughout the department. This was evident in well-prepared material in the sixth form on population genetics, physics revision and chemical investigation. Where this knowledge was combined with good lesson planning, the result was good learning. In the sixth form, learning was more passive than it was in the main school.

110. The Science Plus scheme, with its rigorous testing and feedback, led to good learning. Overall learning was sound, but this judgement covered a range from very good to poor and the issue for the department is to raise the general level of learning to that achieved in the best lessons. In general, pupils had acquired sound or good laboratory skills and the level of their oral contribution was very good at times. In many cases, however, this was not fully reflected in written work unless the teacher applied much effort. Pupils' attitude to work and their behaviour were good. Laboratories, even in the midst of practical work, were quiet, orderly places where the atmosphere was conducive to learning. Pupils showed interest, even where the teaching was less strong, and when it was good, their concentration and enthusiasm were at a high level.

111. The leadership of the department has recently changed. Management has improved markedly and is now good. The department has clearly identified priorities for improvement and put systems in place for managing not only the key stages but issues that impact across the school such as progression, differentiation, investigation and developing the use of information and communication technology. These new approaches, since 1999, are improving planning, marking, record keeping, literacy support, academic targeting and schemes of work. These initiatives are important for teaching and standards to be raised further. Some inconsistencies affect standards, for example lack of detail in the schemes of work, since teaching practice is at its most diverse in areas where the schemes of work are least well specified. Equipment and resources are well managed and administered by technicians and have been a positive factor in improving standards. There are insufficient textbooks, however, and access to and use of computers is inadequate.

112. The development of pupils' literacy skills is promoted well within the department. Where teaching is good, work is well matched to pupils' abilities and it promotes literacy. This is seen in well-presented work by special needs pupils and by independent work, including writing for a range of audiences by more able pupils. A wide variety of techniques is in use. These include clear specification of learning objectives, a variety of writing tasks, reading of text and Internet material, active information processing and rapid and constructive feedback. Learning assistants are a great support to literacy work, where the class teacher plans with them and allows them an active role. Where teaching is less good, these outcomes are less well achieved.

113. The teaching environment has been greatly improved since the last inspection. Strengths of the department include the impact of primary links on the Year 7 curriculum, the improvement in integration of investigation and practical work in general, the development of industry and community links and the high level of extra-curricular provision. Variation between teachers remains an issue, although recent changes in departmental management have gone some way to promote improvement. The provision of information and communication technology within the science curriculum has not improved since the last inspection. This, rightly, has a high priority in the department's development plan.

## **ART**

114. In the most recent GCSE examinations the percentage of pupils who gained A\*-C grades in art and design courses for drawing and painting, ceramics and textiles was below the national average but in line with the results of similar schools. The combined percentage of A\* and A grades, whilst below the average, compared well with the results of similar schools although the A\* grades were lower. In recent years, performance in art and design examinations has been better than in almost all other examination subjects. Nevertheless some factors hamper progress and the attainment of higher standards for certain pupils. These include a poor record of attendance and low standards of literacy. Standards in the most recent A-level examinations were slightly below the average because the point scores show variation across the different courses. Some work was outstanding. Several pupils attained the highest grades in the drawing and painting examination. This work is a strength of the

department. A personal project by one pupil, based on a study of shoes in art, demonstrated very high standards of research and an ability to make thoughtful connections across different cultures and times.

115. Standards of attainment of current pupils, based on the work seen in lessons and in portfolios, are average at Key Stage 4 and in most post-16 courses. This is higher than past examination results. Pupils achieve well at Key Stage 4 and very well on A-level courses. The standard of painting by a high attaining pupil in year 11, showed skilful and sensitive observation and use of paint supported by research on artists known for their portraiture work. In a textiles lesson, a pupil gained the confidence and skills to use a sewing machine to provide decoration, texture and pattern to a design based on her photographs of seaweed and pebbles. In an A-level art history lesson the quality of oral responses of pupils studying the paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites was very high. Pupils were able to 'pool' their knowledge of social history and literature, in order that the group gained a deeper understanding of the work of Millais and Hunt.

116. Teacher assessments of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 show most pupils reaching standards above expectation. Based on the work seen in classes, samples of work provided by the school and from discussions with pupils, by the age of 14 the attainment of the majority of pupils is below expectation. However, given low attainment on entry to the school, most pupils achieve well and make good progress, including those with special educational needs. Much of the work pupils produce is carefully crafted. It demonstrates increasing confidence in the use of skills and techniques and in handling of different materials as, for example, making a container from clay, which appeared to be 'melting', and a painting of figures engaged in everyday activities based on the work of African artist Mode Muntty. Pupils' evaluations of their own and others' work and standards of homework and personal research are less well developed overall. Where pupils had in previous lessons begun models or paintings, based on the work of artists and craftspeople, a week or so later they had very limited recall of the factors that had influenced the work. Most were not confident in talking about their own work or the work of the artists they had been introduced to.

117. The use of computers, for research or design tasks, is not included as part of the planned curriculum and standards are therefore low. Pupils do not use sketchbooks and this too hampers their progress, for example in independent research, providing a point of reference or for consolidating work covered in lessons. Throughout the school and in the studios, examples of technically skilled and imaginative work - ceramics, paintings, drawings, examples of appliqué and printed textiles - by pupils of all ages, help create a stimulating environment and a sense that art and design is a valued part of the life of the school. Pupils respond very positively to this work. In lessons they have good attitudes and standards of behaviour.

118. The quality of teaching and learning was good overall with some very good and excellent teaching in examination classes. Teaching was sound in Key Stage 3, good in Key Stage 4 and very good in the sixth form. In all year groups the strengths of the teaching include the knowledge and enthusiasm that teachers have for the subject, their high expectations and the positive relationships they foster. They enable pupils to experience success and help them achieve good standards of technical and expressive skills. Where teaching was especially effective, questioning was used carefully to challenge pupils' views, to probe for deeper and more thoughtful responses and, at the end of the lesson, to consolidate and recap on the learning. In many lessons however, time and planning were insufficient for developing aspects of literacy, for example by encouraging pupils to practise using specialist language. The arrangements for assessing pupils' progress and tracking their attainment throughout Key Stage 3 are unsatisfactory. Some teachers do not make the necessary short-term plans, or the regular assessments of pupils' progress and achievements. As at the time of the last report further work needs to be done to ensure consistency in planning and assessment.

119. Management of the department is sound, with significant strengths as well as areas where improvements need to be made. The art and design work has a high profile, both in the school, the local community and abroad. It reflects the school's aims and values for its pupils and is highly valued. In sharp contrast, some entrenched views about curriculum planning and assessment have held-up progress in areas identified in the last inspection report. Overall progress has been sound. The health and safety issues concerned with the ceramics kilns and dust levels have been addressed and are closely monitored by the ceramics specialist. Examination performance has improved. The gaps in provision, for example in computer-generated research and image making, remain. There is no formal monitoring of teaching and approaches to assessment and planning vary widely.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

120. The 1999 GCSE examination results show that the proportion of candidates gaining A\*-C grades was below average in resistant materials, graphic products, child development and catering, and well below in electronics. With the exception of electronics, results are comparable with those of similar schools but are below the school's own residual results. Catering results compare well with the school's residual results. Results have been similar for three years, the exception being catering which performed well at A\*-C grades in 1998. Low entries at A-level make comparisons difficult but all pupils who entered were successful at grades B to E.

121. Current attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is below average overall but with levels of achievement satisfactory and often good, particularly in practical work. The weaker work relates to the overall standards of design folders across the department. Some folders lack depth of research and a variety of initial ideas, and do not use a range of presentational skills to full advantage. Where the work is satisfactory and good, pupils do use these presentational skills to good effect along with sound research, analysis and evaluation. Model making is under-developed and insufficient use is made of information and communication technology in designing and presenting work. On occasion there is a lack of understanding of processes, materials and equipment used and a few tasks are insufficiently demanding.

122. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 in lessons and work is below the national expectation overall with a small minority achieving at or above what can be expected. An improving trend is seen through the key stage and work in design folders shows a range of good and weak design skills, research, analysis and evaluation. The better folders show a variety of presentational techniques using colour, photographs, commercial material and shading to illustrate the work. Weaker folders show a lack of initial ideas, shallow research and brief evaluations. Practical skills are usually well developed and outcomes are of a good standard. Overall, pupils achieve satisfactory standards for their prior learning. Information and communication technology is little used in design folders at this key stage.

123. Current attainment of the small numbers of pupils taking A-level design and technology is up to course expectation and in line with predicted grades. Levels of achievement are sound, graphical skills well developed, and interesting projects are being investigated such as a table design for an office, and researching ideas for helping children at a local school for disabled pupils, followed by investigation of practical solutions.

124. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall with an equal proportion of satisfactory and good teaching at Key Stage 3 and a minority of good teaching at Key Stage 4. Teaching in the sixth form is good. The better lessons have clear objectives, subject knowledge used to expand and develop ideas, good pace and technical language used to increase learning. This was seen, for example, in a Year 9 lesson in food technology where pupils were making a pasta product to a time scale, and in a Year 11 resistant materials lesson where exemplar material was used to reinforce learning. In a Year 8 textiles lesson, pupils increased their learning using paintings by famous artists as a resource when researching initial ideas for slipper designs. Satisfactory lessons have positive elements but sometimes lack real pace and clear objectives, resulting in pupils being off task for part of the time. Teaching and learning in the sixth form was always good. Learning of concepts and processes relevant to individual projects was increased, especially graphical presentation and application.

125. Pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour is good or very good. They work well in pairs or groups and share workplaces willingly. Relationships are good and pupils can discuss their work confidently.

126. Assessment procedures are sound at Key Stage 3 but need developing to include National Curriculum levels throughout the key stage. Pupil record cards show progress and attainment at the end of a unit of study. Pupils need to be informed of how they are performing and how to improve. At Key Stage 4, assessment links examination board criteria to teachers' marking. Similar arrangements occur at A-level.

127. Marking is regularly done but some teachers do not inform pupils as to how and where improvements can be made in the work. Homework is set and marked regularly.

128. The department is managed effectively and documentation is thorough. Monitoring of standards in the department is too informal and irregular. Insufficient emphasis is put on monitoring and sharing good practice of

teaching and learning across the department. The curriculum meets statutory requirements at both key stages. The content of some of the courses, however, does not offer sufficient challenge or accommodate the needs of all abilities.

129. Accommodation is good overall though rooms are small for graphics and food technology, and dust extraction in some areas needs to be improved. The department is given valuable support by a technician but not in food technology.

130. Since the last inspection satisfactory improvements have been made by introducing a broader course of study at both key stages, improving the range of projects at Key Stage 3, and increasing information and communication technology facilities. The learning environment is supportive, with good displays of work in all rooms.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

131. Attainment at Key Stage 4 is well below national expectations. GCSE examination standards in 1999 were well below those for both all secondary schools and all secondary modern schools, 28.8% of pupils achieving A\*-C grades compared to the national average of 53.1%; the average for similar schools was 39.6%. There has been a decline - with some fluctuations - in the proportion of pupils achieving these levels over the period 1996 -99. The performance of girls is better than that of boys and well above the national difference. In the 1999 GCSE examinations the subject performed well below the school average. In lessons and pupils' work, attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is well below national expectations: Year 11 pupils have weak recall of work covered in Year 10 and, for many, revision sessions of basic skills, such as using Ordnance Survey maps, have to be treated like new learning.

132. Attainment at Key Stage 3, judged by national assessment, is well below what is expected of pupils of this age, although girls do considerably better than boys. Inspection evidence confirms that attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is well below national averages. Pupils' low literacy standards are a limitation on geographical attainment throughout the school. In Year 9 pupils have a range of geographical knowledge but frequently lack the understanding to link what they know to draw geographical conclusions. One group could name a number of developing countries but could not define or explain human migration without help.

133. Attainment in A-level examinations is well below national expectations. The 1999 A-level average points score for the subject of 3.0 is well below the national average of 4.46, having fluctuated considerably in the last three years. Boys' and girls' performance is broadly similar at this age. Performance in lessons and work is broadly in line with national expectations, due to an improvement in the cohort taking the subject this year; they show a broad range of knowledge, which they bring to bear answering geographical questions.

134. Geography teaching is unsatisfactory; there are some good qualities, but a number of lessons seen were unsatisfactory or worse. Observed teaching of geography in the sixth form was unsatisfactory, characterised by good subject knowledge and satisfactory planning but a lack of urgency and the use of unstimulating techniques. In a Year 13 lesson on the effects of tourism on the environment in Africa, the aims of the lesson were unclear and pupils were ineffectively questioned. This meant that the pace of learning was too slow. Pupils generally respond well, working with good application. They are a positive influence on their own learning, but this cannot compensate for weaknesses in teaching so that the overall rate of learning in the sixth form is unsatisfactory and pupils achieve less than they could for their abilities.

135. Teaching at Key Stage 4 is unsatisfactory; there are considerable inconsistencies. While teachers have good subject knowledge and are aware of the demands of the examination curriculum, the management of pupils can lack rigour. Where lessons had weaknesses these included a poor variety of activities and uninteresting exposition. This led to pupil disenchantment and a poor pace of learning. Tasks are not matched to the range of abilities found in classes, so the learning needs of most pupils are insufficiently addressed. Lesson aims are rarely made clear to pupils and low expectations of staff are all too frequently met by pupils. In good lessons the enthusiasm of teachers helped to propel progress. Such sessions are thoroughly planned with a varied range of activities to maintain pupil interest; teaching is alert, keeping all pupils on task. A good Year 11 lesson

exemplified these strengths; high expectations, and an insistence that pupils became involved, ensured that all made good progress in revising both map work and planning issues simultaneously. Pupils' response to the subject matches teaching. Where teaching is good, with firm pupil management, they behave well and work hard; where it fails to engage them and lacks pace and rigour pupils rapidly lose interest in the lesson and take little part in the lesson. Overall pupils in Key Stage 4 are achieving less than could be expected for their levels of prior attainment and their learning is unsatisfactory.

136. Teaching of geography at Key Stage 3 is also unsatisfactory; again, it is inconsistent. Where it has strengths, teachers have good knowledge of their subject, pupils are well managed and effectively questioned. Such lessons had a good range of interesting activities to help maintain interest and learning. In unsatisfactory lessons, teachers' expectations were too low and a lack of consistent 'drive' within the classroom hampered progress. Key Stage 3 pupils' attitudes to the subject are usually good. They have a propensity to obedience and usually start lessons energetically although this work-rate falls if the lesson is unstimulating. They show enjoyment of the subject and participate well orally; most are keen to answer the teachers' questions. Teaching is a major factor in pupils' rate of learning and achievement being unsatisfactory at this key stage.

137. Management of the department is poor. Teaching and marking are not monitored, which has meant that the inconsistencies remain. The curriculum is satisfactorily planned, including a good range of local fieldwork. The department does not plan for delivery of literacy and numeracy through its schemes of work. Very little information control technology is taught through the subject. The pattern of assessment of geography is poor; regular assessments are done but they are not standardised, marks are not moderated or recorded centrally and so fail to inform teaching and learning consistently.

138. Since the last inspection, pupils' attainment at each key stage and in the sixth form has fluctuated but remained well below national averages. More geographical enquiry is undertaken, especially in Key Stage 4. There have been no improvements in the provision of information and communication technology through geography, and the standard of teaching has seen a marked deterioration. Overall progress has been unsatisfactory.

## **HISTORY**

139. The level of attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 as indicated by 1999 GCSE examinations is well below national expectations, with 34% of pupils gaining A\*-C grades compared with the national average for all modern schools of 41.4% and that for all schools of 56.2%. GCSE performance over the past three years has fluctuated but remained below that of similar schools. The 1999 figures were similar to those reported in the last inspection in 1996. However, the department's results in 1999 were above the school average. In lessons, pupils' standards at Key Stage 4 were also below average, mainly due to their weak recall. For example, many pupils are unable to relate historical events or trends in one country to contemporary events in another. A Year 11 group had difficulty relating the disaffection felt in Eastern Bloc countries in the 1950s to earlier events such as the Berlin airlift. Low levels of literacy pose difficulties for many pupils, particularly in analysing the source materials that are an important part of the GCSE course.

140. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 in national teacher assessments indicates that pupils' attainment is well below national averages. During the inspection week, attainment of pupils at Key Stage 3 was below what is expected of this age range. The low level of literacy is an impediment to attainment, as pupils have some difficulty accessing information from printed resources and they express themselves hesitantly in writing. They have better skills orally and often speak on historical matters with confidence. Recall of all but recent work has weaknesses, although most pupils in a mixed ability class in Year 7 were able to relate their knowledge of life in the middle ages to try and explain some reasons behind the spread of the Black Death. This good performance was partly due to the teacher's strong emphasis on appropriate vocabulary; this assisted pupils to speak with confidence and some fluency, using appropriate terms like 'symptoms'.

141. The 1999 A-level average points score of 4.5 was below the national average for all schools of 5.3; the small cohort taking history means that there have been fluctuations in these points averages in the last 3 years.

The trend of attainment remains steady. There are no significant gender variations arising from the 1999 examination performance. Post-16 pupils' attainment in lessons is in line with expectations; it is better than that in recent examinations due to variation in the small cohorts of pupils who take history. The constant re-visiting of topics, typical in the teaching, firmly consolidates learning so that pupils have a good range of skills and knowledge. For example, in considering why Stalin purged Soviet society so ruthlessly they were able to make telling comparison with Hitler's methods in Nazi Germany.

142. Teaching of history is good. It is consistent across the members of the department because of effective subject management. At Key Stage 3 lessons are well planned and teachers show good subject knowledge. A strong emphasis is placed on developing literacy through history lessons. Appropriate subject-specific key words are on display in all history rooms and teachers are careful to emphasise those relevant to the task at hand. Pupils are invariably managed with subtlety and tact and lessons have a good range of interesting activities. Teachers show a love of their subject and this communicates to pupils. A very good Year 9 lesson on trench warfare in the First World War typified many of these characteristics. Using a varied and interesting range of source materials the teacher encouraged all to make worthwhile contributions so that the learning process became collaborative. In this, as in all Key Stage 3 lessons observed, pupils responded in a mature fashion. They were keen to learn and participate in all elements of lessons. The outcome of all these factors is that the quality of learning in Key Stage 3 is good; pupils practice and learn key skills, such as analysis of source materials, as they progress through the history course. They achieve well considering their prior attainment.

143. Key Stage 4 teaching is also good. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and have a strong focus on meeting the needs of the examination syllabus; to this end they manage lessons at a good pace, setting tight deadlines, and their exposition has great clarity. Work undertaken has good challenge for pupils and teachers are approachable and very helpful when pupils need help. Key Stage 4 pupils' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory. They need - and receive - firmer guidance at this age but they lack some skills as independent learners. Teachers' strong commitment and pupils' natural obedience combine to ensure a good pace of learning. Post-16 teaching is also good. Enthusiastic and expert teaching, conducted at a brisk pace, is typical of lessons. Consolidation of learning is particularly effective; the teachers' knowledge of and focus on the requirements of the examination is also strong. Pupils enjoy the subject, participate confidently in discussion and are genuine partners in their own learning. Thus progress at post-16 level is good.

144. The department benefits from good management. The curriculum is well planned and meets statutory requirements. Thorough procedures are in place to assess pupils throughout the school. Marks are moderated and centrally recorded and the results feed back into the curriculum. Pupils have very few opportunities to practise information and communication technology skills through the study of history. Monitoring of teaching and planning by the head of department is informal but effective, helped by the close proximity of history classrooms.

145. Since the last inspection GCSE and A-level attainment has remained at similar levels. Teaching has seen an improvement; the previous limited range of teaching strategies has been effectively addressed. However, the use of computers in history lessons has not been fully addressed. Overall progress has been sound.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

146. Standards in examinations at the end of Key Stage 4 are well above those for all maintained schools and other modern schools. Attainment is better than for other subjects in the school and both boys and girls perform significantly better in the school than is the case nationally. Standards in lessons and scrutinised work are very high in this key stage. Most pupils use computers to carry out a range of tasks, proficiently and confidently and many do so in an imaginative and discriminating way, making and justifying choices about the methods that they use. Most are able to write reports in which they describe their work and a few develop these into user guides of high quality, incorporating detailed explanations, illustrated by graphical representations of screens, which they are able to integrate using the computer's screen saver facility. Some work in testing databases and using spreadsheets, produced by the school's pupils, has been included in exemplar material published by a GCSE examining board.

147. In Key Stage 3, standards are above average. All pupils can use word processors and databases and can write a procedure to set up a sequence of commands for a computer to control equipment such as a set of traffic lights. Most know how to transfer information from one program to another and are able to test and improve control sequences that they have set up.

148. Standards at A-level are high, with significantly better results than in all maintained schools or modern schools nationally. Pupils use computers very well in real situations, especially when supporting GNVQ subjects. Most can word-process assignments, in which they combine text, tables from spreadsheets and charts. A few succeed particularly well in using information and communication technology to enhance the presentation of their work and the quality of information provided. Some coursework, in statistics for example, has a highly professional appearance, with numbered lists used to create contents linked to page numbering, headers and footers, the use of symbol fonts to create pictograms and table structures used to organise information on the page.

149. Pupils achieve well in terms of their ability and prior learning in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form and very well in Key Stage 4. They move forward in all aspects of information technology, except the use of computers to take measurements and log data. However, lack of access to such equipment as scanners and digital cameras sometimes limits achievement, when pictures and maps have to be cut out and stuck into work by hand. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well for their prior attainment.

150. The quality of teaching and learning is very good in all key stages. Strong teaching of procedures and techniques, and the provision of ample opportunities for pupils to practise what they have learned, provide a strong foundation in skills. Pupils benefit both in terms of learning the subject and in performing well in examinations, as teachers draw upon their considerable experience as examiners to provide guidance on how requirements should be met. Classes are controlled firmly, but in a manner to which students respond positively. Teachers provide very good explanation and clear instructions and guidance. They make good links to previous work so that pupils develop an awareness of how individual tasks relate to the overall development of their capability. Tasks have a good level of challenge, which motivates students and instils a natural pace. There is good support for individuals, as teachers listen carefully to responses and check work in detail. Attainment is further enhanced by the wide range of examination options that are offered and the diligent way in which teachers seek to ensure that students enter for the ones most suited to their needs. Good use of homework, for example when pupils are required to write accounts of what they have learned and carried out on computers, provides both consolidation of learning and feedback to teachers on how well knowledge and skills have been established, in addition to being a good context for practising literacy skills. Opportunities to discuss work provide further support for literacy, as for example, when a Year 7 class, which was creating an estate agent database, shared ideas about different types of house that they might include. The same activity also supported the development of numeracy skills through consideration of the various types of numerical field that might be appropriate. Occasionally teachers do not monitor the work of pairs, to ensure both pupils participate equally. Opportunities for creativity and independent problem solving are sometimes limited when teachers give pupils too much information instead of challenging them to work it out for themselves.

151. The response of pupils is very good and they clearly enjoy working with computers. They listen carefully to instructions and guidance, work with commitment and focus and persevere well. There is a high level of productive collaboration when pupils work in pairs and mutual help is given and received willingly. Very occasionally one of a pair dominates the keyboard while the other is passive. Many pupils attempt to address their own problems. For example, a pair of boys carefully read a control procedure that they had written to see why it did not work as planned and rectified the problem without needing assistance from the teacher. On the rare occasions when it is necessary, pupils respond well if corrected by teachers for minor misbehaviour.

152. A number of the strengths identified by the previous inspection have been maintained, such as very good teaching and high standards. The depth of control technology is better in Key Stage 4 and extra-curricular opportunities have been improved by the provision of a lunchtime drop-in clinic. However, overall improvement has been unsatisfactory as no target has been fully achieved and fewer departments now use information and communication technology in their teaching. Apart from some GNVQ courses, particularly business studies, very little work is done in curricular contexts.

153. The need for improvement in resources - identified in specific areas in the last inspection - is now more widespread. Although the pupil:computer ratio appears favourable, some of the school's stock is not currently serviceable. The school has not kept pace with latest developments, so that there is no general access to the Internet, or devices such as scanners and digital cameras and the library does not function as a media resources centre. There are now also issues of the management of resources. Subject departments have very little access while information technology rooms are timetabled for lessons that either do not take place in them or do take place but without the resources being used. The use of information and communication technology to support students with special educational needs remains limited and the stock of specialised resources, such as voice recognition software, is insufficient. Resourcing for control has been improved, but not for data logging. Because of this, computers are not used adequately for measuring, with the consequence that the school is failing to meet fully its legal requirement for the National Curriculum. Staff have received some training, but there remains an urgent need for a planned programme to support teachers in using information and communication technology to enhance the delivery of their subjects and provide students with subject contexts in which to apply and consolidate their capability.

154. Specific information technology courses are well managed and taught and all staff are committed to the development of opportunities for matching this quality throughout the curriculum. A highly skilled member of the department has taken on the task of improving the level and quality of resources. Consequently, the capacity for improvement is good, provided that current plans, which are at an early stage, continue to be developed and are adequately financed and resourced.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

### **French**

155. Standards of attainment in French are below national standards. Results in the 1999 GCSE examinations were well below the national average when compared with all maintained schools and below average for similar schools. The attainment of boys was significantly lower than that of girls when compared with national figures. Over the past three years, results have dropped from well above national averages to well below, as a result of a change in examination syllabus from a fully modular to a terminal course. Results in 1999 were lower than those in other subjects in the school. The 1999 results for the oral examination were moderated and lowered by the examination board and are currently being contested by the school.

156. From analysis of work and observation of lessons, current pupils in Key Stage 4 attain standards that are below national standards and are broadly in line with similar schools, indicating that standards are higher than last year. In Year 10 for example, higher attaining pupils produced work of good quality on the benefits of living in the country as opposed to the town. In Year 11, higher attaining pupils used a variety of adjectives and expressions and were comfortable with the past tense. Pupils' powers of retention are underdeveloped, however, with the result that some have difficulty recalling previously learnt work, such as common vocabulary taught earlier in the course. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards are also below national averages although the work of higher attaining pupils in Year 9 is in line with national expectations, with some using the past and conditional tenses fluently. Lower attaining pupils have problems with basic skills, as in Year 7 classes where they had difficulties copying correctly. In teacher assessments for 1999, almost a quarter of the intake attained level 5 or above compared with a third of pupils nationally.

157. Numbers of pupils taking A-level French are small, making comparison with national averages less meaningful. In 1999, results in A-level French were well below national averages for the higher grades but broadly in line for A – E grades. Although standards in the current Year 13 are well below national averages, there are pupils in Year 12 who should obtain the higher grades in French.

### **Spanish and German**

158. Standards in Spanish and German are in line with national averages both when compared with national data and in work seen. GCSE results in 1999 in Spanish were in line with all maintained schools and well above the average for similar schools. Results in Spanish have improved gradually over the past three years. There were no entries for German GCSE in 1999, but standards in 1997 and 1998 were in line with national averages. Very small numbers are entered for both languages.

159. A-level results in Spanish and German for the small numbers involved were broadly in line with national figures, both for the higher grades and for all grades. Standards of the current Year 13 pupils are well below national averages in both languages but some in Year 12 are likely to obtain the higher grades in Spanish.

### **All three modern foreign languages**

160. Pupils achieve well in languages when taking into consideration their prior learning and ability. They achieve particularly well in Spanish and German where they cover the GCSE course in two years. Higher-attaining pupils and those with specific learning difficulties make good progress. This is as a result of dedicated teachers and high motivation on the part of pupils.

161. Teaching ranges from very good to poor but is good overall with two-thirds of lessons graded good or better. Just under half the French lessons seen in Key Stage 3 were very good. All full time staff are confident and competent in the languages they teach. Strengths of the teaching include good subject knowledge, well planned lessons, established routines and good classroom management. These strengths result in good learning throughout the school and are enhanced by the very positive attitudes of pupils. In a Year 7 lesson, for example, pupils of all abilities made very good progress and could use 'mon, ma, mes' well when speaking about their families. They thoroughly enjoyed the lesson and some used French, unprompted, to communicate both with the inspector and with the teacher. Weaknesses occur where lessons have been covered by substitute teachers, whose lack of teaching experience and inadequate planning results in disruptive pupils, unsatisfactory learning and underachievement. Occasionally, teachers provide too much support for pupils, an issue identified in the last inspection, and do not ensure that pupils use the language learnt. There are too few activities to promote memory retention and recall of previously learnt work. Although numeracy skills are promoted through survey and graph work, there is insufficient emphasis on the development of basic literacy skills, skimming and scanning in reading, for example, and on the development of dictionary skills.

162. All pupils study French at both key stages and most enter for the GCSE examination. There are no Certificate of Achievement courses. The second language is not introduced until Key Stage 4, limiting numbers in GCSE groups and in A-level Spanish and German groups. Schemes of work relate primarily to the textbook or the examination syllabus and do not provide adequate guidance for teachers, particularly at Key Stage 4. Although teachers mark conscientiously, records provide insufficient insight into the attainment of pupils or the progress being made. There has been effective analysis of recent examination results and a variety of strategies, such as the introduction of coursework at GCSE, have been instigated. Modern foreign languages do not meet statutory requirements for the delivery of information and communication technology since there is no access to computers in this part of the school.

163. The head of department provides clear educational direction and staff, including foreign language assistants and support assistants, have a shared commitment to raising standards. There is a very positive ethos for learning and a good team spirit. The development plan is insufficiently focused to fully support all aspects of the department's work. Monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching takes place informally but there are no formal structures to ensure that good practice is shared between teachers or to identify issues regarding the progress of particular groups. The location of the language teaching area has improved since the last inspection. The accommodation is unsatisfactory in several respects, however, and has a detrimental effect upon standards, despite efforts by teachers to brighten the environment with excellent display and self-help projects to paint classrooms. Two rooms have little natural light; leaks in some areas have resulted in damp and mildew, and conditions outside the mobiles (where there are few surfaced walkways or covered ways) result in wet, muddy pupils. Similarly, resources have deteriorated since the last inspection. There are not enough textbooks for pupils to take one home, no computers, insufficient listening equipment to promote independent listening and too few materials for independent reading. Many teachers supplement resources by buying materials themselves.

### **MUSIC**

164. At the time of the inspection, there was no head of music. Lessons were taught by a supply teacher who was unfamiliar with the scheme of work, and who was absent for one day of the inspection. In addition, an experienced teacher of music teaches part-time.

165. Attainment in GCSE in 1999 was below the national average, but above the levels attained in other recent years, when results were well below average. Three of the six candidates gained A to C grades. However, numbers taking GCSE have been small and comparisons with national statistics are of limited value. Only four pupils are preparing for GCSE music in Year 11. Their achievement is in line both with their abilities and with the school's expectations of them. Pupils are able to write rhythms from dictation and, despite their diffidence, were able to sight-read simple melodies accurately. In the lesson seen and in written work, the pupils showed only a limited knowledge of musical language and had an imprecise knowledge of musical styles and eras. Composing was elementary and had not reached the stage expected for this point in the course.

166. By the end of Year 9, pupils' attainment is below national expectation. There is no allusion to the National Curriculum in the scheme of work. Although what is taught overlaps with statutory requirements, the prescribed musical 'elements' of the National Curriculum are not methodically taught. However, pupils' achievements are in line with their abilities, and are occasionally good. In Year 7, pupils sang robustly, reflecting well the character of the song in their performance. In Year 9, a class made good progress in a graduated course on electronic keyboards, consolidating their working knowledge of the relevant theory, and developing their understanding of rhythm and pitch. Where pupils listened to music, they were able to identify instruments and notice changes of mood and dynamics, but they showed little facility for using expressive or technical language to analyse what they heard. No examples of composing were available for inspection.

167. Teaching is satisfactory overall. Teachers prepare lessons carefully and in some lessons they communicate their enthusiasm effectively. Music for the pupils to listen to is carefully chosen to appeal to them, including 'The Flight of the Bumblebee' and 'The Ride of the Valkyries'. The teachers have good keyboard facilities and supportive and assured accompaniments enhanced the singing that was heard. Because of the supply teacher's limited knowledge of the pupils and the limitations of an inappropriate scheme of work, teachers' planning at the time of the inspection was inadequate for the needs of all pupils. In particular, higher attaining pupils were not challenged sufficiently. This was particularly the case in Year 8, where abler pupils had to wait for others to catch up when recorder playing was practised as a whole-class activity. Some questioning about the music heard was too obvious and did not sufficiently develop the pupils' powers of expression. There was no opportunity to inspect composing, which forms a small part of the scheme of work. Pupils with special educational needs were fully involved in all practical activities and made satisfactory progress.

168. The senior management of the school is carefully monitoring and strongly supporting the teaching of music in the absence of a head of department. Instrumental tuition continues to be effectively organised. The school benefits from the work of members of the county music service, who provide tuition and rehearse ensembles. A jazz band and junior choir rehearse regularly. The school's musicians and music teachers make an important contribution to the performing arts provision of the school and, through this, make a major contribution to the opportunities pupils have for social and cultural development. There are few policies or procedures, merely unoriginal schemes of work that focus on the musical content of lessons and not on the needs of pupils.

169. Accommodation for music has improved since the previous inspection. In other respects, provision has deteriorated because of the lack of a head of department but this situation will soon be remedied.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

170. The results of the 1999 GCSE examinations were below the national average for similar schools. The trend over the last three years has been downwards and is explained by the changing nature of the intake whose entry scores have similarly descended. Results at post-16 are above national averages with A-level pupils achieving 100% pass rate.

171. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 in general physical education is at national expectations; the level of skill acquisition and confident tactical play in volleyball, illustrates this. An internal staffing problem has affected this year's end of Key Stage 4 pupils; although now resolved, this has had some effect on progress. Standards in GCSE work are similar to those achieved in 1999. At Key Stage 3 in physical education lessons pupils' achievements match national expectations; principles of attack and defence are understood by pupils in invasive

games at this stage. Attainment at A-level in lessons seen was slightly above national expectations. The A-level groups understand the need to review performance in practical and theory work. For example, they understand the theory and practice of mechanics in physical exercise and, in dance, pupils assimilate and develop themes, creating sensitive and flowing performances.

172. Standards are high in dance. Key Stage 3 and 4 lessons include examples of refining skills to improve accuracy and performance; boys in particular respond well to the stimulating material selected in the scheme of work. Teachers' expectations are high in the sixth form and pupils respond with good quality performances.

173. The quality of teaching is good overall, with some very good examples in dance. Teachers have good subject knowledge. Members of the department have written two books for GCSE work, generating the material from their own lesson planning because they felt that other publications did not meet the needs of their pupils. This indicates the professional expertise and caring approach to pupils' needs of teachers in the department. Indoor lessons are taught in mainly mixed groups by gender; most outdoor games lessons are in single sex groups. Generally lessons are well structured and have good pace, and teachers have a good understanding of pupils' attainment and progress. Pupils are encouraged to participate in activities that challenge them. For example, in dance at Key Stage 4, pupils learn how to improve movement by reviewing their own performance on video. At A-level, a difficult topic on muscle co-ordination was delivered with expertise by providing practical opportunities to understand change in position. It was planned to be sympathetic to the problem of pupils' understanding such complex issues and pupils related well in their learning to this style of teaching. In most lessons, specific learning objectives and clear reinforcement of skills, with an analytical evaluation of what takes place, benefited pupils' learning. One leisure activities lesson at Key Stage 4 was barely satisfactory in its learning and teaching of skills so little progress was made because expectations were not as high as elsewhere. Overall, however, pupils of all levels of ability were generally achieving well throughout the school.

174. Relationships between teachers and students are good. Pupils are well known to staff, as are their strengths and weaknesses. Staff can identify pupils with special educational needs within groups. Attitudes and behaviour are generally good at Key Stage 4; pupils' attitudes are good or very good at Key Stage 3 and very good at post-16.

175. Curriculum planning is satisfactory at all stages but there is too much emphasis on invasive games. Current plans for enhancing the curriculum will address this. In Year 7 there is a particularly effective foundation programme concentrating on basic skills and safety. This is valued by other schools in the area who are utilising the scheme. Good co-ordination between teachers in the A-level course is helping to link aspects together. Here and elsewhere the curriculum is broken down into units which are thoroughly assessed at the end of each section. There is a wide range of popular extra-curricular activities which pupils enjoy. An extensive subject library enhances learning. Work cards for non-active participants are used but better planning is needed to meet the needs of these pupils. Word sheets of words in frequent use in the subject are displayed round the changing rooms, helping pupils to improve their technical vocabulary. There is no timetabled provision for sixth form pupils to receive physical education tuition. Such provision is important if pupils are to learn to appreciate healthy life styles

176. The department provides good opportunities for personal and social development. There is an emphasis on fair play in field games and an appreciation of different cultures in dance. Pupils are offered responsibilities, such as team or games captain, within the department. They are encouraged to participate in sports into adult life and more able pupils have the opportunity to experience club activities through the department's links with a local professional football club, an athletics club and a rugby club. The difficult route to the playing fields is managed effectively and the staff can be in touch immediately with the office by radio link. The department appreciates the importance of health and safety considerations.

177. The department is well led and managed, with a good team atmosphere and effective sharing of tasks. A comprehensive handbook describes the work of the department and schemes of work are designed to attract the interest of pupils. Clear assessment procedures are used to plan and match work to pupils' needs, including those with special educational needs. Sports facilities are good but some are not well maintained. There are damaged doors in the sports hall and this area's roof and that of the gymnasium have leaks. The dance studio is a useful resource but unsuitable in terms of height for jumping and stretching - tall pupils, boys in particular, are having

their movement restricted. Ventilation in the dance area is compromised by its nearness to other classrooms. Staff do not feel they can open windows in case the noise from the sound system interrupts other lessons. Cleanliness, in all areas, is poor. Toilet facilities for the girls in the sports hall are inadequate and dirty. There is no washbasin or sanitary facility. The one lavatory is not private enough and is badly situated. The showers are not effective in removing mud brought in from the field.

178. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Successes in teaching and standards have been maintained or improved upon. There is a better-balanced curriculum and the planned changes to lower the emphasis on invasive games should enhance it further. A better allocation of time to Key Stage 4 is also planned and this will widen opportunities. Some accommodation issues noted in the last report still need attention, however, as does the cleanliness of some facilities. These detract from the positive environment created by teachers and pupils working in the department.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

179. Overall attainment at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 is below the expectations of the county Locally Agreed Syllabus. Pupils gain some knowledge of the origins, development and beliefs of Christianity and other world religions. However, the school's interpretation of the Agreed Syllabus focuses not on attaining wide factual knowledge, but on interpreting and evaluating religious beliefs and practices. Pupils are taught to gain religious insights and to apply them to their own lives. In this respect, many pupils are achieving good standards, often achieving well above expectation for their abilities. All pupils benefit from the varied and imaginative teaching methods employed. For example, in Year 9, pupils began to understand the effects of discrimination by grouping themselves differently around the classroom according to such considerations as height, gender and favourite football teams. They progressed to grouping those whose 'heroes' included members of other races and those who believed in God. All pupils understood, through this, how discrimination could arise. They were able to talk confidently about its implications and reflect on their own attitudes. Pupils with special educational needs benefit from an approach which does not rely on extensive written work; they participate fully in all lessons and make very good progress.

180. A scrutiny of written work shows that it is sparingly but effectively used to increase pupils' understanding of issues and principles and to help them consolidate their learning. For example, pupils wrote lists of words and phrases to help them define 'happiness' and 'unhappiness'; they wrote stories of small 'miracles' in their own lives to help them appreciate the significance of the Resurrection for Christians. Pupils carefully re-draft some of their work and this makes a positive contribution to the development of their literacy. In occasional projects set for homework, such as 'the environment' and 'babies', some pupils showed enthusiasm and well developed research skills and produced substantial work, often very well illustrated and sometimes using information technology.

181. Religious education is not studied at GCSE level. Pupils continue to develop their understanding of religious, moral and social issues in Key Stage 4. Learning continues to focus on developing pupils' individual attitudes. They make very good progress in developing empathy, discussion skills and open-mindedness. For example, in Year 10, they consider appropriate punishments for various criminal case histories and debate discrepancies between their suggestions and the actual sentences. They evaluate ideas from world religions in a topic on 'war' in Year 10. In Year 11, they compare the attitudes of the major world religions with their own on the use and abuse of alcohol. Skills of discussion and research are well developed and most pupils are able to appreciate views that differ from their own.

182. Teaching is very good in both key stages, and some is excellent. The teachers show outstanding commitment to the pupils and employ mixed ability teaching methods very successfully. They devise interesting topics that engross the pupils and enable them to learn by relating what they hear to their own experiences. For example, in Year 7, pupils study the Parable of the Talents and consider how they may contribute to conserving the world's resources. In Year 11, pupils considered what qualities are desirable to ensure that a relationship, such as marriage, remains secure. All lessons proceed in simple stages to lead the pupils' understanding from the known to the unknown. Questioning is very skilful. Teachers ask supplementary questions to deepen pupils' thinking. This was the case in an outstanding lesson in Year 11, where pupils progressed from basic social considerations

about sexual relationships to considering the writings of a distinguished Roman Catholic theologian on the purpose of sexual relations. There is much support for individuals. Lessons have a supportive ethos that encourages even diffident pupils to speak in the knowledge that their views will be respected. Teachers value pupils' views, which are encouraged and acknowledged by the constructive use of praise. Teachers set deadlines for tasks that ensure a good pace of working and they vary teaching methods successfully to maintain pupils' interest. Teachers maintain good standards of behaviour, but a few pupils in Year 11 behave immaturely because they do not understand that an important aim in lessons is that pupils should develop responsibility for their own behaviour and attitudes.

183. The head of department leads the subject effectively. Much of the co-ordination of the teaching is informal. Teachers are encouraged by the head of department to teach to their individual strengths. This works successfully because the teachers share a common philosophy. Since much of the teaching is concerned with religious and social concepts and attitudes, rather than being information-based, formal assessment is difficult and requires further development. Marking, however, is careful and constructive. The scheme of work reflects well the Locally Agreed Syllabus and is being carefully adapted to accommodate its revised requirements. Religious education makes a very good contribution to the provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils have good opportunities to gain an understanding of the reasons for the different social attitudes and priorities reflected in different world religions.

184. Teaching is significantly better than was reported in the previous inspection report. Pupils now contribute more to class discussions, and they co-operate better in collaborative tasks. There is now a wider range of resources, and the allocation of time for religious education is now satisfactory in Key Stage 4. However, the school has not responded to the previous report by providing religious education in the sixth form. In this, the school is in breach of its statutory duties.

## **VOCATIONAL AND OTHER COURSES**

### **Performing Arts – Drama**

185. Drama is taught to all pupils at Key Stage 3, and is a popular option at GCSE. There is an A-level theatre studies course with very small numbers. GCSE results have been erratic, but have improved. The A\*-C pass rate has been above the national average in each of the past two years; many pupils taking drama gain better results than in other subjects.

186. Pupils' attainment in lessons was similar to national expectations at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form, and above national expectation at Key Stage 4. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils are willing and confident performers, who are particularly good at supporting and encouraging each other. Their understanding of the conventions of drama, and their ability to evaluate their own and each other's work are, however, limited. These skills do develop at Key Stage 4, where many pupils create sustained three-dimensional characters capable of illuminating the themes and issues of a play. Sixth form pupils use rehearsal time efficiently to analyse the effectiveness of presentation, finding good solutions to staging problems, or means of making acting more convincing.

187. Teaching is always satisfactory or better. There are good emphases on trust, working together and performance, but some teaching overlooks the value of routine and theory. This can result in pupils becoming casual, and not realising the important role which they have as audience. The carousel arrangement at Key Stage 3, where pupils have blocks of time away from drama, causes continuity problems. The best teaching is at GCSE, when behaviour expectations are clear. In one particularly good lesson, rehearsal was used by teacher, performer and audience to stimulate ideas about how specific skills might refine performance. Pupils were then given a framework, a clear task, and the responsibility to decide for themselves how to proceed.

188. Pupils respond well to drama, which they see as both valuable and enjoyable. The stress on performance can lead to some pupils, especially younger ones, becoming bored when they are not in the spotlight. The majority, however, remain enthusiastic. The department makes a major contribution to the social and cultural life of the school by the strength of its extra-curricular work. Ambitious, large-scale and highly successful productions involve large numbers of pupils of all ages; high-profile national and international links with theatre

groups have been forged; the school's White Cliffs Theatre is an excellent facility for drama work, and is appreciated by the wider community.

### **GNVQ Health and social Care**

189. The 1999 examination results at Intermediate level saw nine pupils gaining full awards with five candidates awaiting final end of unit tests results. The Advanced level pupils all gained passes with one distinction. The 1998 Intermediate level pupils all gained passes. All intermediate pupils take a first aid course, "First Aid at Work". Outside specialist staff are used to conduct this course. All pupils take a basic food hygiene certificate in Year 12. Marking is by continuous assessment with supportive comments by the teaching staff. Coursework is assessed internally and verified externally. A work experience programme incorporates individual pupil interests and is part of the course of study. Educational visits support the learning, such as recently to Westminster Hall for a health conference. The core elements of numeracy, literacy and information and communication technology are covered appropriately.

190. Teaching is well organised with appropriate strategies employed. Independent study is encouraged and pupils employ research techniques appropriately when working on their coursework. Relationships are very good and pupils support each other. In lessons observed, the pupils engaged purposefully in their work, supported by appropriate teacher intervention resulting in positive learning outcomes with good levels of achievement.

### **GNVQ Leisure and Tourism**

191. Pupils show strong involvement in this course and work with good interest and independence. However, teaching is inconsistent and can lack sufficient specific guidance for pupils; some work undertaken lacks purpose. Inconsistencies in challenge for pupils and the lack of clear aims means that the pace of learning can be slow. Some teaching was good and overall pupils' achievement was sound.

192. The subject is well managed and the curriculum effectively planned. Accommodation is inadequate for a GNVQ course as many teaching rooms cannot, for reasons of security, contain computers; this is an impediment to learning and has a negative impact on attainment.

### **GNVQ and A-Level Business studies**

193. Pupils have the opportunity to take GNVQ business studies in Key Stage 4 and to choose either GNVQ or A-level in the Sixth Form. Teaching and learning are very good in each of these. As a result, the level of achievement is very good and attainment at A-level is above average. In Key Stage 4, teachers give very good support that is well targeted at course requirements. Pupils enjoy the course and focus well on their tasks. They present their work well, although some are not yet fully proficient at reporting on it at the standard required in GNVQ. In the Sixth Form, A-level students are given very good support to enable them to maximise their performance in the examination. In discussions, most respond imaginatively to good questions, although a substantial minority are more passive. In GNVQ, teaching balances very good guidance about the appropriate approach, with strong encouragement for divergent thinking about goals and how to achieve them. Pupils respond well to this and work very well together, at tasks which have a high degree of authenticity. Good use is made of computers to support learning and enhance the presentation of work.

### **GNVQ communication and numeracy**

194. This aspect of the course is integrated into the work and assessment of other units. Thus communication skills were assessed in a module in which pupils prepared a presentation in French for an audience of native French speakers. Pupils are aware of the crucial importance of developing, demonstrating, and evaluating their communication skills. They have good awareness of the need to adapt the means, tone and content of work to take into account the target audience and the intended purpose. Standards are satisfactory. Work is characterised by confidence, diligence and detail. Sometimes the level of formality required is misjudged, or the focus for communication is not made sufficiently clear to the audience. Numeracy skills, similarly, are taught effectively within other units. The pupils' skill levels are appropriate for their prior attainment and the level of course taken.

### **Politics**

195. The teaching of politics is typified by good subject knowledge and enthusiasm. As a result pupils enjoy the subject and engage in interesting and stimulating discussion, to the benefit of their progress. Teaching has a

strong emphasis on literacy, explaining key terms and how to address them in a written answer; the work pupils do in class is frequently consolidated by relevant homework.

### **Sociology**

196. Teaching of sociology encourages lively and thoughtful discussion amongst pupils; relationships in classrooms are good, promoted by a common interest in the topics under consideration. Pupils are well managed and challenged by good questioning which helps to deepen their understanding.

### **Psychology**

197. Psychology has been a popular A-level subject since it was introduced three years ago. Pupils have achieved 100% pass rate in that time. The results in 1999 indicate an average points score of 5.4, close to the average for this type of subject in all schools nationally and in similar schools. Fewer boys than girls took the examination and their results were evenly spread across grades B-E. Girls achieved more B and C grades. The cohort in the present Year 13 has an even gender balance and is likely to achieve results similar to those in 1999. From evidence in lessons and in previous work, pupils are achieving well for their capability. Some good examples of investigatory course-work were seen.

198. The small sample of lessons seen indicates that teaching is at least sound with considerable strengths in subject knowledge, planning work well related to the syllabus and making appropriate reference to authorities and texts. Some teaching involved pupils very well in discussion and by questioning their understanding of points as the session progressed, for example when relating negative behaviour of school children to power seeking in adult life. Occasionally pupils were not encouraged to show independence of thought or what they could do. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour were good. The department is well resourced with reference texts and practical work is well planned, making good contribution to the standards attained. Management of this subject is good, imaginative and with clear educational direction. Psychology is a strength in the school.