

INSPECTION REPORT

NORDEN COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

Rishton

LEA area: Lancashire

Unique Reference Number: 119717

Headteacher: Mrs G Merrett

Reporting inspector: Dr D A W Biltcliffe
1025

Dates of inspection: 7th – 10th February 2000

Inspection number: 187395

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Stourton Street Rishton Nr Blackburn Lancashire
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Telephone number:	(01254) 885378
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr I Kitchin
Date of previous inspection:	11 th – 15 th March 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Dr D A W Biltcliffe	Registered inspector	Equality of opportunity	Results and achievements Teaching and learning
Mrs J W Biltcliffe	Lay Inspector		Attendance
Mr H Meggitt	Lay Inspector		Partnership with parents
Mr H Heller	Team inspector	Special educational needs English as an additional language	Pupils' attitudes and values School's care for pupils Leadership and management
Mr A F Barringer	Team inspector	English; drama	
Mr A W Dickens	Team inspector	Mathematics	
Mr C P Hewson	Team inspector	Science	
Mrs W Burke	Team inspector	Art	
Mrs S M Mansell	Team inspector	Design and technology Information technology	
Mr B M Greasley	Team inspector	Geography	Curriculum
Ms C Evers	Team inspector	History	Efficiency, staffing, accommodation and resources
Mr A E Nutton	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
Dr J D Ward	Team inspector	Music	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development Assessment Staffing
Mr R D Gaunt	Team inspector	Physical education	
Miss M A Warner	Team inspector	Religious education	

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REPORT CONTENTS

	PAGE
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	5 - 9
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	10 - 15
The school's results and achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?	16 - 18
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?	18 - 21
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	21 - 22
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?	22 - 23
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	23 - 26
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	26 - 27
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	28 - 32
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	33 - 54

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Number of full-time pupils:	633	(smaller than average)
Pupils with English as an additional language:	18.0%	(higher than most schools)
Pupils entitled to free school meals:	22.4%	(above average)
Pupils on the register of special educational needs:	20.0%	(slightly above average)
Average number of pupils per teacher:	16.9	(broadly average)
Average class size:	21	

The overall social and economic background of pupils in this mixed comprehensive school for 11-16 year olds is below average. The overall attainment of pupils on entry to the school at age 11 is lower than is usually found. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational need is about average. About 17 per cent of the pupils come from families of ethnic minority heritage.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Norden provides a sound standard of education for pupils. Its greatest strengths are the quality of its senior management and its teaching. Pupils are looked after well. Standards have risen strongly over the last five years by the end of Year 9. Pupils' achievements at GCSE have varied, but have been largely in line with pupils' earlier attainments. The school's curriculum is generally broad and balanced. Governors and senior management work closely and effectively together. Their plans for the future are sound and realistic. The school stands clearly for hard work, commitment to improvement and consideration for others. Relationships amongst pupils are good, but there is a minority of troublesome or lazy pupils. Overall, the school has far more strengths than weaknesses and is on an upward course. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils' achievements in the national tests in Year 9 have risen dramatically in the last five years and are now average.
- The core subjects of English, mathematics and science have consistently performed best in GCSE over the last three years
- The school is very well led and is effectively managed.
- The new senior management team has brought renewed vigour and purpose to the educational direction of the school.
- The school's teaching is good and has improved significantly since 1996.
- Good quality of care is provided for pupils.
- The school's literacy strategy is increasingly effective in raising pupils' standards of reading.

What could be improved

- The attainment and progress of pupils in design and technology, geography and French in Years 10-11.
- The assessment, analysis and reporting of pupils' attainment and progress.
- Teaching the full curriculum at Key Stage 4 in design and technology and in information technology.
- Oral work, spelling, punctuation and the setting of homework.
- The purpose, use, staffing and stocking of the library.
- The tidiness and cleanliness of the outside of the school.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good progress since 1996. It has improved to a good level most of the weaknesses identified then. For example:

- pupils' level of attainment has risen significantly by the end of Year 9;
- attendance has improved to a satisfactory level;
- management and planning for the future are now clear, decisive and effective;
- the work of subject departments is carefully monitored by senior management;
- there is a clear determination amongst senior staff to continue to improve the school's performance;
- the appraisal of teaching staff is now carried out on a regular basis; and
- provision for pupils with special educational needs is sound (though still with some inconsistency amongst subjects).

Insufficient progress has, however, been made in improving the following weaknesses identified in 1996:

- heads of department are better overall at monitoring performance, but still not good enough across the board; and
- teachers' assessments of pupils' achievements and progress, though improved, are still not consistent enough across all subjects and year groups.

Pupils' overall standard of attainment in GCSE examinations has fluctuated since the last inspection, but is similar overall to what it was in 1996. The school's teaching has improved significantly. Overall, since 1996 the school has shown a good capacity, albeit with gaps, to improve its practice. Its governing body and senior management are firmly committed to further improvement. The school gives a satisfactory indication of having the required quality of governance and management to make satisfactory progress in the future. The appointment of a new headteacher is planned for September 2000.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	Compared with				Key
	all schools			Similar schools	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
GCSE examinations	E	D	E	E	Well above average A Above average B Average C Below average D Well below average E

Results in the national tests for 14 year olds in 1999 were close to average in mathematics and science, but above average in English. The overall standard in these subjects has risen substantially over the 1995-1999 period – and at a much faster rate than the national rise. When compared with similar schools, pupils in this school performed very well in the tests in all three subjects – a substantial achievement by the school. By the end of Year 9 overall standards in the school are

average in most subjects. In art overall attainment is above average. Only in geography and modern foreign languages is the level of achievement below average. Pupils make good overall progress in their studies during Years 7-9.

Results in GCSE are below (and have often been well below) national averages. In 1999 they were well below average, including achievement in the three core subjects, showing a drop from the level of achievement in 1998. This decline is partly because only one out of a significant minority of pupils who joined the school after Year 7 gained high grades. The results achieved are largely consistent with pupils' prior attainments. Over the last three years pupils performed best in English language, mathematics and science, and worst in geography and French. Girls' results were higher overall than those of boys. The overall standard (as measured by "points scores") was well below that generally achieved in schools of a similar character in 1999, but was average in 1998. The school's system of data analysis, though much improved since 1996, is still not robust enough to track pupils' progress across Years 7-11 adequately.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Positive overall. Most pupils keen and cooperative.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Generally good in and around the school. The school is an orderly community, but a few pupils are troublesome.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils usually courteous, trustworthy and responsible. Relationships friendly and respectful.
Attendance	Currently satisfactory – an improvement on what it was in 1996. Some signs that it may be slipping again.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good	N/A

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.

Teaching is a strength of the school. It was at least satisfactory in 94 per cent of lessons, good in 42 per cent and very good (or better) in 19 per cent of those seen. Around six per cent of lessons had unsatisfactory teaching. The quality of teaching in English and mathematics is good. It is best overall in history, but weakest in geography and modern foreign languages. In well-taught lessons pupils make good progress through clear explanations, a lively pace and intellectually rigorous work. Unsatisfactory teaching is characterised by little need to think, a slow pace or weak management of classes.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Generally good provision, breadth and balance, but not enough design and technology and information technology in Years 10-11.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Specialist teaching for these pupils good. Support within subjects broadly satisfactory, wider than in 1996, but could be better still.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The small number of pupils who are at the early stages of learning English receive effective teaching. The school keeps appropriately close links with pupils' homes.
Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Sound overall. Moral and social provision strong through positive teaching, planned activities and an orderly climate. Spiritual and cultural development are not as strong, but satisfactory.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Pupils feel secure and valued. High quality of care consistently applied. Some lack of creature comforts.

The school continues to maintain good links with parents and consider how it can make them better. Reports to parents have improved, but are not consistently precise. The good curricular provision is limited only by insufficient teaching of the required content in Years 10-11 in design and technology and in information technology. Careers advice is sound. Pupils can take part in a good range of extracurricular activities.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Much improved since the last inspection. Headteacher provides clear vision and strong leadership. Senior management effective, but in transition. Middle managers vary from very good to unsatisfactory, but are satisfactory overall.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	Governing body well organised and committed to keep on improving the school. Governors closely involved in all aspects of the school's life.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Better than at the last inspection. School has a framework of systems and data, but not the comprehensive monitoring system needed. Teaching is monitored.
The strategic use of resources	School's priorities and targets carefully established. Good financial planning and monitoring.

The school has sufficient, qualified specialist teachers, except in religious education. Technical support is satisfactory, except for science and food studies, but clerical help is a little low. Accommodation is sufficient, but very varied in its quality and attractiveness. The library is poor in size and usefulness. Most departments have enough books and equipment, but there are a few shortages of audio-visual equipment. The school monitors its spending on services satisfactorily.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The generally good relationships between school and home. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils to have more homework.

Parents had few additional comments to make about the school on the pre-inspection parental questionnaires returned. Inspectors' judgements support the positive view parents express about the school's determination to forge strong home-school links. In contrast, the volume of homework frequently has gaps, partly because its setting is insufficiently monitored. Overall, parents and the wider community have a favourable view of the school.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. The overall standard of attainment of pupils in the school is broadly in line with that expected nationally of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 and below average by the end of Key Stage 4. Pupils' overall level of achievement in the Year 9 national tests in 1999 was close to the national average for the first time, whilst achievement in GCSE examinations was well below average, though on a rising trend overall. Standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 are broadly similar to those at the last inspection in 1996, but at the end of Key Stage 3 are considerably higher than they were at that time.
2. When pupils come to the school in Year 7, their overall attainment is, on the limited evidence available, below (and sometimes well below) that of pupils of the same age across the country. Attainment in the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 1999 was close to average. By the end of Year 11, pupils' achievements in GCSE have fluctuated considerably in the last few years, but have been well below average overall. These results and the standard of work seen during the inspection point to pupils' level of attainment rising strongly as they move through Years 7-9 and being sustained, albeit at a slower rate on the whole, in Years 10-11. It is an important task for the school's management to ensure that the recent surge in performance up to the end of Year 9 is carried fully through to the end of Year 11.
3. In the national tests taken at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 the proportion of pupils who achieved the national standard of at least level 5 was close to average in mathematics and science, and above average in English. The proportion reaching at least level 6 was about average in English and mathematics, but below average in science. On the average "points" that pupils scored in 1999, pupils' performance was below average in mathematics and science, but above average in English. Pupils' overall performance was close to average.
4. Pupils' performance in these national tests over the 1995-1999 period shows a significant and sustained rise. In 1995 pupils' overall attainment was only about half the national average. Over the next four years, however, pupils' scores in Year 9 rose consistently, year on year, until they were very close to the national average in 1999. For example, the proportion of pupils gaining the higher level 6 (or better) in these tests in 1999 was double that of 1995 in mathematics and science, and was three times higher in English. This rise is much faster than the rise nationally. In view of the fact that the school's standardised tests in Year 7 have not suggested a marked difference in the attainment of Year 7 pupils during these years, this significant rise in performance indicates a good achievement by the school. The highest level of achievement over these years has generally been in mathematics, but it was overtaken in 1999 by English.
5. The overall level of attainment of boys and girls was very similar over the 1997-1999 period. Boys were just a little ahead, overall, in mathematics and science, and girls generally well ahead in English. Boys were a little closer to the national average for boys in 1997 and 1998 than girls were to that for girls. Girls' overall performance, however, has been steadily rising over this period and in 1999 reached a point very close to average, whilst the level for boys has remained static over the three-year period. Teachers' assessments are usually close to pupils'

average test results in mathematics, fluctuate in English, but have been much lower in science in the last two years than the level of results that pupils achieved.

6. When these 1999 Key Stage 3 results are compared with those in schools which have a similar background (as measured solely by the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals), pupils in this school performed very well. At level 5+, for example, attainment was well above average in all of English, mathematics and science. At the higher level (6+), attainment was above average in science, but well above average in English and mathematics. Pupils' overall average points score is well above average, too, in these core subjects. The school's recent performance in these tests has been strong and reflects, for the most part, both good teaching and management effort.
7. In the five other (non-core) subjects formally assessed at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999, teachers judged the overall attainment of pupils currently in Year 10 as above average in geography, history and information technology (IT), and average in design and technology and in modern foreign languages. Inspectors judge that pupils' standards of attainment in these subjects is lower than teachers' assessments indicate - average in history and information technology, close to average in design and technology, but below average in geography and modern foreign languages.
8. In GCSE examinations in 1999 pupils' overall achievement was well below average - for pupils' average points score and for the proportion of pupils gaining at least five grades A*-C. In 1998 both pupils' average points score and the proportion gaining five or more grades A*-C were noticeably higher, although still below average. The decline in 1999 is largely explained by two factors. Firstly, the overall level of attainment of the intake to the school was well below average in September 1994. Their subsequent achievement in GCSE was reasonable, since, for example, 95 per cent of the pupils rated at least average on intake tests achieved five or more grades A*-C. Secondly, of the 18 pupils who joined the school after Year 7 (including a number excluded from other schools) only one gained five grades A*-C; this group of pupils lowered disproportionately this small school's results.
9. Over the period 1994-1999 there was a slightly rising trend in the school's average points score, but at a slower rate than the national trend. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more of the higher (A*-C) grades over the last six years was 16-36 per cent against a national average of 41-46 per cent. The proportion of pupils gaining at least five A*-G grades has, however, risen progressively over the 1995-1999 period from a very low position to a point close to average in 1999. The school feels, with some justification, that its new senior management's drive to raise standards has borne fruit in Years 7-9, but has not yet fed through into Key Stage 4.
10. In the core subjects pupils' achievements in GCSE in 1999 were well below the national averages in all of English, mathematics and science. These results were lower than the results in 1998. Nearly a quarter of pupils in Year 11 in 1999, however, gained at least a grade C in all of these three subjects, double the number four years ago. When a comparison is made about pupils' performances in all the subjects taken in GCSE in 1997-1999, pupils did significantly better in mathematics and science (and also in English language in the last two years), but worse than in most of their other subjects in geography (and in the last two years in French and business studies). No pupils achieved the highest A* grade in 1999 in English literature, history, French, German, music, physical education (PE) or business studies.
11. Girls achieved a much greater proportion of the higher A*-C grades in GCSE than boys in the

last four years: the gap in the proportions of boys and girls gaining these grades has, however, progressively declined over the last four years – from a considerable gap of 16 percentage points in 1996 to half that figure points in 1999 (about the same gap as in 1994 and 1995). This change is the result of boys doing a little better than they had been doing, whilst girls broadly maintained their level of performance. In the last four years approximately one-fifth of the boys and one-third of the girls in Year 11 have achieved at least five of the higher grades. Over twice as many girls as boys usually achieve at least a grade C in English, whereas girls and boys have achieved about the same in mathematics (girls much better in 1999 only) and science.

12. When the school's results at GCSE in 1999 are compared with those in schools with a similar "free school meals" background, pupils' average points score was well below average; it was in line with the national average in the previous year. Although the school's rating in 1999 for the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A*-C was below average (in contrast to above average in 1998), the ratings were average for the proportions of pupils gaining either one or at least five grades A*-G. In 1999 pupils in this school achieved at a similar level in English and science to pupils nationally in the same free school meals group, but worse in mathematics. In contrast, their performance in 1998 had been well above average in science and very high in mathematics, when compared with the results obtained in similar schools.
13. There are some variations in the progress that pupils make at different points in the school. Pupils' overall level of attainment on entry to the school in Year 7 has always been below average. As noted earlier in paragraph 4, attainment by the end of Year 9 has risen every year since 1995 and is now close to average. As pupils moved on to take GCSE in Year 11, their overall rate of progress was sound in 1998, but had some unsatisfactory features in 1999. Boys made less progress than girls in both years. The school's store and analysis of data, though improving rapidly, are insufficient to identify with precision pupils' rates of progress across the school. The school's targets for pupils' achievements in GCSE in the current academic year are reasonable.
14. The overall standard of work seen during the inspection was close to average by the end of Key Stage 3 and below average by the end of Key Stage 4. The overall standard of attainment in English is in line with this picture. Pupils have a fluency and accuracy in reading which is generally typical of their age; they usually tackle reading assignments well and with confidence. The majority take notes carefully, when required to do so, and present their work neatly. The standard of writing is broadly average. Handwriting is above average at Key Stage 3, but average at Key Stage 4. The overall standard of spelling and punctuation is below average. Most pupils listen carefully and are good at discussion in groups. They are generally weak, however, in discussion or arguing a case in open class.
15. The standard of pupils' linguistic work in other subjects across the school broadly reflects the position in English. Pupils' standard of reading is usually average, although their fluency in geography and (with a different focus) modern foreign languages is below average. Pupils generally read their textbooks and worksheets satisfactorily, but are often a little below average in understanding the significance of what they have read. This is partly because there is, despite shining exceptions, too little whole-class discussion in this school of key ideas and knowledge. The school's focus on the reading element of literacy has paid good dividends in raising both the competence and interest of pupils in reading. The time spent reading in tutorials, for example, is generally well used and effective, but the school's library contributes little to this drive to raise standards.

16. Pupils' standard of writing is a little below average overall. Most departments offer reasonable help to pupils in planning and structuring their writing, but pupils infrequently redraft their first attempts in order to produce writing of higher quality. Note-taking is sometimes practised, but pupils' skill in recording significant information is below average overall. Pupils' presentation of their work is above average in most subjects, although a little below average in design and technology, geography, modern foreign languages and religious education (RE). Most pupils' handwriting is of a satisfactory standard. Spelling and punctuation are, however, slightly below average overall. Although pupils are at least average in spelling technical words, partly because these are often displayed around the class, they infrequently use dictionaries to check and correct common spellings; for a significant proportion of pupils the use of the apostrophe is a mystery.
17. Pupils generally listen carefully to their teachers and, in work in groups, to one another. Their standard of discussion within groups is usually appropriate and good-natured. Although pupils are easy and fluent in informal conversation, the standard of speaking in class lets many of them down and a substantial number are insufficiently clear and audible. Pupils' standard and capability in description, explanation or arguing a case are below average: many are not confident or articulate, and project themselves poorly – largely because such oral work is undervalued (including by some teachers) and is infrequently practised. Pupils' store of specialist vocabulary, in contrast, is often good and better than usually found, because a conscious effort is made to teach and use it.
18. In mathematics the overall standard of attainment is average by the end of Key Stage 3 and a little below average by the end of Key Stage 4. Numeracy across the curriculum has not been accorded the same priority as literacy (though its whole-school development is in the pipeline), and this lower priority is reflected in pupils' below average standard of attainment and confidence. Pupils have a reasonable facility with number work, but estimating and approximating are weaknesses. Measuring and drawing to a variety of scales are well practised in design and technology, but the compilation and interpretation of data are rare. Calculators are, for the most part, used appropriately.
19. Attainment in science is average by the end of Key Stage 3, but below average by the end of Key Stage 4. Pupils have a reasonable grasp of the basics of the subject, but many find it increasingly difficult to master and retain the more complex concepts. Attainment in IT is average throughout the school in the use of word processing and spreadsheets, but lacks depth at Key Stage 4 in other aspects, because they are not timetabled or otherwise incorporated sufficiently; many pupils improve their work by access to computers at home.
20. In most other subjects the overall attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 is average. It is, however, below average in geography and modern foreign languages. By the end of Key Stage 4, overall attainment is below average in most subjects and is well below average in design and technology and in modern foreign languages. Attainment in art, in contrast, is generally above the standard pupils achieve nationally. The standard of attainment is average in PE and RE. The trend of pupils' attainment is upwards, particularly because of the strong rise at Key Stage 3 since the last inspection.
21. Overall provision for pupils with special educational needs is usually sound and often good. Pupils' progress is generally satisfactory, but is good where withdrawal or in-class support is offered. The small number of pupils for whom English is an additional language make satisfactory progress overall as a result of specialist teaching and broader help, including close liaison with pupils' homes. The proportion of these pupils who gained at least five

grades A*-C in GCSE examinations in 1999 was a little lower than the school's average. The school has a brief but sound policy statement for gifted and talented children and a commitment to seek to identify such pupils as part of the school's overall assessment procedures.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

22. Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development are positive overall. There is, however, a small but significant minority of pupils who find it difficult to conform to the school's framework of discipline. These pupils require considerable energy and support from staff to help them to take up the many opportunities presented to them.
23. Most pupils are keen to attend school and enjoy the work and activities provided. Pupils are generally well behaved in class, showing good (and often very good) attitudes in about three out of every five lessons. In about one in 12 lessons, however, pupils' attitudes are unsatisfactory. In these, pupils do not readily settle down to work or show adequate concentration; a small number create distractions which prevent the whole class from establishing a good working ethos. In the best lessons, however, even with pupils whose attainments are lowest, teachers gain attention and enthusiasm through their careful planning and active approach to the work.
24. The school is, in general, an orderly community. Pupils are usually courteous and trustworthy and behave well around the school. The fabric of the school and property within it are generally well respected. There are, however, large amounts of litter and dirt across the open site.
25. The working atmosphere in the school is usually positive. Pupils generally show regard and sensitivity for one another's feelings and wellbeing. There are, nevertheless, reports from pupils of a few episodes of bullying, some of which are said to persist despite the intervention of staff. There is no evidence of any significant aggression motivated by racism or sexism. The number of permanent exclusions (none in the last school year) is low for a school of this size. The number of fixed-period exclusions (46) is slightly above average, but this sanction is applied with care and in a graduated way.
26. Most pupils form constructive relationships with one another, with their teachers and with other adults. A significant proportion of the pupils who find difficulty in maintaining such positive attitudes are included on the Register of special educational needs. The school works hard to help these pupils to find more appropriate ways of forming relationships. Pupils generally show respect for the feelings and beliefs of others. They are able to share in the successes of their peers and applaud their efforts and achievements.
27. Where opportunities are offered, both in class and beyond, many pupils are able to shoulder responsibility. The year councils share in the planning for many school procedures, such as school uniform. Older pupils contribute to the care and welfare of newcomers to the school and help with "paired reading" schemes. Pupils are also involved in charitable and community projects and have positive links with industry.
28. The attendance of pupils is satisfactory overall and shows an improvement over the level of attendance at the time of the last inspection. In the 1998-1999 academic year pupils' overall level of attendance was 91.1 per cent, in line with the national average. In the Autumn Term

1999, however, the level of attendance slipped a little to 90.5 per cent, almost two per cent lower than in Autumn 1998. If the pattern of the previous year is repeated, the level of attendance for the whole of the current academic year is on course to fall once more below 90 per cent.

29. The level of authorised absences in 1998-1999 (7.6 per cent) was close to, but fractionally below, the national average. The amount of absence without good reason (1.2 per cent) was average. The evidence available suggests that unauthorised absence is largely owing to a small number of pupils having very low attendance, despite the school's efforts to secure improvement. A larger minority of pupils have intermittent time off school. This tail of poor attendance makes it hard for both teachers and pupils to sustain good progress in classwork and lowers the level of achievement in GCSE. During the inspection the progress of the majority of pupils in a few classes was slowed down by teachers doing their best to help poor attenders to catch up.
30. The school has a useful policy and clear guidelines on matters of attendance. Its prospectus emphasises to parents and pupils alike the importance of good attendance and punctuality. The school provides a dedicated telephone line to make it easier for parents to report children's absence and has recently assigned specific time for a clerical officer to focus on matters of attendance. Registers are accurately kept. The school's computerised system for recording and analysing pupils' attendance is, on the whole, employed effectively to monitor attendance, but no administrative staff have been trained to access data.
31. Pupils' punctuality for school is good, an improvement on the situation at the last inspection. Most pupils are also punctual for lessons, but a small minority loiter and waste time in getting from one lesson to another. The school has satisfactory systems in place to combat truancy.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

32. Teaching is good overall. It is satisfactory or better in nearly all lessons - satisfactory in a third of lessons and good in just over two-fifths of them. Additionally, nearly a fifth of the school's teaching is very good. In about one in every 16 lessons inspected, however, teaching was unsatisfactory. The quality of teaching is very similar throughout the school.
33. The quality of teaching is one of the major reasons for the purposeful and friendly atmosphere in which most lessons are conducted and for the sound quality of education that pupils receive. Teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection. In 1996 a quarter of the school's teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory and only about a third of it to be good (or better). By this inspection the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching had fallen to a little over six per cent and about three-fifths, a much larger proportion than earlier, was good (or better). This improvement has been brought about by the school's monitoring and greater emphasis on the craft of teaching and by changes in personnel.
34. Teachers generally have good knowledge of the subjects they teach. This enables most teachers to give pupils clear instructions, detailed explanations, and interesting and relevant illustrations. Many teachers convey not only accurate information, but also real love and enthusiasm for their subjects. A particular feature is the wide use and display of specialist vocabulary in classrooms. In a minority of lessons teachers' confidence enables them to pose wide-ranging and open-ended questions, so stimulating wide debate and deeper understanding amongst pupils.

35. The school has put much effort, with success, into the improvement of pupils' literacy. Teachers generally use a suitable range of techniques to improve standards of reading not only in English, but also across other subjects. Many make frequent references to the spelling and use of specialist words, which are often prominently displayed on classroom walls. Pupils frequently read out passages from texts for the whole class. In a Year 11 lesson in French, too, pupils practised the use of tenses and vocabulary in an appropriately structured way. Across a wide range of subjects teachers encourage pupils to use carefully structured plans for their writing. Numeracy is infrequently promoted in an active and conscious way across the school, but plans are afoot to do so. Little use is made of oral work in most subjects to explore topics, reinforce literacy or deepen understanding.
36. The majority of teachers set appropriately high standards for pupils. In the best lessons teachers explain the purpose of lessons precisely, pose thought-provoking questions and expect pupils to produce detailed answers. They frequently ask pupils to explain the basis for their views and the steps in their thinking, so that both they and other pupils have clear understanding. In a mathematics lesson in Year 9, for example, the teacher's skilled questioning about compound shapes kept the whole class interested and motivated, with the result that all were prepared to venture opinions without fear of giving a "wrong" answer. In an English lesson in Year 11 the teacher questioned pupils rigorously about Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* and insisted upon pupils quoting evidence from the text to support their views. Such thoroughness and intellectual rigour stimulated pupils to think deeply and was often the key in lessons to producing a good standard of work.
37. In a minority of lessons, however, pupils are allowed to coast along at a relatively undemanding level, because they are not expected to offer extended or reasoned answers, or indeed to say much at all – sometimes because the teacher talks too much. In these lessons only closed questions tend to be posed and teachers readily accept snippets of replies from only a handful of pupils. In these instances pupils are not expected to work hard enough and are happy to oblige. Occasional examples were also seen of "learned helplessness", where the teacher fell into the trap of too readily offering the assistance requested and doing the work for pupils.
38. Lessons are nearly always well planned. Teachers are usually clear about what they want to achieve and normally plan the use of time well, although they do not always share their thinking with pupils. Most revise the content of previous lessons comprehensively and crisply, and set reasonable time-goals for pupils to work at new topics. A smaller number draw lessons to a clear conclusion by identifying the significant issues studied in the previous hour; the omission of this final stage is a significant weakness in checking and consolidating pupils' understanding. In a few lessons the teacher's brief and uninspiring introduction produced early boredom and restlessness, particularly amongst those pupils already predisposed to these traits.
39. Most teachers use a suitable range of effective teaching methods, particularly at Key Stage 4. With a few exceptions, teachers explain topics clearly to the whole class. A significant minority are very skilled at coaxing the whole class into interchanging ideas and building up a composite picture of a topic. In a history lesson in Year 7 on religion in medieval England, for example, the teacher's energetic and bouncy style encouraged pupils to contribute their ideas confidently and to blend what they had previously learned with information gleaned from a video animation. The training given by many teachers results in pupils working purposefully and cooperatively, in groups of varying sizes, to solve problems together in a sensitive manner.

40. Notetaking is well taught, structured and employed in a few lessons, but is insufficiently used overall as a routine method of remembering key points for discussion, essay-writing or revision. Brainstorming and extended debate are used to very good effect, but again only in a minority of lessons. In a few lessons teachers talk too much, allow a small group of pupils to dominate discussions, or do not coach or directly teach pupils enough.
41. Most lessons are well managed and conducted in a friendly and positive spirit. Teachers, in the main, quickly settle pupils down to work. The good rapport and relationships seen in most classes enable pupils to concentrate on their work with interest and without interruptions. In the majority of lessons the atmosphere is calm, workmanlike and productive. In a few lessons, however, pupils learn little, because their teachers do not control high levels of unproductive noise, a small number of difficult children or occasional showing off. Late arrivals for lessons or poor attenders sometimes impede the learning of other pupils.
42. Time is normally used well, though a few lessons move at too leisurely a pace. Many staff use a stimulating range of resources to enliven and clarify pupils' studies. Short extracts from video-recordings are often used very well to bring a subject alive – as, for example, in Year 9 when pupils were studying Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in English or the life of Martin Luther King in history. Effective use of the blackboard enabled pupils to understand clearly the imperfect tense in French and imaginative use of a microphone and tape-recorder kept pupils interested and working hard in Spanish. Hand-painted samples of wallpaper, brought by a teacher from his industrial experience, spurred on pupils in a Year 8 lesson in textiles to greater efforts with their own designs and to a deeper appreciation of the work of William Morris.
43. Teachers generally assess pupils' work and progress satisfactorily during lessons, but with insufficient consistency across departments. During the inspection homework was generally set appropriately to reinforce or extend what had been learned in school. The majority of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire also indicated satisfaction with the setting of homework. Examination of pupils' work and planners, however, indicates that homework is not set with sufficient regularity or consistency for a substantial minority of pupils.
44. Overwhelmingly, teaching is good throughout the school. It is very good in history (particularly in Key Stage 3). Teaching is satisfactory overall in science and art in Key Stage 3; in design and technology in Key Stage 4; and (though with a few significant weaknesses that require improvement) in geography and modern foreign languages throughout the school. The specialist teaching of IT is good, but teaching of the subject across departments is unsatisfactory overall. In all other subjects and key stages teaching is good. Nearly all subjects have at least some teaching that is very good (and occasionally outstanding), and about a third of the teaching was of this quality in English and mathematics.
45. The result of this good teaching is that most pupils who attend school regularly make good progress in their studies both in lessons and over longer periods of time. In well over half the classes seen pupils made good progress in what they learned and in a further one in every ten lessons made very good progress. Pupils did not learn to a satisfactory level in about six per cent of classes. Pupils make a fairly similar rate of progress in their learning as they move through the school.
46. Pupils' learning is of a broadly satisfactory standard in Key Stage 3 in science, geography and modern foreign languages. Many make unsatisfactory progress overall in what they learn in

Key Stage 4 in design and technology, in geography, modern foreign languages and IT. Pupils usually learn well in all other subjects and in other key stages and on General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) work.

47. There are many reasons why most pupils make good progress in their studies. The quality of teaching is good overall in most subjects. The majority of pupils behave well and work conscientiously. Most listen very carefully and cooperate sensibly with one another and their teachers. Although a significant minority of pupils, given the chance, are happy to sit back and take life easy, the majority are prepared to put effort into their work and use the hour-long lessons productively. Only in a small number of classes do unnecessary chatter, unclear explanations or silly behaviour restrict considerably what pupils learn.
48. High-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs (SEN) usually make satisfactory progress in their studies. The specialist teaching for the latter group is generally good. The support offered by subject departments has improved since the last inspection. It is satisfactory overall, but in a minority of subjects pupils' needs are insufficiently matched by appropriate teaching content, materials or methods. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are of good quality. Teaching staff are given helpful advice and information by the SEN coordinator, but she does not have sufficient opportunity to extend this consultancy role to those subjects not fully meeting SEN needs. Provision for about 12 pupils for whom English is an additional language is effective, predominantly through specialist teaching of sound quality.

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

49. The curriculum provides a good range of opportunities for learning which address the needs of all pupils. At Key Stage 3 the breadth and balance of the curriculum are good. Each subject of the National Curriculum and RE are appropriately covered. After studying one modern foreign language in Year 7, all pupils study both French and Spanish in Year 8 and there are firm plans for this to continue in Year 9 next academic year. All pupils study personal and social education (PSE), but no course is offered in drama.
50. The curriculum is strengthened in Key Stage 3 by very good provision to improve pupils' literacy. To support this initiative, the school has a clear policy, well thought out strategies and an ongoing training programme for staff. These are coordinated by a purposeful management group. All pupils focus on literacy skills during an additional English lesson in Year 7. This provision is coordinated with work undertaken in contributory primary schools and at a Summer School. Effective work is undertaken in all subject areas, as well as in tutorial groups in Years 7 and 8, to support this initiative, and a literacy target is agreed by the whole school each term. A numeracy strategy is being established.
51. A sound range of curricular provision is offered in Key Stage 4. All pupils study the core subjects (including double science), design and technology, French, PE, RE and PSE. In addition, pupils choose two subjects from an appropriate list of options. One course is offered at Foundation level for the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ), but it was undersubscribed and did not take place in Year 10. There are firm and sensible plans to offer this to Intermediate level next academic year, to provide a more relevant and worthwhile course.

52. The curriculum meets statutory requirements, except in Key Stage 4 in design and technology and in IT. There is no timetabled provision in IT at Key Stage 4 for half the cohort. Provision in other subjects across the curriculum is inconsistent and insufficient to enable these pupils to develop the full range of skills and to meet statutory requirements. This weakness was reported at the time of the last inspection also. The home economics course, taught as part of design and technology in place of food technology, does not meet statutory requirements. The total teaching time each week of 25 hours fully meets the recommendation of the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). During the period of the inspection the use of tutorial time was satisfactory.
53. All pupils have access to all subjects of the curriculum. The arrangements for teaching pupils in attainment groups are generally effective. The match of work to the differing needs of pupils has improved since the time of the last inspection and is generally consistent across the school. It is good in English, history and IT. Higher-attaining pupils are not challenged sufficiently in Key Stage 4 in design and technology and in geography. One pupil is sensibly disapplied from the National Curriculum in Key Stage 4 to follow an appropriate vocational course.
54. The procedures and structures for curricular planning are satisfactory. Procedures for monitoring the effectiveness of the curriculum are good, through sound links between the senior management team and subject departments and a good system of curricular review. The school takes into account the views of governors and parents and works to provide an appropriate curriculum: it now provides what is considered to be a more relevant second modern foreign language, for example, by having changed from German to Spanish. Schemes of work are very good in art and RE, and are good in English, history, music and PE. They are satisfactory elsewhere, except in geography at Key Stage 4 where the scheme is poor.
55. Continuity between the key stages is generally good. It is, however, unsatisfactory in design and technology where food technology in Key Stage 3 is followed inappropriately by home economics in Key Stage 4. Curricular links to ensure effective continuity with contributory primary schools are good where they are part of the programme to raise standards of literacy, as well as in English generally, in mathematics and in design and technology. Elsewhere they are weak, resulting in slower progress than need be in Year 7 in many subjects.
56. A good range of extracurricular activities enhances the curriculum. Out-of-school residential visits include activity weeks in Cumbria and France and a visit to the World War One battlefield sites. Each year pupils take part in successful performances by the orchestra and choir. There is a wide range of other clubs which take place at lunchtimes and after school, including a very successful and active Young Enterprise group. A good range of activities supports the subject curriculum. These include a homework club and study support and revision clubs in a number of subjects, including English, mathematics, science and art. A third of the pupils take part in a good range of inter-school sports, with a strong commitment from five members of staff.
57. The provision for careers education and guidance is sound. An appropriate scheme for careers education is organised by the careers coordinator and is taught within the PSE course. The coordinator neither teaches nor has the opportunity to monitor the course systematically. Impartial careers advice is given by the careers service. The programme of guidance is comprehensive and includes those who have most need in Years 10 and 11. A

strength of the provision is the involvement of local employers, who take part in activities such as the mock interview programme and the Young Enterprise group.

58. All pupils in Year 11 participate for two weeks in generally well-organised work experience. During the placement pupils are visited by a member of staff and complete a diary. The work experience takes place in October in Year 11, but this arrangement does not enable the full potential of the experience to be exploited in preparation and follow-up work. There is a small careers library, but access to it is difficult. The amount of material within it is the minimum required and some of it is out of date.
59. There are good links with the local community, industry, and with other schools and colleges. The Community Centre and the Primetime leisure activities enhance the opportunities available for out-of-school activities and support for pupils. In addition to their support of the careers programme, employers act as mentors for pupils experiencing difficulty with their work in school. Local designers and artists are involved in an art project each year, recently supporting pupils in completing a mosaic at the entrance to the school as part of the millennium activities. Good relationships are maintained with the local contributory primary schools, with which liaison is regular and purposeful.
60. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory. Pupils experience moments of reflection in assemblies as, for example, at the end of a presentation of religious and moral themes, when brief prayers are said. These presentations are made both by senior teachers and by visitors, including an evangelical group. In assemblies pupils also join in celebrations of important religious events such as Advent, Ramadan and Eid. Religious education lessons include opportunities for pupils and staff to express faiths, as well as to learn about them. Some spaces are designated as prayer rooms for Muslim pupils. In the curriculum overall there are examples of spiritual development, but it is not strongly promoted. In mathematics, for instance, pupils are introduced to the wonder of forms in nature; in music they listen to the Hallelujah chorus; and in art they enjoy looking at the designs of William Morris.
61. Pupils' moral development is strongly promoted. Teachers generally set good examples of conduct and respect, and most of them have high expectations of good behaviour. Rules of conduct are displayed in classrooms. The school operates an effective discipline policy which employs a suitable series of graded sanctions. These are well understood by the pupils. Clear moral themes, such as respect for others and taking responsibility for one's own actions, are presented in assemblies, in RE and in PSE lessons. In PE pupils learn about the value of team work and the need for clear rules. In history there is appropriate emphasis on the issues of racism and fascism through, for example, discussion and study of the American civil rights movement of the 1960s. The school's police liaison officer makes a good contribution to the school's provision of moral education.
62. Provision for pupils' social development is good. Overall, there are good relationships amongst staff and pupils. The school has established an orderly ethos which allows pupils to work and socialise in positive ways. There are some spaces designated for social activity at morning break and at lunchtimes. The school provides a good range of taught extracurricular activities. These include girls' rugby, choir and orchestra, and an IT homework club. The school runs an annual camp and organises a series of out-of-school visits.

63. Pupils have a school council which provides them with opportunities to experience responsibility and citizenship. Significant changes have recently been made to the school uniform as a result of pupils' opinions. Pupils may become prefects. Pupils in Year 10 have a mentoring system which enables them to work with younger pupils. The school involves pupils in raising money for charities: £1000 was recently raised, for example, for The Multiple Sclerosis Society. Social development is also fostered in daily lessons when, for example, in music, mathematics and design and technology pupils regularly work in pairs or groups. Through involvement in sports activities the school has established excellent relationships with local clubs.
64. The school's promotion of pupils' cultural development is satisfactory. The fact that pupils come from a wide range of social and ethnic backgrounds is regarded as a positive feature of the school. Pupils are encouraged to share their beliefs and traditions, in order to build up a respect for lifestyles which are different from their own. In art and music pupils meet professionals who enhance studies with a local bias. The curriculum includes a broad range of cultural topics such as Indian classical and popular music, France in the eighteenth century, Asian and African poetry, and Steinbeck's description of the 1930s' depression in the USA.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

65. Overall, the school provides a positive environment in which pupils feel secure and valued by staff. A high quality of care is consistently applied, even to those pupils who find it difficult to comply with the school's norms of conduct.
66. The school has a satisfactory policy statement for health and safety matters. A full review of the building and its facilities is carried out each month. This procedure is steadily reducing the number of items causing concern. The overall coordination of the management and supervision of this policy, however, is inadequate. There are some aspects of the school which fail to attain a consistently high level of health and safety. The medical room, for example, is poorly maintained, has sparse facilities and lacks appropriate comfort. There are uneven flagstones in some external circulation areas.
67. Arrangements for child protection are sound. The headteacher herself is the person designated for this responsibility and ensures that procedures are in line with the requirements of the Area Child Protection Committee. All staff are kept up to date concerning their own responsibilities in these matters.
68. Since the last inspection the school has introduced a systematic framework for discipline, with an explicit set of rules and sanctions (Assertive Discipline). This has proved successful in presenting to pupils, staff and parents a common set of expectations about behaviour. The school is now appropriately seeking to build on this sound foundation by developing a broader range of rewards and sanctions, in keeping with changing needs.
69. Programmes for personal, social and health education are relevant to pupils' needs, well planned and resourced, and organised in a coherent and progressive way across the school. The implementation and teaching of these programmes are, however, variable in quality, largely because there is no settled team of teachers to provide a specialist outlook and continuity of experience and expertise.

70. The school provides effective support and advice for pupils. Form tutors, coordinated by the four Heads of House, offer continuity of supervision as pupils progress through the school. The procedures for monitoring pupils' academic performance are not, however, consistent or comprehensive. There are unhelpful variations in the way both the progress of individual pupils is assessed and academic targets for pupils are formulated. There is generally a good match between the provision made by the school for pupils with statements of special educational need and the requirements of their statements.
71. The school's assessment policy provides satisfactory guidance on the assessment, marking, recording and reporting of pupils' work. Within subject departments the quality of day-to-day assessment of individual pupils' work is satisfactory in most subjects. It is good in English, art, history, IT, modern foreign languages and music. Where it is good, teachers make clear to pupils exactly what they must do to achieve higher levels, involve the pupils themselves in the appraisal of their standards, and record individual attainments carefully. Overall, pupils' work is marked well.
72. In Key Stage 3, assessments of pupils' work relate satisfactorily to National Curriculum levels of study in all subjects. In Key Stage 4, assessments relate firmly to the requirements of external examinations and, as a consequence, provide both indications of the progress of pupils and targets for improvement. Subject departments adopt different procedures, however, in assessing pupils' work: whilst some progress has been made in unifying the system of grading, inconsistencies remain. Within most departments teachers make satisfactory use of assessment data to ensure that work is properly covered or to modify the pace of work for individual pupils and teaching groups.
73. The whole-school procedures for recording and using assessment data to monitor the progress of individual pupils and groups of pupils remain unsatisfactory. As a result of insufficient information and the adoption of different grading systems at Key Stage 3, the progress of individual pupils cannot be monitored with sufficient precision either across year groups or as they move up the school. The use of assessment to monitor attainment and progress was identified as a weakness also at the last inspection.
74. Interim and annual reports to parents are presented in a common format, but these often do not give sufficiently clear and consistent information about the attainment and progress of pupils in Years 7 and 8. Written comments are very variable both across and within departments. The school does not have a strong enough system to monitor the quality of teachers' reports, in order to ensure that the attainment and progress of all pupils are clearly indicated.
75. Records of Achievement include a collation of pupils' achievements from Year 7 onwards and are finally completed in Year 11. These provide information not only about academic achievements, but also about projects such as work experience, sports competitions and musical performances. They do not, however, include reports by the school on National Curriculum subjects taken in Key Stage 4. Assessment procedures are sound for pupils with special educational needs and for pupils for whom English is a second language.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

76. The school continues to maintain good links with parents, as reported in the last inspection. In addition, it has introduced effective ways of further improving the exchange of information between school and home. These enable the school to communicate quickly

and easily on such issues as attendance, good work, behaviour and homework. Parents' evenings are now well attended and the school has a policy of telephoning parents who have not returned reply slips.

77. The pre-inspection parental questionnaire indicated a good level of satisfaction with the school. The evidence of the inspection confirmed this, identifying a marked improvement over the past three years. The fact that the school now has far more applicants for entry than places available also reinforces the school's attraction to parents.
78. The school's prospectus and options booklet for Key Stage 4 are informative and well presented. The regular newsletter is good. The school's series of *Spotlight* leaflets, which give brief curricular information about each subject and other issues, are a helpful way of informing parents about what is taught. There is a suitable home-school agreement signed by parents, pupils and the school. The Friends of Norden Association makes an active and valuable contribution to parental links with the school. The lack of events such as drama and theatrical productions, however, puts some restriction on ways of further improving the school's partnership with its parents.
79. The interim and annual reports to parents are presented in a standard format. Their frequency is appreciated by parents. There are, however, inconsistencies across subjects in indicating unambiguously to parents pupils' attainments and achievements. The reports do not always convey fully comparable information in clear and simple terms, nor indicate what pupils need to do in order to improve.
80. The school Planner is a useful and systematic method of monitoring homework and maintaining regular contact with home. A significant minority of these planners, however, have many blank pages and lack regular signatures from parents and teachers. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are kept well informed about their children's progress and are well consulted. There is a good programme of home visiting, supported by a bilingual assistant, for pupils for whom English is an additional language.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

81. There have been significant improvements in the leadership of the school since the last inspection. The headteacher provides a clear focus for the school and a strong vision for its improvement. Many of those carrying responsibility for subjects and other aspects of the school's work have shown improved qualities of leadership. The governing body has also sharpened its performance to a sound level.
82. The headteacher has an impressive grasp of the school's priorities and has supplied energy and dynamism to promote necessary changes in the school's direction. She is highly visible and accessible to pupils, staff, governors and parents, and has faced difficult decisions positively. She has provided the school with a challenging, but appropriate, agenda for change and improvement.
83. The unfilled vacancy for a second deputy headteacher means that the senior management team is heavily committed, not only in managing the programme of improvement, but also in ensuring that improvements already secured are sustained. The links of senior staff with subject departments and the monitoring of the quality of departmental work are important innovations. They do, however, involve a significant demand on their energies, since the

headteacher and her deputy are also fully engaged in the day-to-day management of the school.

84. The current pastoral system, with four parallel Heads of House, is cumbersome. It provides good pastoral support to pupils, but reduces the possibility of the senior team delegating clear responsibility for some whole-school issues - such as induction of pupils in Year 7, the effective monitoring of progress of whole-year groups, and the efficient preparation of school-leavers for the next phase of their education or training. It also reduces the chance of policies operating consistently across the school.
85. The quality and effectiveness of the leadership of subject departments and pastoral work range from very good to unsatisfactory, but are satisfactory overall. There have been improvements in middle management's commitment and accountability since the last inspection, but some of these leaders do not show adequate vision and energy to match the improvements, particularly in pupils' attainments and progress, demonstrated by more successful managers.
86. The school has adopted a relevant and concise set of aims and values which command broad support. There is an explicit commitment to positive relationships, inclusive education and equality of access and opportunity. These aims are generally well reflected in the day-to-day life and work of the school.
87. The urgency of the need to improve the school's achievements has been made clear and well established by the example set by senior managers. This stance has received an appropriately positive response from staff and governors. The school's success in implementing most of the key issues for action outlined in the last inspection report confirms that the current senior staff have both the capacity and the will to maintain such improvement. There is insufficient administrative support, however, to underpin all the measures needed for the school's improvement.
88. The governing body is well organised and actively committed to the task of improving the school's overall performance. Most governors recognise their key role as that of setting and monitoring the strategic direction for the school, in concert with the professional guidance of the headteacher and the school's other professional managers. Governors involve themselves in all aspects of the school's life and have specific individual links with subject departments.
89. The quality of teaching in the school is regularly monitored and evaluated by senior managers and subject leaders. This is an innovation since the last inspection and is associated with a distinct improvement in the overall standard of teaching. Such monitoring is linked with the school's procedures for teacher appraisal, but does not sufficiently concentrate on the impact that teaching has on pupils' achievements and progress.
90. The school has made a satisfactory start in evaluating its overall performance and seeking to identify how far its efforts improve pupils' attainments. The school has made considerable strides since the last inspection and has an outline framework of data to help this process. It does not, however, have a comprehensive, whole-school system of management information through which the school's performance can be closely tracked, appropriate targets set and regular reviews carried out.

91. The school's system of planning is good. It involves wide consultation, clear costings and relevant priorities, and lays down criteria by which successful implementation can be judged. The planning for whole-school development is generally well matched by planning within subject departments.
92. The school's educational priorities are well supported through sound financial management and planning. The governing body is well informed about the school's spending patterns and monitors the expenditure carefully. There are clear plans for spending appropriately the surplus carried forward in the budget. The last financial audit did not identify any major weaknesses and the school has responded effectively to all the points which were raised.
93. Departments receive their capitation through a formula based on the number of pupils taught, together with a system of bids linked to their curriculum development plans. Spending by heads of departments is carefully monitored. The grants for pupils with special educational needs and for those from ethnic minority groups have been used effectively. The school makes satisfactory use of new technologies such as e-mail, CD-ROMs and the Internet. There are sound systems for monitoring spending on services such as water. The school has considered ways in which it might manage spending on services such as cleaning more efficiently.
94. The proportion of the school's budget spent on teaching staff is above average and this provision is good. The majority of lessons are taught by specialists. In RE, however, a large proportion of lessons are taught by non-specialists; this has a detrimental effect on pupils' learning. There are sufficient qualified or experienced support staff for pupils with special educational needs. Technical support is satisfactory, with the exception of that for science and food studies. There is insufficient administrative support, which results in some teaching staff having to use time to complete clerical tasks. The school appropriately uses some of the funds for pupils with special educational needs to keep group sizes small. The time teachers spend in lessons and the pupil-teacher ratio are broadly average. The total teaching time of twenty-five hours per week is in line with that recommended nationally. Time is used well in the main and most lessons start promptly.
95. There is an effective programme of induction to the work of the school for teachers new to the school or to teaching. Opportunities for the professional development of staff are used well. The good overall standard of teaching in the school indicates the school has the potential to be an effective provider of initial teacher training. There is a system of appraisal in operation for teaching staff; this includes the appraisal of an aspect of teaching for each member of staff.
96. There has been some improvement in the provision of accommodation since the time of the last inspection. The new buildings have enabled the school to provide subject-specific teaching areas for English, mathematics and science. There is, however, still some inadequate accommodation for food studies and a few rooms are on the small side when large classes are taught in them. There has been no improvement in the accommodation for PE or in the "all-weather" playing area, which cannot be used in all weathers. Some parts of the site are untidy and neglected, and litter is a major problem, as it was at the last inspection. Although teachers have made many parts of the accommodation attractive with good displays, other parts of the interior are drab and lack stimulation. Access to most of the school is difficult for people with disabilities.

97. The spending on resources is below the national average. The provision of books is satisfactory in all subjects except art. The provision of equipment is satisfactory in all subjects except in mathematics (where there is no overhead projector), in design and technology (where there is insufficient equipment for computer-aided design and manufacture) and in art (which lacks television and video equipment).
98. There has been little improvement to the library since the time of the last inspection. It remains an unsatisfactory resource base and does little to help pupils to learn independently. The library budget is very low. The room is small and the stock, although containing some good quality books, is also too small. The library does not contain such things as audio-visual resources, newspapers or magazines. Its IT provision is not linked to the school's network, with the result that pupils cannot use the Internet in the library. The teacher in charge of the library does not have sufficient time to develop the resources effectively and there are insufficient staff to ensure the library is accessible all day.
99. Centrally-provided IT is good and the number of computers in the school is average. The provision of IT within departments varies, but is satisfactory overall, except in geography and PE. Access to the central IT facilities is not always available at times convenient to departments

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

100. In order to improve the sound quality of education that pupils already receive, the governors and senior management of the school should:
- (a) improve further pupils' overall attainment and progress by
- assessing pupils' achievements to consistent criteria across all subjects in Years 7-9 (##70 72 73);
 - regularly analysing - and incorporating into the school's planning - significant data about pupils' levels of attainment, particularly in Years 7-9 (##13 73 90);
 - increasing the amount of rigorous and extended discussion in class (##14 15 17 35 37);
 - raising pupils' overall standard of spelling and punctuation to match their good presentation of work (##14 16);
 - removing the weaknesses identified in the main body of the report in a minority of teaching (##32-33 35 37-38 40-42 44 47);
 - improving the standard of work in Years 10-11, particularly in design and technology, geography and modern foreign languages (##7 10 15 20 44 46 53 54);
 - ensuring that homework is set regularly, in accordance with the published timetable (##43); and
 - indicating clearly and consistently in reports to parents their children's achievements in all subjects, so that both children and parents know accurately how well they are doing (##74 79).
- (b) ensure that all aspects of the National Curriculum in design and technology and in information technology are taught at Key Stage 4 (##19 52 55).
- (c) ensure that the school's library/resource centre helps pupils to learn better, by being appropriately staffed and by being resourced with up-to-date books, magazines and other learning materials (##15 98).

- (d) reduce significantly the amount of litter and dirt around the exterior of the school, in order to enhance pupils' social and aesthetic education (##24 96).

In addition to the key issues above, other less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the school's future plan of action. These are indicated in paragraphs 18 21 23 25 28 31 55 57 58 60 66 69 75 84-85 87 89 94 96-97 99 and in subject sections.

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	176
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	90

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	17	42	33	6	1	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons. The percentages do not total 100 per cent because of "rounding".

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	633
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	142

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Special educational needs	Y7–Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational need	13
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	127

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	114

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	18
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	24

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	7.6
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	1.2
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for 1998-1999.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	65	55	120

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	40	37	34
	Girls	45	38	38
	Total	85	75	62
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	71 (46)	63 (62)	52 (47)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	31 (26)	36 (40)	15 (21)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	36	37	49
	Girls	41	38	41
	Total	77	75	90
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	64 (47)	63 (70)	75 (68)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	31 (22)	36 (40)	33 (29)
	National	29 (31)	40 (37)	28 (31)

Percentages in brackets refer to 1998.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	47	61	108

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	10	48	57
	Girls	18	45	50
	Total	28	93	107
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	26 (35)	89 (83)	94 (92)
	National	46 (45)	91 (90)	96 (95)

Percentages in brackets refer to 1998.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	26.7 (30.2)
	National	37.1 (36.8)

Figures in brackets refer to 1998.

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	17	53%
	National		73%

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	0
Indian	8
Pakistani	103
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	2
White	517
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	5	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	41	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	37.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.9
Average class size	21.0

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	6
Total aggregate hours worked per week	140

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	1998-1999
	£
Total income	1,475,656
Total expenditure	1,510,314
Expenditure per pupil	2,530
Balance brought forward from previous year	174,085
Balance carried forward to next year	139,427

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	633
Number of questionnaires returned	101

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	35	49	6	2	8
My child is making good progress in school.	31	60	1	1	7
Behaviour in the school is good.	19	64	2	4	11
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	18	66	6	4	6
The teaching is good.	29	62	0	0	9
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	28	60	5	3	4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	40	49	5	2	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	47	48	0	0	5
The school works closely with parents.	27	52	7	0	14
The school is improving.	28	51	3	2	16
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	26	60	2	1	11
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	25	58	1	1	15

Other issues raised by parents

There were additional comments from parents on 12 of the 101 questionnaires returned.

Amongst the positive points mentioned were:

- the generally good relationships between school and home.

Amongst the few concerns expressed in questionnaires were:

- insufficient homework being set.

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

ENGLISH

101. Pupils' overall standard of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with that found nationally. In the national tests in 1999 pupils' average points score was above the national average. The performance of boys was nearer to their own national average than that of girls was to theirs. Results were very high, when compared with those of pupils in schools with a similar percentage of free school meals. Performance was better than in 1998 and the trend of results is upwards. Taking into account the fact that the overall level of literacy on entry to the school was below average, pupils made good progress by the end of Key Stage 3. Standards are now higher at the end of Key Stage 3 than they were at the time of the last inspection.
102. The general standard of attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is below the national expectation. In GCSE for English language and English literature in 1999 pupils' average points scores were well below the national average. Girls did better than boys in both subjects. Pupils performed comparatively better in English language than they did in the majority of subjects in the school, but tended to do worse in English literature.
103. The majority of pupils throughout the school listen attentively. They work productively in small groups, the planning of which has improved greatly since the last inspection. The overall standard of speech is average, but there are wide variations. High-attaining pupils in Year 7 speak clearly, articulately and confidently, whereas low-attaining pupils in the same year lack fluency and do not communicate ideas effectively. The majority of pupils throughout the school answer questions willingly and audibly, but lack confidence when presenting opinions and findings to the whole class.
104. Standards of reading have improved as a result of the school's literacy project. During tutorial time in Years 7 and 8 all pupils read and keep a record of the books they have read. The range and frequency of pupils' reading have increased accordingly. The level of reading comprehension at the end of Key Stage 3 is slightly above average. This allows most pupils to study a wide range of literature with confidence and understanding. High-attaining pupils in Year 9, for example, drew upon their study of Shakespearean sonnets and earlier love poetry to inform their sensitive understanding of a modern poem, *Valentine*, by Carol Ann Duffy. Pupils in Year 10 made good use of word processing to provide a framework for their detailed analysis of characters in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. Pupils in Year 11 study various major works of literature and identified, with accuracy and maturity, key elements of plot, character and themes such as racism and prejudice in *To Kill A Mocking Bird*.
105. The overall quality of written work in Key Stage 3 is in line with that found nationally. The standard of presentation and handwriting is above average. In response to the lively stimulus provided in many lessons at Key Stage 3, pupils write with enthusiasm for a wide range of readerships and purposes. High-attaining pupils in Year 7 express ideas effectively and write with accurate sentence structure, spelling and punctuation. Pupils in the top set in Year 8 write lively entries for "Theseus's diary", telling of his adventures in the Labyrinth and showing a good grasp of both the appropriate form and narrative skills. Much of the work seen reached at least National Curriculum level 5.

106. The general standard of writing in Key Stage 4 is below average. The majority of assignments, although written in an often lively and imaginative way, suffer from too many errors in sentence structure and, especially, in spelling and punctuation. The best work of high-attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11 is, however, of well above average standard, particularly in relevant, detailed and well-crafted responses to literature. Much attention is given to the planning and structure of written work through the use of writing frames. This remedies a weakness noted during the last inspection.
107. The quality of teaching throughout the school is never less than satisfactory. It is good in one third of lessons and very good in another third. Some teaching is outstanding. The standard is marginally higher at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3. Teachers know the subject well. They plan and prepare lessons very thoroughly. Tasks are explained briefly and clearly and pupils know precisely what is expected of them. The majority of lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and employ a stimulating range of linguistic activities, resulting in pupils responding with interest and enthusiasm.
108. Teachers are particularly careful to place lessons in context, rehearsing thoroughly the ground previously covered, so that pupils know the purpose of each lesson. Tasks are skilfully matched to pupils' level of attainment and specific materials are provided for pupils with special educational needs. Such pupils are taught with great care and patience, and they respond well through a sense of confidence. Relationships are, in the main, positive and purposeful, but in a few classes a minority of pupils (usually boys) lose concentration and force teachers to spend too much time controlling them, to the detriment of others.
109. In the best lessons teachers use rigorous questioning, insisting upon detailed answers and pressing for precise expression. Where lesson preparation is thorough and pupils know that their opinions are respected, they respond with enthusiasm. High-attaining pupils in Year 10, for example, worked with a high degree of commitment and enjoyment at an assignment on the language of advertising. The quality of their performance was a direct result of the teachers' insistence upon detailed analysis of text and correct use of specific vocabulary. Outstanding teaching inspired the bottom set in Year 9 to a very thorough understanding of key issues in *Romeo and Juliet*, and a lively oral response to the play. Skilful use of video material added further to pupils' involvement and enjoyment.
110. The quality of behaviour is good overall. Most pupils sustain concentration well and are well motivated. There is, however, a significant minority of pupils who easily lose concentration and, in the most difficult cases, disturb the learning of others. A handful of classes have a higher than usual percentage of pupils with special educational needs, some of whom have behavioural difficulties. The progress of learning in such groups is occasionally lowered by poor behaviour.
111. The curriculum meets statutory requirements. Some drama is taught within English lessons, but it is not taught as a separate subject. In consequence, pupils do not receive the whole range of skills, knowledge and understanding which form an essential part of drama - including skill in oral presentation noted as a weakness in the school. The allocation of one lesson each week in Years 7 and 8 to work on literacy has helped to improve standards in Key Stage 3. This project continues to be managed energetically and effectively. A new head of department has recently been appointed. All staff share the same vision and purpose, and have effectively maintained motivation and momentum through a recent difficult period.

112. In almost all other subjects across the curriculum the quality of pupils' listening is good overall. The quality of speech, however, is very variable, with poor levels of clarity and audibility noted in geography, history and modern foreign languages in particular. Where discussion in class is planned and encouraged, it is generally satisfactory, but in several subjects it is not practised effectively. The quality of extended speech is nearly always below average. This is a clear and unfortunate weakness across the curriculum.
113. The reading comprehension of the great majority of pupils is adequate in almost all subjects to enable them to understand their textbooks and other printed material. Reading aloud varies considerably in standard and, in a number of departments, is not sufficiently used, resulting in a lack of fluency and range of expression. The quality of pupils' writing is appropriate for the tasks set in all subjects except geography. Note-taking is little used and is generally unsatisfactory. Spelling and punctuation are a little below average overall.

MATHEMATICS

114. Overall attainment in the subject has risen since the last inspection in 1996, and particularly in Key Stage 3. The proportion of pupils achieving the basic or higher levels expected of 14 year olds in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 was in line with the national norms in 1998 and 1999. The school's results were well above average, however, when compared with those of schools with pupils from similar backgrounds. There was little difference between the attainment of boys and girls.
115. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C in GCSE examinations was close to the national average in 1998; boys and girls did equally well. In 1999 there was a significant drop in the performance of boys and the overall GCSE result was well below the national average. Girls' achievement of the higher grades was half as much again as that of boys in 1999, but was slightly below that of boys in the previous two years.
116. The standard of attainment overall is average by the end of Key Stage 3. Pupils of all levels of ability usually make good progress. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 8, for example, have a confident grasp of algebraic processes, can substitute in formulas and solve linear equations. They produce a good standard of work when using and applying their skills in investigations: in exploring "squares on a chess board", for example, their work was well organised, showed logical development and reached a generalisation in algebraic form. By Year 9, standards in the top sets are well above average. Many pupils work at level 7 of the National Curriculum as, for example, when solving simultaneous equations.
117. The majority of pupils develop satisfactory levels of skill in the routines of calculation, algebra and data-handling. Basic geometry is generally good, shapes are readily recognised and named, and perimeter and area are calculated for composite shapes. A considerable proportion of pupils, however, whilst being competent with processes, do not add sufficient depth to their understanding, finding it difficult to recall past learning and apply it to new situations. Many have weaknesses in using directed numbers.
118. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported in Key Stage 3 and their progress is often good. When presenting data, for example, pupils are able to follow routine procedures to draw pie charts with a reasonable degree of accuracy. They steadily build up their mathematical vocabulary through an emphasis on the meaning and spelling of specific words in each lesson.

119. By the end of Key Stage 4 the overall standard of attainment is a little below the national average, and in the current Year 11 less than a fifth of pupils are studying for the higher level of GCSE entry. The most able pupils add considerable depth to their understanding. This is demonstrated in Year 11, for example, by their analysis of quadratics sequences: a top grade piece of coursework investigated how to use a given length of fencing to surround the maximum area and led to a powerful generalisation, using trigonometric functions. In Year 10 the highest attainers understand compound probabilities and use tree diagrams to solve practical problems. Scatter graphs and correlation are well understood and the quadratic formula is used appropriately.
120. Pupils of middle ability in Years 10 and 11 develop further their ability to apply rules and routines in the solution of problems, but they are not always encouraged to think more deeply about why these procedures work. When a class was revising statistics in Year 11, for example, a problem arose about whether to take the mid-point or end-point of grouped data when plotting frequency polygons and cumulative frequency graphs. The teacher gave the answer, but did not explain why; no pupil raised a question, even though it was subsequently evident that many had simply accepted the rules without understanding them.
121. In the lowest sets in Key Stage 4 the pupils follow a graduated assessment course for GCSE; this suits their needs well. The real-life contexts help the pupils to see the relevance of mathematics to their own lives. In Year 10, for instance, pupils designed a bedroom. They were able to calculate costs for furnishing, carpeting, painting and wallpapering, using a range of basic skills and consolidating their learning.
122. The quality of teaching is good overall throughout the school and has improved since the last inspection. It is somewhat better in Key Stage 3 than in Key Stage 4. Teaching was at least good in over half the lessons seen, very good in a quarter of them, and satisfactory in most others. Teaching was unsatisfactory in two lessons, mainly because the tasks or the teaching did not meet the needs of all the pupils.
123. Teachers are well qualified, hard-working and very knowledgeable about their subject. They generally have high expectations of pupils and maintain a challenging pace of work in most lessons. They take great care to foster good relationships and manage behaviour particularly well, often with good humour and well-directed questions that avoid confrontations.
124. Some teachers are particularly skilled in questioning and use it very effectively in discussions to probe pupils' understanding and to assess their learning. In a lesson on shape, for example, a sequence that ran "What is this shape?" / "Why is it called a rhombus?" / "Why isn't it a square?" / "Is it a parallelogram?" triggered a lively discussion and got to the underlying concepts involved. In a few lessons (more so in Key Stage 4) questioning was too restricted and sought only "right" answers. This approach left no space for pupils to explain their thinking and did not give teachers enough feedback to make judgements about whether pupils had understood.
125. Teachers mostly plan their lessons well and identify the learning objectives to be addressed. Sometimes, however, these objectives are not made clear and explicit to the pupils at the start of lessons. In the majority of lessons seen there was a good balance between direct teaching, discussion and written or practical activity. This variety served to generate a good pace to lessons and sustained pupils' interest. Learning is usually reviewed at the end of

lessons and key points are reinforced, although occasionally lessons are allowed to peter out without any summary.

126. The level of work in lessons is generally pitched to meet the needs of the majority of pupils, but there is scope for improving the matching of work to the needs of the very able and the least able in each set. In the unsatisfactory lessons the work set did not effectively meet the needs of the majority of the pupils. In a lesson on angles, for example, all the pupils were given the same work, when it was clear that the more able pupils fully understood and needed something more challenging. On another occasion, when explaining tree diagrams in a lesson on probability, the teacher's pace was too fast for a substantial number of pupils to follow, yet the teacher took answers only from those with hands up and missed seeing the confusion of others until the lesson was over. Although teachers generally plan to have extension material available in lessons, insufficient thought has been given to widening the range of ways used to meet pupils' different speeds and depths of working.
127. When the teaching is good, pupils respond enthusiastically and have positive attitudes to learning. They work cooperatively in pairs and often volunteer to help others who are in difficulty. Behaviour is very good and in nearly all lessons seen most pupils sustained their effort and kept on task throughout. Many pupils, particularly in the middle and lower sets, rely too heavily on their teachers and do not develop sufficient independence in their learning.
128. Regular and rigorous formal testing (including mental tests) takes place and records are kept of percentage scores. Pupils' progress is insufficiently evident to themselves and to their parents, however, because test scores are not linked to National Curriculum levels throughout Key Stage 3. Pupils monitor their own position in class, but are not given opportunities for self-assessment and target-setting to help them to learn more independently. Teachers regularly mark pupils' work, but there are inconsistencies in grading and in marking investigations in Key Stage 3. Resources for learning are adequate at present, but the need to update textbooks is imminent. The department has no whiteboards or overhead projectors.
129. The standard of basic numeracy in the school is generally rising and many pupils have good recall of multiplication tables. A number of imaginative activities are used: "target squares", for example, engage the pupils' interest and enable them to practise their skills in an enjoyable way. Many pupils, however, are weak at estimating and making approximations. There is little evidence of estimation being used routinely by pupils to check their answers – as, for example, when using calculators.
130. The first stage of a numeracy programme has been put in place in Year 7 with the introduction of weekly mental tests, but it is too early to judge its long-term effectiveness. There is evidence that testing is taking precedence over teaching the skills and strategies of mental calculation. The development and use of number across the curriculum are at an early stage. The graphical work used, for instance, in design and technology and in geography is sound at the level of presenting data, but pupils are less confident when required to identify relationships or interpolate from graphs.

SCIENCE

131. The overall attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 is average, an improvement since the last inspection. Pupils' achievement in the 1999 national test in Year 9 at the significant level 5+ was close to the national expectation, although that at level 6+ was below it. This difference largely reflects the spread of attainment on entry to the school in Year 7. Over the period 1997-1999 pupils' attainment has risen gradually towards the national average. When pupils' achievement in the tests is compared with that of pupils from similar schools (as measured by the criterion of free school meals), it is well above average.
132. During the 1997-1999 period boys have performed better than girls in this key stage, although in 1999 the difference was small. The performance of ethnic minority pupils is not significantly different from that of the majority of pupils. Most pupils have a sound knowledge of the three branches of the subject and show skill in handling scientific apparatus. As pupils move from Year 7 to Year 9, standards improve. In view of pupils' overall level of attainment on entry to the school, this is a considerable achievement.
133. At the end of Key Stage 4 pupils' overall attainment is below average. In the 1999 GCSE double science examination nearly a third of the pupils entered gained a grade in the range A*-C. This proportion was lower than that in 1998 and well below the national average, and can be accounted for partly by the low prior attainment of the cohort. In the period 1997-1999 there has been no discernible trend in performance, although boys have performed slightly better than girls. The overall GCSE result in science compares favourably with those in most other subjects in this school and is average for schools with a similar intake.
134. Most pupils recall important terms in all three branches of the subject. They begin to understand such topics as the structure of matter, the importance of food in the digestive system and facts about chemical substances. Some pupils find it difficult, however, to build a coherent picture of underlying chemical principles, and their recollection of past work is often faulty, sometimes owing to poor attendance or low motivation. Throughout the school pupils use mathematics appropriately to calculate and illustrate the results of experiments such as the speed and acceleration of objects and the rates of chemical reaction.
135. Pupils generally enjoy their lessons and get closely involved in their experiments. In Key Stage 3, pupils are enthusiastic, but at the same time some are easily distracted and disturb other pupils' concentration. At this stage relationships are good and pupils cooperate sensibly in practical lessons. Most pupils behave well, but there is a small minority who find the self-discipline required for investigations difficult to sustain and as a result resort to immature behaviour; this is carefully handled by the teachers.
136. In Key Stage 4 most pupils behave well and relations are generally good. Some pupils (mainly boys) find concentration difficult to maintain and become disengaged from their lessons. Most, however, maintain interest and rise to the intellectual challenge of learning new ideas. They relate well to one another and discuss the outcome of their experiments sensibly.
137. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall in Key Stage 3 and often good in Key Stage 4. Teachers know their subject well, and in Key Stage 4 in particular relay this knowledge to pupils with confidence and enthusiasm. All lessons are well planned, but their clear

learning goals are seldom shared with the pupils. Teachers use a wide range of approaches, including demonstrations, practical work and videos, to stimulate interest. They are well supported by the technical staff and the use of suitable equipment. At the start of lessons pupils are usually questioned about what they have learned previously, but rarely in sufficient depth to probe true understanding.

138. Teachers generally manage pupils well and insist on high standards of behaviour, although some teachers accept too much irrelevant chatting. Homework is set and marked appropriately, but seldom used as a basis for further study. In most lessons pupils' depth of learning is determined by their own commitment to work.
139. The department is satisfactorily managed. It has clearly stated policies and a strong ethos towards hard work, aimed at enabling each pupil to achieve success. The departmental development plan has realistic targets to raise pupils' standards of performance. Schemes of work are well presented and meet statutory requirements. They do not, however, show objectives for lessons and topics in sufficient detail, and too little reference is made to the use of IT. The assessment of pupils' performance is undertaken conscientiously and now reflects the requirements of the national tests. The results of these assessments are not used to monitor pupils' performance, so that pupils' progress is difficult to ascertain accurately.
140. There are sufficient staff to teach the timetabled programme, although in some cases classes are unnecessarily split. The one technician finds it difficult to service five laboratories on two sites. These laboratories are in good condition and during the inspection were attractive with displays of pupils' work. Resources are generally good. Computers are now readily available in each laboratory, but there is a shortage of suitable software and ancillary equipment.

ART

141. Over the period 1997-1999, GCSE results were below average for the proportion of pupils gaining grades in the ranges of A*-C or A*-G, with the exception of well above average grades at A*-C in 1999. Girls achieve more of the higher grades than boys. In 1999 pupils' overall performance in this subject was significantly above what they achieved in many of their other school subjects. By the end of Key Stage 3 the majority of pupils achieve the standard expected nationally.
142. At the end of Key Stage 3 pupils' attainment is average overall. Their drawing skills are often good. They apply their knowledge and understanding of a range of artists' styles to their own work in a way typical of their age. In Year 9 the majority of pupils are confident when analysing shape and rendering form in line, tone and colour – as, for example, in their drawing of cross-sections of cabbages and onions. With their teachers' support, many discuss and judge homework assignments against outlined objectives. The low use of IT puts some restriction on pupils' progress in Years 7-9.
143. By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils' attainment is usually above average. Pupils use a wide range of materials creatively, within the framework set by the teacher. Higher attainers in particular draw and paint well in Year 11, and their individuality shines through in their work with clay or textiles. Their personal studies of artists (such as Renoir) are presented carefully and with a target audience in mind. Homework is particularly effective for talented pupils, because it allows them opportunities to follow their own lines of enquiry.

The handmade paper books produced by one pupil in Year 11 demonstrate high levels of resourcefulness and creativity.

144. Throughout the school pupils learn to share ideas and to develop a critical, but constructive, approach to their own and other pupils' work. This style of teaching and learning leads pupils to a thorough understanding of the processes they have covered. A significant number of pupils in Year 7 make poor progress, because they do not listen carefully and have low levels of concentration. These pupils take the teacher's attention away from other pupils and slow the learning of the whole class. The quality of learning is satisfactory in Year 8 and often very good by Year 9, where pupils are more able to sustain concentration and work quietly and reflectively.
145. The minority who choose to continue to study the subject in Key Stage 4 make good progress. This is well illustrated in Year 10 by the reactions and high level of concentration of pupils on the design possibilities of tools such as scissors or keys, and by their enlargement and repetition of images to create new and interesting compositions. The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is generally good, as exemplified by opportunities to create a mosaic to commemorate the millennium. The lack of a visit to an art gallery is a weakness in the department's provision at Key Stage 4.
146. Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are generally good. Some pupils in Years 7 and 8, however, have not learned to value what they are asked to do and do not sustain the concentration needed for the work set. Pupils in Years 9-11 enjoy the subject, usually behave responsibly and generally form constructive relationships with their teachers.
147. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall in Key Stage 3, at least good in Key Stage 4 and good overall. The best teaching is in Years 9-11. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are able to motivate the majority of their pupils because of their obvious appreciation of the subject. They are generous with their time and regularly offer extracurricular activities, particularly for pupils in Years 10-11. Homework is appropriate, set frequently and regularly marked. Pupils are closely involved in the assessment of work, in order to help them to understand their own strengths and weaknesses as well as where they might improve.
148. Weaknesses in teaching in Year 7 arise from a combination of factors – such as inappropriate timetabling arrangements resulting in practical activities for two hours, as well as the poor management of disruptive pupils in an open-plan area. In these cases the teachers' focus on disruptive pupils deprives potential high attainers of the attention they need.
149. The department is well led. Departmental documentation is very good and new teachers are well supported. Links with primary schools are weak. Statutory requirements are met, although IT is little used within the subject: teachers lack confidence in using IT and have not undergone appropriate training for it. The school has made good progress in remedying the weaknesses identified in the last inspection, except for the use of IT. A shortage of art books and the lack of ready access to a television and video-recorder make it difficult to teach the historical element of the art curriculum effectively. The lack of sketchbooks for use in lessons limits pupils' problem-solving activities and restricts opportunities for learning and assessment.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

150. At the end of Key Stage 3 the overall attainment of pupils is average. Standards have risen since the last inspection in 1996 as a result of improved teaching. By the end of Key Stage 4, with the exception of graphic products at GCSE, however, there has been insufficient progress in the subject: the overall standard is well below average, and not high enough. This is owing to a combination of staffing constraints, weaknesses in teachers' planning for coursework, teachers' uncertainties about course requirements and a below average amount of time for the subject. Discussion during the inspection established that National Curriculum requirements were not being met in Key Stage 4, because half the pupils follow a non-National Curriculum syllabus in home economics instead of design and technology. Remedial action has begun.
151. Teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1998 and 1999 suggested that pupils' overall attainment was in line with the national average, but that many more girls than boys achieved a high level. By the end of Year 9, pupils have a broad experience of designing and construction in food, textiles, graphics, resistant materials and control, and know how to work safely. They are familiar with the use of the Internet to search for information, as when creating individual designs for a clock. Higher-attaining pupils explain their ideas for designs fluently, using detailed annotated sketches. Pupils have some experience of computer-aided design, but no experience in computer-aided manufacture, because the department does not have the necessary resources.
152. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is well below average overall, although in a minority of cases (mainly involving girls) it is higher. The GCSE results in 1999 in resistant materials, taken mostly by boys, were poor and well below average. In contrast, results in graphic products, taken by a similar number of boys and girls, were close to the national average. Pupils' overall average points score in 1999 was well below the national average. Boys' results have lagged well behind those of girls in recent years.
153. Most pupils have good standards of graphical skills and practical competence by the end of Key Stage 4, as when modelling their individual designs for shop displays. Many pupils are poor, however, at studying independently and tend to rely too heavily on their teacher for answers and guidance, so contributing to their underachievement. The poor attendance and negative attitudes of a small number of pupils (mainly boys) impede their learning and lower the standards they achieve in resistant materials. Pupils with special educational needs attain appropriate standards.
154. On entry in Year 7, pupils' overall attainment is below average. In Key Stage 3, the department concentrates on securing a consistent approach to learning by planning very specific activities. This practice ensures that pupils make satisfactory progress in gaining subject knowledge and skills – as, for example, in understanding how to undertake designs and how to use tools and construction processes safely and with reasonable accuracy. Some tasks in food and textiles, however, throughout the school are too narrow and limit what pupils can learn. Pupils have good opportunities to take measurements and are encouraged to spell and use technical terms correctly, so extending their vocabulary and oral confidence.
155. In Key Stage 4, higher-attaining pupils work with greater independence and learn to solve more complex design problems successfully, as when they research and model their ideas for the design of products. Pupils improve the presentation of their work by using IT

appropriately. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, because work is carefully matched to targets in their individual education plans.

156. Pupils' attitudes to learning are generally good throughout the school. Pupils behave well, listen carefully to teachers' instructions and usually settle quickly to work. They respond well to teachers' questions. Many throughout the school, however, tend to rely heavily on their teachers for direction, lack initiative and show little sense of urgency in lessons. Pupils use tools confidently, work sensibly in small groups or alone, and share workspaces considerately. The clear and well-planned activities in Key Stage 3 usually motivate pupils and sustain their interest. In Key Stage 4, however, some pupils (mainly boys) lack clear purpose, easily lose motivation in long GCSE projects, particularly in resistant materials, and struggle to complete work on time. Poor attendance and negative attitudes to learning hamper the progress of a minority of pupils.
157. Teachers have a thorough understanding of their specialist subjects and manage pupils well. Although lessons are generally reasonably planned and have clear targets, work is inadequately matched to national requirements for the subject. Teachers' uncertainty about the levels at which pupils should be working, for example, results in some underachievement by more able pupils. Teachers work hard and use resources effectively in most lessons, but some aspects of required teaching in computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture (CAD/CAM) are omitted because of inadequate resources. Assessment is well used in graphics and control to ensure suitable progression in pupils' learning. Links with the local community and industry are insufficiently used to enhance teaching or pupils' learning.
158. The department has responded satisfactorily, in part, to the last inspection. It has, for example, improved teaching schemes in Key Stage 3 and introduced new GCSE courses (which include systems and control) to cater for more able pupils. There is, however, no overall scheme of work for Key Stage 4 to help teachers to secure suitable progression in the subject and statutory requirements are not met. The department has made some progress since the last inspection, but much more remains to be done. There is a shortage of accommodation for food studies and insufficient resources for control (CAD/CAM). Technical support is good in resistant materials, but insufficient for food.

GEOGRAPHY

159. Pupils' overall level of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is below the national expectation. When teachers assessed pupils' work in 1999 at the end of Key Stage 3, results indicated that pupils achieved levels above the national average. During the inspection, however, pupils were working at levels below the national expectation in two-thirds of lessons.
160. At the end of Key Stage 4 pupils' overall level of attainment is below (and for many pupils well below) the national norm. Results in GCSE were well below the national average in 1999 and show a decline since 1997. Pupils' performance at GCSE was well below what they achieved in many other subjects in the school. There has been no improvement since the last inspection. The department reviews these results annually, but the strategy implemented is inadequate to raise standards.

161. Pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of the environment and the way of life of the people in places they have studied in depth. The higher-attaining pupils have a satisfactory understanding of the geographical features of cities and how landscape features such as cliffs are formed. Pupils have a poor knowledge of where places are and have difficulty in finding them in an atlas. Their recall of knowledge is often unsatisfactory. Their understanding lacks depth and the majority have difficulty in explaining the links between people and the environment in which they live. Pupils are able to define geographical terms correctly, but rarely use them in oral or written work. At Key Stage 4 pupils have unsatisfactory understanding of geographical issues such as those between the requirements of tourism, farming and the environment in National Parks.
162. Pupils have satisfactory skills in collecting and selecting information from resource materials. In Key Stage 4 they competently collect and analyse information, in order to produce an extended study of the changes which have taken place in the types of housing and shops in the local town. These skills are not, however, developed to a high enough standard. Written work is usually brief, contains spelling errors, and at Key Stage 4 lacks the detail required. Pupils' numerical skills are satisfactory. They draw a narrow range of graphs accurately, but find difficulty in making comparisons between graphs or in describing the trends shown.
163. The quality of teaching in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory overall, but includes some good and very good teaching. Teachers are generally well prepared and organised, enabling lessons to start briskly and promptly. They have a good knowledge of the subject, provide clear explanations and ensure that all pupils know what to do. Lively questioning and discussion involving all pupils gain their interest. Relationships between teachers and pupils are generally good, creating a working atmosphere which allows pupils to work effectively.
164. Lessons are planned with a suitable variety of work and generally maintained at a good pace, enabling pupils to make good progress. In one lesson in Year 7, for instance, pupils made good progress studying the way of life of people in Kenya. The lesson started briskly and a lively discussion of the differences between the life of people in Kenya and the United Kingdom quickly gained pupils' interest. They competently collected additional information in a short, silent reading exercise and completed a brief exercise which was well matched to their needs and reinforced their understanding. They used the knowledge they had gained to plan a tourist guide to the way of life of people in Kenya. A swift review effectively concluded the lesson. In a minority of lessons the quality of the work set is poor, relying exclusively on comprehension exercises and copying. Marking is up to date, incorporates positive comments and has an appropriate focus on accuracy and spelling.
165. In Key Stage 4 teaching is satisfactory overall, but some teaching is unsatisfactory. Lessons are generally well sequenced and planned with clear objectives. Teachers' explanations provide accurate information, but often rely heavily on textbooks and fail to inspire and enthuse pupils. Questioning lacks challenge and often brief answers are too readily accepted. Exercises often rely heavily on transferring information from a textbook to answer questions and do not encourage pupils to use their knowledge. Expectations are low. This results in underachievement, particularly by higher-attaining pupils, because they are not challenged to analyse and explain patterns in new areas of study. A majority of pupils maintain their focus throughout, but a significant minority lose concentration (particularly towards the end of lessons) and the pace of the progress being made slows considerably.

166. Pupils learn satisfactorily overall. They learn better at Key Stage 3 than at Key Stage 4, where the learning of many pupils has unsatisfactory features. They make good gains in acquiring knowledge and understanding when lessons are planned with a variety of activities, proceed at a good pace and expect pupils to produce their best work. The relevant introduction of reading at Key Stage 3 and a focus on geographical terms, with appropriate exercises, are used effectively by pupils to extend their vocabulary and consolidate their skills in literacy. At Key Stage 3 good support, attention to individual needs and skilful management enable pupils with special educational needs to maintain their interest and pace of working, with the result that they make good progress.
167. In Key Stage 4 work is rarely matched to individuals' needs and progress generally is slow. Pupils do not use their learning skills effectively at this key stage. Much of the work does not allow pupils to use a full range of learning skills; oral work is not encouraged, written exercises are lengthy, and pupils with a short span of attention lose focus.
168. Pupils generally have a positive attitude to the subject, especially in Key Stage 3. The majority are well behaved, work hard and find the work interesting. They take care to present their work neatly. Many take pride in the presentation of their work and maintain their books in good order. A minority of pupils, particularly in Key Stage 4, have little real enthusiasm for the subject, take time to settle down to work and are a distraction to others.
169. The scheme of work in Key Stage 3 is sound and meets national requirements. There is no teaching scheme in Key Stage 4. The small amount of fieldwork in Key Stage 3 does not provide a coherent programme to develop further pupils' understanding of geographical enquiry and provide support for GCSE coursework. There is no effective programme for the use of IT in the subject. The system of assessment is satisfactory and attainment is recorded effectively, but it is not used systematically to support individual pupils or to review the curriculum.
170. Leadership of the department is unsatisfactory. There is no clear educational direction for the subject and no rigorously implemented and systematic strategies to lift attainment further in Key Stage 3, or to raise the poor standards of achievement and to eliminate the underachievement of higher-attaining pupils in Key Stage 4. Monitoring is being developed, but planning for the future is not rigorous enough. Pupils' attainment, aspects of teaching and curricular organisation have not improved since the last inspection.
171. The subject is taught mainly by two members of staff, one of whom teaches mainly in Key Stage 3. They are experienced and well qualified. The quality and quantity of resources are satisfactory overall, but there is a shortage of atlases and many of the textbooks in Key Stage 3 are in poor condition. There is one appropriately equipped room, which is used to teach half the classes taking the subject. Other pupils are taught in rooms in other parts of the school; one of these also serves as a dining room. This arrangement makes departmental identity difficult to achieve and results in an inefficient use of textbooks.

HISTORY

172. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils' overall attainment is in line with that expected nationally. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls overall, but more girls than boys reach the very top levels. Higher-attaining pupils reach an appropriately high level of achievement. Teachers assessed their pupils as being above the national average in

1998 and 1999. The overall standard of work seen during the inspection, however, both at the beginning and end of the key stage, was in line with that seen nationally.

173. Pupils in Key Stage 3 grasp and explain historical causes and effects and use an appropriate range of sources competently for information and to make deductions about the past. They identify successfully similarities and differences between the past and the present, as, for example, in a lesson about medieval houses and lifestyles. Higher attainers use sources effectively to describe the past and many produce extended writing of good quality.
174. Pupils taking the GCSE course in Key Stage 4 reach an overall standard which is below the national average. The percentage of pupils who achieved grades A*-C in 1999 was below the national average. The proportion who achieved this level has, however, risen since 1997 and was higher in 1999 than at the time of the last inspection. The attainment of boys has risen steadily over the past three years and in 1999 was close to the boys' national average. The attainment of girls has fluctuated considerably between 1997 and 1999. In 1997 and 1999 it was well below the girls' national average, but in 1998 it was only just below the average. The percentage of those who gained A or A* grades has been well below the national average for the last three years.
175. The overall standard of work seen in Key Stage 4 during the inspection was below the national average, although a minority showed the potential to reach the highest grades. A significant minority were working at a standard below the national average. Pupils taking the GCSE course see and explain the causes of past events in a satisfactory way. In a lesson about the Great Depression in the USA, for example, most pupils could identify some causes of the depression and a small number could explain successfully how the different causes might be linked. Pupils use sources effectively to extract information and make deductions about the past. In a lesson on the impact of World War Two on life in Britain, for example, pupils used the evidence of a video, which included original government information films, to describe and explain vividly the effects of war.
176. The quality of teaching is very good overall, and never less than good - an improvement since the last inspection. The very best teaching was seen at Key Stage 3. Throughout the school the aims of lessons are made very clear to pupils. Teachers expect all pupils to work hard and behave well. As a result, virtually all pupils at all levels of ability respond well and try hard to achieve their best. Teachers manage their pupils effectively, deal calmly and quietly with any behavioural problems which arise, and use praise and encouragement appropriately to motivate pupils. The behaviour of almost all pupils is good, and in many lessons is very good. Relationships are friendly and positive. There is a pleasant atmosphere in lessons.
177. Teachers communicate an enthusiasm for the subject and conduct lessons at a brisk pace. The good working environment ensures that all pupils who wish to learn may do so. The support staff who are available in some lessons are used to good effect to help and motivate pupils with difficulties and to keep them focused on their work. As a result, pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in acquiring knowledge and understanding about the past - an improvement since the last inspection. Marking is regular and teachers' comments in many books set suitable targets for improvement for pupils. Although teachers work hard to improve pupils' written work in most lessons, they too infrequently encourage pupils to speak, other than by giving short answers to questions posed by the teacher.

178. The work set for pupils at Key Stage 3 is suitably matched to their abilities. In mixed-ability classes this is often through the use of a range of tasks for different groups of pupils within the class. As a result, most pupils make progress in gaining some knowledge and understanding about the past and learn to use different kinds of sources as evidence. For example, pupils in a lower-attaining set and in a higher-attaining set used the same video about the life of Martin Luther King. The way in which the video was used by the teachers and the structure of the guidelines given for note-taking, however, placed greater demands on higher-attaining pupils to interpret the evidence for themselves.
179. Pupils taking the GCSE course are given good opportunities to practise examination questions and to learn from their mistakes. In a lesson in Year 11, for instance, pupils were asked to assess and mark samples of work done by other members of the class, made effective use of the examination board's mark scheme to comment critically on the work, and clearly gained good understanding from the experience. Pupils' very mature approach to criticising and being criticised was particularly noticeable and contributed much to the success of the lesson.
180. Statutory requirements are met at Key Stage 3. The leadership and management of the department are very good. There has been a very positive response to the weaknesses identified at the last inspection, so that the quality of the teaching, monitoring the work of the department and planning are now much better than at the time of the last inspection. All the lessons observed had a strong ethos for learning, and those in Key Stage 4 a clear commitment to improving attainment in public examinations.
181. The department has good resources and uses them well. There is, however, only limited availability of IT hardware. Access to centrally provided IT, especially for use of the Internet, is not always easy at times convenient to the department, with the result that pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to use IT for historical research.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

182. The level of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with the national expectation, although mainly in handling information and data. Teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1998 and 1999 indicated that the majority of pupils attained at least level 5, the basic standard expected for their age. Pupils' knowledge and skills in IT were broadly in line with their level of attainment in other subjects in Year 9. Girls' results were above those for boys and by an increased margin in 1999 over 1998.
183. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils are proficient in word processing, desktop publishing, and in using databases and spreadsheets. They use computers competently for data-logging and graphical interpretation, and are familiar with the Internet for research. Higher-attaining pupils manipulate text and data with confidence and know how to refine their work. Pupils have little experience, however, in computer-aided design or computer-aided manufacture (CAD/CAM) because of insufficient resources.
184. The proportion of pupils gaining grades in the range A*-C in the 1999 GCSE examination in information studies, taken by a small number of pupils, was below the national average. It has, however, been above, or close to, average in recent years. In Key Stage 4 about half the pupils have no timetabled lessons in IT or sufficient opportunities to use it in other subjects. In consequence, pupils' knowledge and skills in the subject are often not enhanced

or even sustained from Key Stage 3, with the result that the overall standard of attainment is generally below average by the end of Year 11. Higher-attaining pupils have the confidence to work independently (sometimes at home) to maintain their skills, mainly in information handling. Pupils completing the GNVQ course achieve the key skills in IT expected at Foundation level. Provision and achievement in Key Stage 4 are, however, unsatisfactory overall.

185. The overall standard of attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 has shown an improving trend since the last inspection and is now in line with that achieved nationally. At the end of Key Stage 4 attainment is not as good as reported at the last inspection. This is mainly because constraints in staffing have limited teaching in the subject and because IT is insufficiently used across all subjects. The recent appointment of a well-qualified specialist has already had a significant impact on the quality of pupils' work and on the accurate assessment of their progress.
186. Pupils' learning is good in the timetabled lessons of the subject at both key stages. In Key Stage 3, pupils learn to work reliably on their own, using guidance materials of high quality which are well matched to their ability and which build upon their knowledge and skills in the subject. Through a range of well-structured tasks, pupils are encouraged to learn thoroughly the features of software packages designed to handle writing, add graphics, record and sort information, and calculate data. These also help to improve pupils' skills in language and number, as when creating a spreadsheet to help a shop keep track of its computer games in stock. The good level of support given in lessons to pupils, especially to those with special educational needs, ensures that they make good progress in the subject.
187. Pupils work well in all years. Most arrive punctually, ready to work, and show high levels of commitment. In Key Stage 3 pupils are especially keen on using computers and interested in their work. They listen carefully and concentrate with great excitement to acquire new skills, as when using a digital camera to take photographs to illustrate their stories for a class magazine. Less confident pupils, anxious about mastering new work, quickly settle with the good individual support given in class and gain confidence through using the detailed guidance materials matched to their abilities.
188. In Key Stage 4, pupils work confidently, reflecting the good teaching they have received in Key Stage 3. They are willing to investigate the capabilities of software to solve problems, to learn from their mistakes and to produce high standards of work. High-attaining pupils explore, refine and develop their ideas independently - as when searching their database to look for appropriate data of increased complexity for a company. Frequent discussion enables pupils to consolidate their learning. In all years pupils are generally cooperative, helping one another and using equipment responsibly.
189. Teaching is good in the timetabled lessons throughout the school, but there is insufficient teaching of the subject overall in Key Stage 4. Lessons are thoroughly planned in a well-structured series of interesting activities that develop pupils' competence in IT and provide a model of good practice. Teachers explain concepts clearly. They provide effective demonstrations of new work to enable pupils to work confidently and to correct their mistakes – as, for example, demonstrating how to produce a mail-merged letter for a company. Work is suitably challenging, teachers expect pupils to use terminology correctly, and pupils respond with high levels of work. Teachers' detailed planning takes account of pupils' different needs. As a result, all pupils readily and easily begin work and

work effectively. Assessment is well used: teachers' detailed, written comments set high standards and help pupils to improve their work.

190. Although most teachers are confident in using computers, many have insufficient training to use IT in their subjects to its full potential. The teaching of IT is good in the special educational needs department; satisfactory in mathematics, science, design and technology and modern foreign languages; but unsatisfactory in other subjects, because resources are very limited in many departments and access to the central IT suite is not always easy at the required time.
191. The school has made steady progress in improving its provision of IT since the last inspection and is meeting its targets for the current academic year. Improvements include revised schemes of work at Key Stages 3 and 4 and a comprehensive system of assessment (which includes literacy and numeracy). Statutory requirements are not met in Key Stage 4, because not all pupils follow the national programmes of study for IT from 14-16 in taught courses or have sufficient opportunities to cover them in many other subjects. Technical support is of good quality and used efficiently, but is insufficient for the growing demand in the school.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

192. Teachers' assessments at Key Stage 3 in both 1998 and 1999 indicated an overall level of attainment in line with the national average. Pupils currently near the end of Key Stage 3 achieve an overall standard just below the national average. They are better at reading and writing than at speaking and listening. They show good understanding when reading passages of French, German or Spanish. Many pupils produce appropriate writing on topics they have just studied, when the writing is carefully guided, although few write passages independently. In most classes pupils have too few opportunities to hear or speak a foreign language and, in consequence, standards of both speaking and listening are low.
193. In 1999 the percentage of pupils attaining grades A*-C in GCSE examinations in both French and German was well below the national average. In 1998 it was below average in German and well below average in French. The percentage gaining a grade in the range A*-G was below the national average in both years in French, and the proportion gaining the highest grades (A* or A) was well below the national average in both languages. In both years pupils did significantly less well in both languages than in most of their other subjects in the school.
194. At the end of Key Stage 4, the overall standard is currently well below average overall. Higher-attaining pupils show sound understanding of written language from a variety of sources and lower attainers read reasonably well. Higher attainers convey messages well and use a range of appropriate language in their writing, although their work often lacks accuracy. Lower-attaining pupils write little at length: their work consists mostly of copying and gap-filling exercises. The standard of both speaking and listening is well below average, because pupils get too few opportunities to practise these skills. The overall standard could be higher.
195. Pupils' attitudes to their work are satisfactory overall, but they vary from very good to poor. In the best lessons pupils complete the work they are asked to do at a reasonable pace, but in too many lessons the pace of learning is slow, pupils' concentration is poor and they show little interest in their work. Overall, behaviour is good, but in a small number of classes a small minority of pupils disrupt the work of others.

196. The quality of teaching ranges from excellent to unsatisfactory, but is predominantly satisfactory at both key stages. It was good (or better) in around a third of the lessons seen and was occasionally outstanding. In one lesson in every six, however, teaching was unsatisfactory. In the best lessons teachers plan well and expect pupils both to complete much work and to think very carefully. In a French lesson in Year 9, for example, the challenging but appropriate pace and the teacher's clear explanations enabled pupils to make excellent progress in talking about their daily routines.
197. In most lessons teachers soon recognise when pupils have difficulties and adapt the work accordingly. Teachers make effective use of homework to develop the work done in class or to prepare for subsequent lessons. In some lessons the pace is appropriate, but in too many lessons pupils are allowed to work too slowly and are given little opportunity to produce language independently. In a French class in Year 10, for instance, learning was unsatisfactory, because the teacher allowed many pupils to do very little work, when they had difficulty understanding the language, instead of encouraging them to use dictionaries to find meanings for themselves. All the teachers are competent linguists, but in most lessons unnecessarily use English for large parts of the lesson, when use of the foreign language would be more appropriate.
198. The management of the department is very good and the head of department provides strong leadership. A number of changes have been introduced to improve standards. Standards have improved considerably in Key Stage 3 in the last three years and pupils are now working near to the national average. This improvement has not reached Key Stage 4. New approaches to planning and assessment have been introduced and the scheme of work has been fully revised, providing greater continuity in pupils' learning. There is now much greater use of IT in the subject than there was at the last inspection.
199. Resources for learning are satisfactory. The accommodation, however, is unsatisfactory: rooms are too small for the number of pupils, so inhibiting the use of a range of teaching approaches. The department meets the statutory requirement to teach the National Curriculum programmes of study.

MUSIC

200. By the end of Key Stage 3 the attainment of pupils is in line with the national average. Pupils perform and compose to a reasonable standard. Composition at this stage is a little stronger than performance. Pupils rehearse and record group compositions in the blues idiom. Through practical activities they learn how melody and harmony fit together and how these combine with rhythms which are produced on the drum machine. In Year 9 there is a strong emphasis on the history of popular music. Pupils listen to, describe and make simple analyses of examples from early blues to present-day popular styles. These studies are usually enhanced by the pupils' own compositions and performances based on the examples they hear. Some topics, such as songs from musicals, continue through Years 7-9.
201. Most pupils learn to play simple diatonic phrases and short melodies on the keyboard from notation, although this often has the letter names added. In class lessons pupils do not sing well in tune, in spite of regular practice. When pupils' capabilities are taken into account, the majority achieve reasonable standards in the required National Curriculum areas by the end of Key Stage 3.

202. The quality of learning in Years 7-9 is good overall. Pupils acquire knowledge and understanding through practical activity, by listening to exemplars of music and by writing about them. In Year 7, for example, they learn successfully how to read simple melodic lines and chord sequences, particularly through a well-structured course on electronic keyboards. In most lessons pupils listen well to instructions and work purposefully at a good pace. Most pupils need, and receive, firm guidance and encouragement from the teacher. A minority develop the ability to work independently.
203. Pupils generally enter the school in Year 7 with a level of attainment that is below average. Only a very small number have learnt to play an individual instrument in their primary years. Well-constructed schemes of work and consistent teaching enable the majority to make steady progress through the key stage. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress as a result of modified tasks and, where appropriate, additional classroom support.
204. In most lessons pupils' attitudes to the subject are good. The majority show a sincere interest in their work. They listen well and respond readily to their teacher's questions and instructions. Many pupils are inclined to give brief and imprecise answers. In the best lessons they are challenged to clarify and extend their answers. Most pupils behave well in lessons and show respect for one another and for equipment. Written work is done carefully and in some cases presented very well. Pupils work regularly in pairs and groups. The majority produce good work through cooperation with their peers.
205. Teaching is good overall. It is based on the teacher's good subject knowledge and expertise. Good skills in performing, accompaniment and directing result in pupils moving on at a fair pace. Discipline is good and time is used well. The essential skills of keyboard playing and control, notation and writing are taught particularly well. There is a good emphasis on teaching the meanings and use of the technical language of music. Skills in the use of computerised elements of the keyboard are taught in a structured way.
206. Pupils are encouraged to work at a good pace and their pieces are often played to the rest of the class for evaluation. The assessment of work is very regular, accurate and thorough. Pupils are told exactly what they need to do to achieve higher standards of playing and composing. Different levels of work are devised, for example, when pupils learn to play keyboards. This approach ensures that pupils work at a level at which they can succeed, whilst facing challenges to achieve higher levels.
207. The department consists of one class teacher, supported by three part-time instrumental teachers, and is soundly managed. Schemes of work are satisfactory and lessons are always well planned. Pupils with special educational needs have full access to the music curriculum. Approximately 25 pupils receive instrumental lessons on brass, woodwind and string instruments. Thirty-five pupils belong to the orchestra and choir which meet at lunchtimes and after school.
208. The overall standard of attainment and pupils' achievements at Key Stage 3 have improved since the last inspection. The number of candidates for GCSE has fallen over the past five years. There were insufficient candidates opting for the subject after Year 9 to form a viable course in the current academic year.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

209. Pupils' overall attainment at the end of both key stages is sound and is broadly in line with what is expected nationally. At the end of Key Stage 3 most pupils have a reasonable grasp of the basic skills of a range of games. They can catch, pass or stop a ball to the expected standard. In rugby football lessons boys are quick to learn the techniques and skills of rucking and mauling. Boys and girls have a sound knowledge and understanding of line-out play and many use them effectively in unopposed situations. In gymnastics lessons pupils plan their sequences well and display reasonable variety in their work. The majority of girls perform with average fluency, control and precision. The work of many boys, however, lacks these qualities.
210. During Key Stage 4, pupils develop their skills and tactical awareness in a range of games and the vast majority attain average standards in at least two activities, including a major competitive game. Many girls choose to follow a course in fitness training. They perform with a sound technique and plan and incorporate their own step-patterns into sequences choreographed by their teachers. Since 1998 a small number of pupils have been entered for the GCSE examination. Although all pupils achieved a pass grade in 1998, only 35 per cent achieved a higher (A*-C) grade. In 1999 this proportion was slightly lower. Most of the pupils currently taking the course attain at least average standards in practical work. Many pupils, especially a majority of pupils in Year 10, attain below average standards. The lack of regular, structured homework is a weakness.
211. In both key stages the majority of pupils, including those with special educational needs, make mainly good progress. The vast majority of pupils respond well to the good teaching that encourages them to work hard and to make the best use of time to practise and improve their skills. The best progress is made in games lessons in Years 7 and 8, where nearly all pupils work with much enthusiasm and sustained commitment. They learn new skills that are designed to provide them with appropriately strong challenges. Progress is less good in gymnastics, where pupils are not always challenged to perform to the standard of which they are capable. The high participation rate in practical lessons is indicative of the pupils' enthusiasm for the subject. They work well with partners and in groups and try hard to help one another to learn and improve. In competitive situations pupils play fairly and with due respect for rules. Pupils' behaviour and standard of dress are good.
212. The quality of teaching is good in the majority of lessons. It is never less than satisfactory and the poor teaching reported in 1996 is not now evident. The number of lessons taught by non-specialists was identified as a weakness in the last inspection report. The school has taken effective steps to improve the situation. Now only one or two lessons are taught by non-specialists with insufficient subject knowledge. Appropriate steps are being taken to equip these teachers to make an effective contribution. The specialist teachers have a secure knowledge of their subject and in most lessons expect much from the pupils. In a few lessons teachers spend too long explaining to pupils what they have to do, instead of a short explanation and quick demonstration. In games lessons teachers use appropriate practices that challenge pupils of all levels of attainment. Pupils' written work is marked regularly, but not always with sufficient detail to help pupils to improve.
213. The requirements of the National Curriculum are met. The balance between the areas of study in Key Stage 3 is reasonable. The time for traditional summer games is minimal, however, and does not enable pupils to attain good standards of performance. The programme for pupils in Key Stage 4 is broad and affords pupils a reasonable choice of

activity. Although pupils currently follow their chosen activities in sufficient depth, the administrative arrangements in place do not guarantee this. Pupils' practical work is assessed accurately and satisfactory records are maintained. Insufficient use is made of this information, however, to identify where curricular change is needed.

214. The last inspection report indicated deficiencies in indoor accommodation. The position remains much the same, although good arrangements have been made to reduce the number of pupils using the changing rooms to an acceptable level. The changing rooms are in poor decorative order, with flaking paint and loose plaster. The lack of a second specialist indoor teaching space inhibits pupils' attainment and progress. The "all-weather" outdoor surface is still in poor condition and presents a desolate sight. It is unusable, except for some throwing events in athletics. The school has only the equivalent of one outdoor grass pitch on site. The hard-play area is used well for a range of activities. The two pitches nearby were described as "excellent" in the last report. At the time of this inspection they were water-logged.
215. The management of the subject is good. Monitoring of the department's work by senior management is effective. About a third of the pupils are regularly involved in one or more of a good range of extracurricular sporting activities. Five teachers give up much time to coach, supervise and officiate at these activities that afford pupils many good opportunities to enhance their skills and their personal and social development.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

216. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils' level of attainment ranges from well above to below average, but is average overall. Pupils in Year 7 are very well motivated, enthusiastically finding answers to questions about specialist vocabulary, for example, from definitions given them on cards. They present their work neatly and put hard effort into written tasks, achieving good standards on such topics as reincarnation. Because of very good teaching over half the pupils in one class of mixed abilities reached an above average standard. In another similar class the quality of pupils' questioning was above average, with pupils keen to understand and have their questions answered.
217. Pupils in Year 8 of average or higher attainment achieve standards appropriate to their capabilities. For example, a class containing pupils of lower to average attainment reached an average standard in producing and performing their own play about the Wedding at Cana. A higher-attaining class produced very well presented and accurate written work from their study of miracles and the raising of Lazarus. Many of those of lower attainment, however, have a limited grasp of the subject, mainly because of very poor attitudes and behaviour.
218. In Year 9 the majority of pupils write at length and quickly during lessons, are keen to achieve, and reach average standards overall. A higher-attaining group reached well above average standards in working collaboratively and at speed, researching information from a variety of sources and presenting their findings to the class. Pupils in another lesson learned much because of the teacher's clear objectives, an appropriate variety of activities and a very good video about the importance of prayer to Muslims. The good standard of presentation in pupils' books in Year 7 is not, however, continued in Years 8 and 9.

219. By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils' attainment is in line with what is expected by the Agreed Syllabus and close to average overall in the GCSE classes. Average and above average pupils put forward their views and argue a case well, whilst higher-attaining pupils write more complex answers. The highest attainers produce a large amount of well-presented work, with a good use of bullet-points for revision purposes. In lessons pupils speak clearly and confidently, when giving a presentation of what they have learned. In the non-examination classes the majority of pupils present their views thoughtfully on such things as capital punishment, listing the arguments for and against it, based around phrases given them by the teacher. Pupils write a satisfactory amount in lessons and two-thirds of them write in detail.
220. Pupils' learning in Key Stage 3 ranges from very good to unsatisfactory, but is good overall because of good teaching. Pupils are generally very well motivated, respond enthusiastically to the teacher's questions and discuss well together. Where pupils of a variety of faiths are in the class, pupils show appropriate respect and check that they have their facts correct.
221. When learning is very productive (as in Year 9), all pupils work at a very good speed, organise themselves into groups quickly, choose a scribe and research from a variety of books. Pupils discuss their topics perceptively and answer the set questions quickly and in detail. Lower-attaining pupils enjoy the subject, because they are taught through an appropriate range of activities, including drama. Where attitudes are poor, this is sometimes because lower attainers have been taught by a succession of teachers or because pupils with special educational needs have insufficient support in lessons, so preventing those who want to work from achieving a satisfactory standard.
222. Pupils' learning in Key Stage 4 is good. Pupils take a pride in their work, are well motivated and make good progress over a series of lessons. GCSE groups enjoy preparing presentations, work well with one another and carry out useful research. They take the subject very seriously, have a mature approach to all aspects of their work and settle to tasks well. They complete a very good amount of work in lessons. Those in the non-examination groups are generally attentive, put forward their own ideas sensibly and settle quickly to write. In a minority of classes teachers try hard to gain a response from pupils they do not know well, but with little reward.
223. The quality of teaching in Key Stage 3 is nearly always good (or better). In one lesson, however, poor teaching contributed to pupils' negative attitudes and behaviour. In the majority of lessons clear objectives, detailed planning and an appropriate variety of learning styles maintain pupils' interest and motivation, ensuring that knowledge is reinforced in different ways. Expectations of pupils are, in the main, appropriately high, but written tasks are sometimes undemanding for high-attaining pupils in Year 8. Literacy is well taught: new vocabulary is continually explained and checks are made that pupils understand the meaning of words. Incentives are used well. Relationships are very good: pupils are uninhibited, but respectful, in asking questions of teachers they know.
224. In the best lessons the blackboard is used well to focus pupils' attention and help them to remember the key points of what has been discussed. Homework is set fortnightly in Years 8 and 9, but does not appear often in pupils' homework diaries in Year 7. Marking is satisfactory on the whole, with the occasional constructive comment, but tends to be misguidedly over-generous. Where teaching is poor, there is too little support for low-attaining pupils, rewards are not used sufficiently and relationships are insecure.

225. The quality of teaching in Key Stage 4 is good. The teaching of GCSE classes is very well organised, ensuring that pupils work closely with others in collecting and using information. Pupils are given good guidance in note-taking. Teachers have good subject knowledge, deal well with sensitive issues and use Biblical references thoughtfully to guide pupils' thinking. Teaching methods include a very good mixture of questioning, discussion, reading of texts and responding to open-ended topics. Pupils are well prepared for examinations. Sometimes, however, low-attaining pupils waste time, because they are not clear about what they are expected to do.
226. Pupils in the non-examination classes often have good discussions at the start and end of lessons. They are given clear instructions as to how work is to be presented. Within a framework of good relationships, pupils are helped to deepen understanding of their own lives, such as when they compare the wages they earn on a Saturday job with those earned by people in developing countries. Pupils are kept well on task by suitable time-limits for different activities within lessons. Sometimes, however, the purpose of lessons and subsequent tasks are not clearly explained. Pupils' work is usually marked well, sometimes with constructive comments. Spelling and grammar are corrected, in accordance with the school's literacy strategy.
227. There have been considerable improvements in the subject since the last inspection, when many weaknesses were identified. A new head of department has been appointed, the Agreed Syllabus is in place and schemes of work are now followed. Standards at the ends of both key stages are higher than at the last inspection. The subject has a satisfactory amount of curricular time, sufficient resources to teach both key stages and a GCSE course, and suitable textbooks for pupils of different abilities. In Key Stage 4 a GCSE course has been introduced and all other pupils have one lesson each week.
228. Teaching is now good and incorporates assessment tasks into all work. Pupils' attitudes are almost always positive. The use of IT has improved slightly, but is still unsatisfactory. Whilst there have been improvements to the accommodation, some teaching of the subject in classrooms away from the resources of the main room is unsatisfactory. There is only one permanent specialist teacher, all other lessons being taken by different non-specialist staff. As a result, departmental meetings are seldom held to develop the subject.