

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **NESTON HIGH SCHOOL**

Neston, Cheshire

LEA Area: Cheshire

Unique reference number: 111398

Headteacher: Mrs R Winterson

Reporting inspector: David Young  
(OFSTED No: 2710)

Dates of inspection: 12 – 16 March 2001

Inspection number: 187435

Full 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 students:	11 to 18 years
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Raby Park Road Neston Cheshire
Postcode:	CH64 9NH
Telephone number:	0151 336 3902
Fax number:	0151 353 0408
Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Cllr R B Chrimes
Date of previous inspection:	26 March 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
2710	David Young	Registered inspector		<p>What should the school do to improve further?</p> <p>How high are standards?</p> <p>a) The school's results and achievements</p> <p>How well are pupils taught?</p> <p>How well is the school led and managed?</p> <p>What should the school do to improve further?</p>
9974	Daljit Singh	Lay inspector		<p>How high are standards?</p> <p>b) Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development</p> <p>How well does the school care for its pupils?</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?</p>
2941	Andrew Henderson	Team inspector	Physical education Equal opportunities	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
19056	Graham Leech	Team inspector	Special educational needs Drama	
30899	Kenneth Boden	Team inspector	Design and technology	
20629	John Bryson	Team inspector	English	
	Malcolm Burley	Team inspector	Mathematics Science	
4423	David Clegg	Team inspector	Science	
7854	Richard Crozier	Team inspector	Music	
20171	Leslie Greenwood	Team inspector	Religious education	
	Andrew Hodges	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
1769	Michael Holohan	Team inspector	History	
21785	Veronica Kerr	Team inspector	Mathematics	
8052	Kenneth McKenzie	Team inspector	Information and communications technology Business studies	
12118	Allan Paver	Team inspector	Geography	
30901	Susan Schofield	Team inspector	Art	

19404	Les Schubeler	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages English as an additional language	
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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Neston High School is a large, mixed comprehensive school for 1624 students aged 11 to 18. The school roll is oversubscribed with many students attending from well outside the school's catchment area. Students start at the school with a wide range of educational achievement and social backgrounds, broadly in line with the national average distribution. A very small proportion of students are from minority ethnic groups; there are none for whom English as a spoken language presents a difficulty. Whilst the proportion of students in the school identified as having special educational needs is below the national average, a higher than average proportion of the school roll have statements of special educational need. 33 students attend a unit for students with moderate learning difficulties known as the Learning Centre. These students are partly integrated into the mainstream curriculum of the school.

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

Neston High School is a very good school. The standard of work seen during the inspection was at least in line with national expectations, and mostly good, in all subjects and at all ages. Students make good progress in all year groups and higher grade GCSE results are particularly commendable. The overall quality of teaching is good or better in all subjects and teachers have a good understanding of effective learning. The personal development of students is very good, strongly supported by an effective pastoral system. The quality of leadership of the headteacher, senior staff, middle managers and governors is very good. The school has a clear sense of purpose and an understanding of what needs to be done to improve continually. The funding available to the school is wisely spent to support the school's main aims and priorities. The school provides good value for money.

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

- The quality of relationships, attitudes and behaviour are strengths of the school and students respond very well to consistently good standards of teaching in all subject areas. Teaching is a strength of the school.
- Standards of attainment in all subject areas are at least in line with national averages and in many cases better; the proportion of students achieving 5 or more GCSE grades A\* to C is well above the average for similar schools.
- The quality of provision and standards achieved are good or better in all three core subjects, English, mathematics and science. These subjects and art are strengths of the school.
- The school is very effective in attending to the personal development and pastoral care of students, including their moral and social development.
- The headteacher, senior staff and governors demonstrate very effective leadership and management.
- Students are offered a wide range of appropriate curriculum opportunities in all year groups.
- The school has developed very effective links with the local community, including partner schools.

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

- Overall attendance figures, whilst average, could be improved.
- Some adjustments are needed to the timetable at Key Stage 3, particularly in the humanities subjects. A similar review is required for religious education at Key Stage 4.
- Greater consistency is required in attending to the variety of individual learning needs in some teaching groups.
- A more coherent approach is required to the teaching of basic skills, particularly numeracy, across the curriculum.

*The school has no major weaknesses and strengths significantly outweigh the weaknesses. 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 maintained a programme of continuous improvement since the last inspection in 1996. Overall, progress has been good. The key issues raised in the last report have all been addressed. Technology has been introduced for all students at Key Stage 4. Adjustments have been made to the pastoral system to achieve the more uniform system recommended. Procedures for registration have been improved and are now rigorous and secure. Additional classrooms have been provided by an attractive extension to the sixth form block. The opportunity now exists for a daily act of collective worship although the spirit of the requirements is not consistently implemented across the school. There



have been improvements in the provision of religious education but the time allocation at Key Stage 4 is still below the recommendation of the Agreed Syllabus. Overall there has been good progress in the implementation of the recommendations for improvements within individual subject departments. Good attention to the improvement of standards in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy has enabled students with special educational needs to reach high standards, comparative to levels of prior attainment, in public examinations. The development of small teaching groups, with some support in the classroom, for identified mainstream students in Key Stage 3 has aided students' progress. The provision for all students with special educational needs is now co-ordinated in a coherent structure. The school's self-evaluation project has made a significant contribution to the dissemination of good practice across the school.

## STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	B	B	B	D
A-levels/AS-levels	A	A	B	

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

Overall, A level GCE results have been well above the national average for the last three years. The average point score at GCSE is below the national average. This arises largely from the school policy of entering lower attaining students for alternative examinations, in particular the Certificate of Achievement in a number of subjects and National Vocational Qualifications. As a result, the number of students achieving grades D to G is below the national average, as grades achieved in Certificates are not included in the calculation. The school's examination entry policy is currently under review. The percentage of students achieving 5 or more grades A\* to C is well above the national average and the average for similar schools. The school is exceeding its target for higher grades at GCSE but below its target for the average points score at GCSE.

The percentage of students achieving 5 or more A\* to C grades at GCSE in 2000 is above the national average in all subjects apart from French and business studies where results are broadly in line with the national average. Results for both boys and girls exceed the national average and whilst girls' results are better than boys', the school has made significant progress with raising the achievement of boys at Key Stage 4.

At Key Stage 3 English results are well above the national average and above the average for similar schools. In mathematics and science overall results are above the national average and in line with those for similar schools. The girls' results are better than those of boys but the gap between them is smaller than that nationally.

Based on work seen during the inspection and taking account of students' prior attainment, their achievements are always at least satisfactory. Students with special educational needs make good progress. Progress overall is good in mathematics, science, geography, history, information technology, and religious education, and very good in English and art. There are no subjects in which overall progress is less than expected although there are differences across the key stages in modern foreign languages, music, and physical education. Progress in drama and in design and technology is satisfactory.

## STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Students' attitudes to the school are consistently good. They approach learning positively and take an active interest in their work.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Students respect the Community Code. Misbehaviour is dealt with effectively.
Personal development and relationships	The quality of relationships is a strength of the school. The personal development of students is very good. Students respond well to responsibility, for example when acting as mentors to younger students.
Attendance	Attendance is broadly in line with the national average but could be better. The staff are very diligent in their support of good attendance.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The teaching was at least satisfactory in more than 99% of the lessons seen. In 79% it was good or better, and in 29% it was very good or excellent. As a result of this high quality of teaching students work hard with good concentration and make progress which is often above expectations. One of the important strengths of the school is the overall consistency of teaching quality across all subjects. There was no unsatisfactory teaching in Years 7 to 9 or in the sixth form. The overall quality of teaching was particularly good in English and mathematics, and in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form in art and information technology. The high quality of teaching supports students' achievement and results in above average progress for students at all levels of attainment. The key skills of literacy and numeracy are both well taught although there is a need to ensure a consistent approach to the teaching of numeracy skills across the curriculum.

Particular strengths of the teaching include teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subjects, the high expectations set by the majority of teachers, the management of students' behaviour and effective use of time and resources. As a result, students demonstrate genuine effort, work at a productive pace and show good concentration and interest. Learning is particularly effective in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form where the quality of teaching is often very good or excellent. Students' work is generally marked appropriately and many teachers provide very constructive comments which enable students to improve their work. The quality of homework is also generally good and contributes to the reinforcement of class work and preparation for future work. Students with special educational needs are taught effectively and make good progress which is often improved when classroom assistants are present.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum provides a good breadth of opportunities for all students. The sixth form curriculum is good as is provision for careers, vocational education and extra-curricular activities. There is insufficient time given to humanities subjects in Years 7 to 9 and religious education in Years 10 and 11.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Students with special educational needs are fully integrated into the life of the school and have full access to the curriculum. They are taught well and ably supported by classroom assistants.

Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for spiritual and cultural education is good, strongly supported by the curriculum in a number of subjects and by the contributions of external visitors to the school. Opportunities for moral and social development are a strength of the school.
How well the school cares for its students	<p>The overall pastoral system of care, support, guidance and welfare, based on a successful house structure, is a significant strength of the school. Arrangements for monitoring students' progress are strong in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form and developing in Years 7 to 9.</p> <p>The school's relationships with parents are constructive and positive. Good information is provided about courses of study and students' progress. Parents are actively encouraged to support the learning of their children.</p>

### HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The school is very well led and managed by the headteacher supported by an able senior management team. The management of subject departments and of the pastoral system is also strong and effective. Development planning is good and finances are managed well.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors have an excellent understanding of the strengths of the school and areas for development. The governing body fulfils its statutory responsibilities and makes an active contribution to the development and monitoring of policies. The governors provide appropriate support and challenge to the headteacher and teaching staff.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school has a very good understanding of its achievements. Performance is rigorously monitored and effective action taken to address areas of concern. The self-evaluation project is a particular strength and deserves to be maintained and developed in the future.
The strategic use of resources	The school's budget is appropriately planned to meet the priorities of the school, based firmly on the curriculum needs of the school. The school has sufficient well qualified staff and appropriate levels of resources. Forward planning for resourcing and for refurbishment of accommodation is in place. The school applies the principles of best value in its use of resources.

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

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students enjoy going to school.</li> <li>• Students are making good progress.</li> <li>• The school expects students to work hard and achieve success.</li> <li>• Behaviour is good and the school is helping students to become mature and responsible.</li> <li>• The school is approachable to deal with problems.</li> <li>• The leadership and management of the school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The consistency of homework.</li> <li>• Information about how students are getting on.</li> <li>• The school's working relationship with parents.</li> </ul>

More than 85% of parents, in the 296 questionnaires returned, responded positively to all aspects of the work of the school. The meeting for parents presented a very constructive picture of the school. It is the inspectors' view that homework is set consistently and in the main provides an appropriate extension to work done in school. The school's reporting system and parents' meetings provide a good means of keeping parents informed of students' progress. Staff are also open to informal approaches from parents

who have concerns. There are good opportunities for parents to become involved in the life of the school. The use of the Parents' Association as a sounding board for policies and developments is particularly commendable.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

1. Standards of attainment are above the national average overall, and well above average in some respects. The Cheshire test scores for students entering Year 7, together with the national test scores from Key Stage 2, suggest that the attainment of students on entry to the school is broadly in line with the national average distribution. The one exception to above average results is the percentage of students achieving lower grade GCSE result, where results are below average. Overall, results are average or above average when compared with schools in similar circumstances. Exceptions to this are the higher grade results at GCSE which are well above those for similar schools and the lower grade GCSE results which are below, or well below, similar schools. Comparison with schools in similar circumstances, based on numbers entitled to free school meals, is not entirely fair as the school includes a Learning Centre for 30 students with general learning difficulties and has a higher than average percentage of students with statements of special educational need.
2. Overall, results in the National Curriculum tests for fourteen year olds in English, mathematics and science have been consistently above the national average for the last five years. In 2000 the overall results in English were well above average and those for mathematics and science above average. In comparison with schools in similar circumstances, the overall results and those for English were above average, and results for mathematics and science in line with the national average. Overall this represents good progress by students up to the age of fourteen.
3. The percentage of students gaining Levels five or above in English in 2000 was above the national average and in line with that of similar schools. The percentage gaining the higher levels (six and above) was well above the national average and above that for similar schools. The results for boys and girls were both above the national averages for their gender.
4. The percentage of students gaining Levels five or above in mathematics in 2000 was above the national average and in line with that of similar schools. The percentage gaining the higher levels (six and above) was also above the national average and in line with that for similar schools. The results for boys and girls were both above the national average for their gender, with the boys' results above the national average by a greater amount than the girls'.
5. The percentage of students gaining Levels five or above in science in 2000 was well above the national average and above that of similar schools. The percentage gaining the higher levels (six and above) was well above the national average and in line with that for similar schools. The results for boys and girls were both above the national average for their gender, with the boys' results above the national average by a greater amount than the girls'.
6. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE results at grades A\* to C was well above the national average whilst the proportion gaining either one or five grades A\* to G was in line with the national average. In comparison with similar schools, these higher grade results are well above average whilst the lower grade results are well below and below those for similar schools. This arises largely from the school policy of entering lower attaining students for alternative examinations, in particular the Certificate of Achievement in a number of subjects. As a result, the number of students achieving grades D to G is below the national average, as grades achieved in Certificates are not included in the calculation. The overall GCSE results have remained above the national average for the last five years. In 2000 the results for both boys and girls were above the national averages for their gender.
7. Overall, the 2000 GCSE results in English were in line with results nationally, including the proportion gaining grades A\* to C. English literature results were well above the national average. Girls' results have been significantly higher than those of boys. Over the last three years, overall results have remained stable. In 2000, results were much the same although the number of students gaining A\* and A grades at English literature rose significantly.
8. Overall, mathematics results in the GCSE examinations are well above the national averages and well above the results achieved in similar schools. In 2000, the proportion gaining grades A\* to C

was well above the national average. The performance of boys is notable. Nationally, girls outperform boys. In this school, both are well above their national figure, but boys do slightly better.

9. Standards in science, as indicated by GCSE results in double science, are above the national average. The results for both girls and boys are well above the national averages for their gender. The girls outperform the boys, in line with the national picture.
10. The school has maintained high standards at GCSE over a number of years. The overall results for students of all attainment levels demonstrate very good progress. Good progress is also evident amongst those students entered for alternative qualifications, including National Vocational Qualifications and the Certificate of Achievement, although their results are not included in the published achievement figures for sixteen year olds.
11. GCE A level and A/S level results were above the national average in 2000. This maintains a pattern established over a number of years with overall results, for example over the last four years, consistently above or well above the national average. Taking into account their prior attainment at age sixteen, the progress of students in the sixth form, whilst good, is not as great as in Years 10 and 11.
12. Overall attainment in the school is mostly good across all subjects. Attainment at GCSE in French and business studies in 2000 was in line with the national average. In all other subjects it was above average. The 2000 GCSE results were particularly good, in comparison with other subjects in the school, in English literature, geography, mathematics, religious education and science.
13. Based on the lessons and work seen during the inspection and in the light of their prior attainment, students make good progress as they move through the school. By the end of Year 9 students achieve satisfactory standards in drama, design and technology, modern foreign languages and music. They achieve good standards in art, English, geography, history, information technology, mathematics, physical education, religious education and science. Overall, progress is particularly good at Key Stage 4. By the end of Year 11 students achieve satisfactory standards in the light of their prior attainment in business studies, drama, design and technology and physical education. They achieve good standards in geography, history, information technology, mathematics, modern foreign languages, music, religious education, sociology and science, and very good standards in art and English. Standards achieved in the sixth form are satisfactory in drama, business studies and design and technology. Standards are good in geography, history, mathematics, modern foreign languages, physical education, psychology, religious education, and sociology, and very good in art, English, information technology, music and science.
14. Students' confidence in speaking and listening is good in most subjects. Oral work in several subjects has helped to develop students' speaking and listening skills. For example, in history where students are able to discuss, analyse and develop ideas. In modern foreign languages students demonstrate the ability to read from narratives, journals and travel brochures. In English and history students are able to read to the class. In many subjects students demonstrate an aptitude for different kinds of writing. For example, in modern foreign languages, physical education and science students make notes. In history they summarise and make journal entries. In design and technology students write extensively when they evaluate their work. Developing imagination is a strong feature of writing in English. Overall, the level of competence is good at both key stages and in the sixth form.
15. Most students enter the school with good numeracy skills and can comfortably cope with the mathematical demands of the wider curriculum. The use of lessons learned from the numeracy strategy in primary schools has resulted in improved attainment in all aspects of the subject, including work on algebra and geometry. Good achievement is also evident in those parts of the curriculum where numerical techniques are important. Students demonstrate competence in aspects such as graphs and measurement in science, geography, design technology and information technology.
16. The school is developing and using increasingly sophisticated methods to set targets for individuals and groups of students. The school's published target for the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE grades A\* to C was exceeded by a significant margin in 2000. The

target was within the agreed 'challenge band' set by the local education authority. The process for target setting has been revised in the light of this success. The target for overall attainment at the end of Year 11 was not met. This is due to the school's examination entry policy as described earlier in the report.

17. Students with special educational needs achieve well in relation to their levels of prior attainment. Consistently, the great majority makes good progress from low levels of prior attainment on entry. With very few exceptions they progress to entry for the Certificate of Achievement and in most cases, including students who are in the Learning Centre, achieve one or more grades A\* to G at GCSE. In 2000, more than half of the students in Year 11 on the register for students with special educational needs entered successfully for five or more subjects in GCSE and three students who entered for nine subjects achieved an average C grade. The attainment and progress of gifted and talented students is good. In 2000 the proportions of students achieving grades A\* and A in almost all subjects in GCSE were above the national proportions. In English, mathematics, science, geography, German and physical education, the proportions of students achieving the highest grade, A\*, were above the national proportions.

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

18. The attitudes, behaviour and relationships of students are consistently good and constructively support learning and their personal development. Attendance is satisfactory and most students enjoy coming to school.
19. Parents have rightly reported that most students enjoy coming to school and behave well. This is consistently supported by most classroom observations. Most students approach learning constructively, and show an active interest in their knowledge, understanding and skills. Students pose interesting questions and their ability to concentrate is good and often very good. Relationships amongst students and between students and teachers are constructive purposeful and provide a solid base for group activities. This was particularly evident in English, mathematics, drama and physical education. Most students take up the very good opportunities for extra-curricular activity, particularly in sporting activities in the adjoining leisure centre. They also enjoy residential visits and take an active interest in the homework club, drama, information technology, and art workshops. During the inspection, inspectors observed five-a-side football competitions, which involved Year 6 and 7 students and included girls, as well as boys. This activity assisted students to combat sexist stereotypes and encouraged an environment of equality.
20. Most students are friendly, polite and respectful, but a minority also engage in disruptive anti-social behaviour. The headteacher and governors have appropriately used exclusion to make clear to the students that disruptive, anti-social and violent behaviour will not be tolerated. The policy has been effective in helping to make the school an orderly place in which to learn. During the last school year there were 70 fixed term exclusions and two permanent exclusions. The number of exclusions of non-white students is low and as a proportion of non-white students in the school, it is broadly in line with similar schools. The school is taking positive measures to provide support and guidance to disaffected students, as well as mentoring for Year 11.
21. Most students observe the school's code of conduct and respond effectively to the system of rewards. Some students in both formal and informal interviews expressed concerns about bullying and racism, but also acknowledged the positive ways in which the school responds to their concerns. Incidents are dealt with effectively by teachers. Behaviour is good overall.
22. The quality of relationships is a strength of the school. Opportunities for students to serve the school and community contribute effectively to the development and promotion of good relationships. Most students enjoy working together, interacting socially and participating in recreational activities. These students are prepared to listen to and respect the views of others, including those of different racial and cultural groups. This illustrates the quality of friendships, which exist and reinforces a tolerant learning environment. The good quality of relationships between teachers and students provides students with confidence and raises their self-esteem, however, there are missed opportunities for students to use their initiative in some lessons. These concerns were particularly shared by a number of Year 11 students.
23. Opportunities are provided for students to serve the school, as prefects at Key Stage 4, through the Sixth Form Council and arrangements for peer support; to represent their year groups in inter-

house competitions and to serve the school and wider community through work experience. During the inspection students across the school celebrated red nose day by collecting for deserving causes. Students also enjoy playing in the band and take part in drama productions, such as Grease. These activities are taken responsibly and very actively lend themselves to supporting students' personal development. Members of the sixth form play a particularly strong role in the social life of the school and in setting the tone of responsibility for younger students.

24. Attendance is satisfactory. Absences are broadly in line with the national average for similar schools. Existing levels of attendance are due to the hard work of form tutors, who take registers at prescribed times and ensure that all absences are followed up. Heads and assistant heads of house and the education welfare officer support their work. Staff and the EWO exchange information purposefully and systematically to investigate, monitor and discourage absence. Timekeeping is generally satisfactory and continues to improve. This improvement is primarily due to the guidance of staff and the perseverance of form tutors, heads of house, and deputy heads of house, which closely scrutinise timekeeping. The system of rewards and the support provided for poor attenders further enables the school to sustain sound levels of attendance.
25. Students with special educational needs mostly behave well in lessons as a result of the supportive learning environment created by teachers and support staff. They enjoy the lessons, maintain their concentration and contribute with enthusiasm. They relate well to each other and to their teachers and support assistants. A small number of students who exhibit behavioural difficulties is managed well through skilful teaching and appropriate lesson activities.

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

26. The overall quality of teaching is good at Neston High School with a significant proportion of very good and excellent teaching. Teaching is a strength of the school. The teaching was satisfactory or better in more than 99% of the lessons seen, in 79% it was good or better, and in 29% it was very good or excellent. No lessons were considered to be poor. These figures show an improvement in teaching since the last inspection. The percentage of teaching which is good or better is consistent across Years 7 to 11 with the proportion of very good and excellent teaching higher in Years 10 and 11. In the sixth form 88% of the teaching seen was good or better and 40% very good or excellent.
27. Students' learning is strongly supported by this high quality of teaching. The response of students is consistently good with attitudes to learning that demonstrate interest, commitment and a desire to improve. The good progress of students throughout the school is largely attributable to the quality of teaching.
28. A very positive feature of the overall quality of teaching is the largely consistent quality across all subject areas. The quality of teaching in music in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. The quality of teaching is very good for students of all ages in English and mathematics. In art and information technology teaching is very good in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, in the sixth form in science, and at Key Stage 4 in religious education. In all other subjects and age groups the quality of teaching overall is good. The teaching of personal and social education, which is shared by teachers from a number of subjects, is also good.
29. Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of their subjects. As a result they are able to ensure that all students are challenged with work of an appropriate standard. Good attention is given to the technical language of subjects and the central ideas of subjects are carefully identified and explained.
30. The quality of teachers' planning is good with lesson objectives generally clearly identified and communicated to students. Students know what they are expected to do and are made aware of the key ideas and information which must be learned and understood in each lesson. In practical lessons there is good attention to the skills which students need to learn in order to make progress with more demanding aspects of their work.
31. One of the most important aspects of the high quality of teaching across the school is the high expectations teachers have of their students, particularly at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Students know that they are expected to apply intellectual and creative effort to their work in order to succeed. In addition, lessons generally proceed at a good pace. There is little opportunity for



students to waste time or lack concentration as teachers are skilled in knowing when to move on to new work and how to make sure that all students have sufficient challenge in their work. There is an occasional weakness in otherwise good teaching when teachers are not fully aware of the range of learning needs within a group. This occurs in both mixed groups and ability sets. In these circumstances individuals are sometimes unable to make sufficient progress as they are being asked to tackle activities which they do not fully understand or which are too complex. This weakness can affect students of lower attainment and sometimes those of average attainment within the group.

32. In most subject areas teachers use a variety of teaching methods which are well chosen to support learning and keep students interested in their work. Throughout the school the quality of relationships between teachers and students is very good. Teachers have a good understanding of what is needed to interest and motivate students. As a result students generally enjoy their work and behave in ways which are appropriate to effective learning. Teachers use well organised lessons and high expectations as methods to ensure that students behave and co-operate.
33. Well planned lessons result in good use of time. The resources used, including both commercially and school prepared materials, are generally of good quality and well chosen to enable students to develop a range of learning skills. When classroom assistants are present, they make a very good contribution to the effective progress of students' work. Students with statements of special educational need are particularly well supported in the classroom. There are occasions when additional classroom assistants would be a valuable resource to work with individuals and small groups of students within the classroom.
34. Most teachers mark students' work effectively. In many cases carefully worded advice is given which enables students to understand what they need to do to improve their work. In the best cases these written comments point to specific skills or areas of understanding related to subject content in addition to advice about aspects of literacy which need attention. Homework is similarly well used to extend classwork and to help students prepare for future lessons. Occasionally the homework is not challenging enough, such as finishing off a piece of classwork which may be almost completed by many students. However, the amount and content of homework is generally appropriate, with some good examples of students making very good individual progress with coursework and projects.
35. The school has had a self-review project in place for the last two years. This has focused the attention of teachers on how students are learning and how teaching needs to develop in order to improve learning. This has included classroom observation by teachers, looking at the quality of work being achieved by students. This project has made an important contribution to the quality of teaching within the school. New arrangements for managing the performance of teachers are being introduced in response to national requirements. It is important that the school retains the best features of their self-evaluation project within these new arrangements.
36. There have also been very effective developments in the use of target setting for individual students and teaching groups through the use of statistical data. Teachers of students at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form have an increasingly detailed understanding of what can be achieved by individual students and whether they are using their full potential. These strategies also enable both subject teachers and form tutors to work with individual students to ensure that they know what is expected of them and how they can improve. Students, particularly in the sixth form, respond positively to this individual attention and the clear targets which are provided. Similar arrangements are now being developed for students in Years 7 to 9.
37. Students' confidence in speaking and listening is good in most subjects. Oral work in several subjects has helped to develop students' speaking and listening skills. For example, good opportunities for discussion are provided in history where students are encouraged to discuss, analyse and develop ideas. Students are encouraged to read from a range of texts, use reference texts and read aloud. For example, in modern foreign languages students are provided with opportunities to read from narratives, journals and travel brochures. In English and history students are able to read to the class. In many subjects students are provided with opportunities for different kinds of writing. For example, in modern foreign languages, physical education and science students make notes. In history they summarise and make journal entries. In design and technology students write extensively when they evaluate their work. Developing imagination is a strong feature of writing in English. Overall, the level of competence is good at both key stages and in the sixth form. There is evidence of a literacy environment throughout the school.

For example, key words are displayed in geography, information technology and modern foreign languages. There is some good practice in each department. However, only the English department has a comprehensive literacy policy in action.

38. Most students enter the school with good numeracy skills and can comfortably cope with the mathematical demands of the wider curriculum. The few who struggle with this aspect of education are given very effective support by the Special Educational Needs department and the specialised work within mathematics lessons. The teaching of numeracy by the mathematics department is very good. A new approach has been devised, based on the National Numeracy Strategy and in close co-operation with the primary schools. Students now have one lesson per fortnight dedicated to improving their mental arithmetic and basic knowledge of number work. Students' improved attainment in all aspects of the subject, including work on algebra and geometry, is already evident. Good practice is also evident in those parts of the curriculum where numerical techniques are important. Science, geography, design technology and information and computer technology (ICT) teachers are all giving careful attention to aspects such as graphs and measurement.
39. The mathematics department has carried out an audit to identify the numerical skills needed by students to cope with the demands of different subjects. They should now use this information to develop a whole school approach to numeracy. There is a need to co-ordinate the approach to common mathematical techniques that are used by different departments, for example, graphs in science and geography; measurement in design technology; and enlargement and co-ordinates in art. The school should also identify ways in which the teaching of all subjects can contribute actively to improving students' skills in this vital aspect of education.
40. The teaching of students with special educational needs is good. Their learning difficulties are met sensitively and they make good progress through support and encouragement. Most students with special educational needs are taught by specialist subject teachers in classes alongside their peers, with setting arrangements in most subjects to accommodate differences in levels of prior attainment. The school's Learning Centre caters separately for a small number of identified students whose needs are acute. They are taught by experienced special needs teachers but follow the same curriculum as their peers and join them for some subjects. As they move up the school and their skills and confidence develop sufficiently they are progressively and successfully integrated into most mainstream subject groups.
41. Complementary forms of additional provision support the learning of students with special educational needs. There is in-class support from a large team of qualified and experienced learning support assistants. Most of these are dedicated to the needs of identified students with physical impairment difficulties and the students with moderate learning difficulties in the Learning Centre. The limited amount of general classroom support is largely confined to Year 7. There is some classroom support by teachers but it is limited to social studies classes in years 8 and 9. Small groups of students in Years 7, 8 and 9 are withdrawn from lessons on a regular rolling programme for short sessions of specialist teaching for literacy development until they reach a reading and spelling level which enables them to cope with the demands of the curriculum. The school has begun to use a computer integrated learning system with students in Key Stage 3, and in Year 11, with measurable success in improving reading and numeracy skills. There is a paired reading scheme in operation for students in Year 7 thanks to the co-operation of students in the sixth form. Students in Year 9 have a popular weekly lunchtime session with a typing tutor to improve presentation skills. There is a "homework club" for students to help them with particular difficulties.
42. Subject teachers are well-supplied with information about students. Students with statements of special educational need have comprehensive individual education plans which help their teachers to provide appropriate tasks and materials. At present, however, there are no education plans for the students on the register of special needs at stages 2 to 4 of the Code of Practice. There is generally good practice by teachers in appropriately modifying tasks and materials to accommodate learning differences, but the practice is not universal. The needs of gifted and talented students are recognised: the school has developed a policy for their identification and development, under the care of a recently-appointed member of staff. Subject schemes of work include extension activities to offer additional challenge.

## **HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED**

## TO STUDENTS?

43. The overall quality and range of learning opportunities are good, and statutory requirements for the curriculum are met. The school is successfully providing learning opportunities which are suitably broad and balanced, and are well matched to students' needs. Students with special educational needs have access to the whole curriculum, and provision is good,
44. The sixth form curriculum is a significant strength as is the provision made for careers and vocational education. Other significant strengths are the school's provision for personal and social education, its extra-curricular programme, and the contribution made by the community and by other institutions to the students' learning.
45. These strengths are offset by some less satisfactory features, including the arrangements in Years 8-9 whereby a second modern foreign language is made available with an alternative of social studies, together with shortcomings in the time for religious education in Years 10-11, and for the humanities in Years 7-9.
46. In Years 7-9 students follow the National Curriculum subjects together with personal and social education. Drama is at present taught as a separate subject in Years 7-8, and within English in Year 9. A second modern foreign language is introduced from Year 8, but is not taken by all students. Whilst the overall allocation of time for history and geography is appropriate to cover the required programmes of study, the uneven distribution from year to year at this stage disrupts the continuity of students' learning and impacts on standards. The overall provision for religious education, personal and social education and social studies contains overlapping content and key concepts; some rationalisation is required.
47. The provision for Years 10-11 is good. In addition to National Curriculum requirements there is a good range of additional subjects including drama, sociology, child development, and a second modern foreign language. Vocational courses are available such as RSA text processing, social studies, community studies and NVQ business. There is a range of alternative accreditation to meet the needs of lower attaining students, although the extent of the use of Certificate of Achievement courses requires review in some subjects. The recent introduction of an alternative curriculum for a small number of disaffected students is a positive initiative. Design technology and art combine to ensure that all students at this stage study an appropriate technology subject. However, the time allocated for religious education is insufficient to allow proper coverage of the Agreed Syllabus, or to access a short GCSE course.
48. The sixth form provision is also good and reflects the determination of the school to provide a wide ranging curriculum that matches all attainments. It comprises 22 subjects at A/S and A level including general studies, plus 1 GNVQ subject at intermediate level, NVQs at various levels, and the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education. All students have access to courses in key skills and personal and social education, and they can also take a number of GCSE courses. The sixth form provision provides good value for money.
49. The extensive range of extra-curricular activities provides considerable benefits to the academic and social development of large numbers of students in the school. Sport and team games are very popular and well-supported, and include very strong involvement with the main feeder primary schools. There is a flourishing Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, and virtually all subjects contribute to the very good provision made. Opportunities include school productions involving music, drama and dance, together with visits to theatres, galleries, museums as well as artists visiting the school. Language exchanges, field study, outdoor education activities, and residential opportunities at home and abroad are illustrations of the positive level of staff commitment in providing these enriching experiences, as are the booster examination classes offered by almost all subjects.
50. The personal and social health programme is very effective and clearly fulfils all its aims and objectives. Inspection evidence indicates that the programme 'contributes to the preparation of students for the responsibilities and experiences of school and adult life'. This provision illustrates the strong commitment of the co-ordinator and other staff, as well as specialists from external agencies.
51. Students with special educational needs are fully integrated into all aspects of school life and have access to the same curriculum as their peers. Access is enabled by specialist and small

- group teaching provision and strategies to develop basic skills. Support in the classroom further aids access. Learning support assistants give valuable help in particular to students with statements of learning or physical impairment difficulties. The school is specially adapted to meet the needs of students with physical impairment, who consequently are able to enjoy many of the same facilities and activities as their peers. Further improvements are envisaged.
52. Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good, overall. Opportunities for a daily act of collective worship have improved since the last inspection, although the school policy is inconsistently implemented, particularly during days on which no assemblies take place.
  53. Provision for the spiritual education of students is good. Through activities in assemblies, art, religious education, geography and science students are encouraged to explore their own views and given time to reflect upon their beliefs and values. A sixth form lesson considering the sociology of religion skilfully presented students with a range of perspectives from which to test their own values and belief systems. In religious education students are given the opportunity to consider the significance of prayer and meditation. A wide variety of visitors, including those from faith communities, shares their beliefs with students in ways that encourage thought and feelings, and a recognition of how personal beliefs affect actions. The richness of artistic displays around the school are physical evidence of personal responses. The school is very effective in ensuring that religious festivals and enrichment days add a further dimension to the development of understanding and personal response. Students are challenged to consider and develop their own beliefs and values.
  54. Very good provision is made for the social and moral development of students. They are provided with many opportunities to discuss moral issues. Through work in many subjects students discuss and explore moral issues that affect their lives and the society in which they live. These activities are strongly supported by the school's own Community Code which appropriately links personal rights and responsibilities. Students support many fund raising activities, responding to issues raised in the curriculum of the school. Personal response is demonstrated by groups and individuals taking responsibility for these activities. The Sixth Form Council provides good opportunities for students to participate in the decision making processes of the school and plans are well advanced for the formation of a similar council for other year groups. The school has established strong community links which provide students with good opportunities to demonstrate personal responsibility in a variety of ways.
  55. Good opportunities are also provided for the cultural development of students. Students are presented with a wide range of cultural traditions, ensuring an appropriate introduction to the ethnic and cultural diversity of society. A number of subjects reflect these cultures in their teaching. The wide range of extra-curricular activities also enhance this aspect of students' development. Recent activities include a visit from representatives of the Muslim community, a holocaust enrichment day, Fair Trade events, visits from a South African drama group, and artists in residence.
  56. The local and wider community makes a very positive contribution to learning, social and personal development of all students. Inspection evidence indicates that employers, business, community representatives, faith leaders and friends of the school all make an invaluable contribution by developing and promoting learning in the classroom and school. During the inspection the local health officer came into school and supported teaching and learning, as part of the health education programme.
  57. The school continues to enjoy a very purposeful and constructive relationship with its feeder primary schools and enjoys a similar link with establishments of higher education. The very good links between departments teaching the core subjects and primary school, complement the good work with foundation subjects and supports learning in the respective year groups. Sharing expertise and special knowledge, for example, about literacy and numeracy helps teachers to raise standards and support students' development and progress.
  58. Strong links have been forged with the universities of Cambridge and Oxford, through visits and workshops. A similar relationship exists with the universities of Manchester and John Moores, Liverpool. Students are provided with opportunities to visit different universities and sample the way of life in higher education. This helps students make informed choices, as well as to succeed to the next stage of education.

## HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

59. The overall pastoral system of care, support, guidance and the welfare of students are very good and a significant strength of the school. The arrangements for child protection are sound, and follow the guidelines provided by the County Council. There have been inconsistencies between these guidelines and those issued by Social Services in relation to procedures for reporting disclosures to the designated teacher. The school is aware of the issues and has changed its policy and practices appropriately. The school continues to provide a safe and secure environment for learning.
60. There are five houses, which form a very solid and constructive framework for the students. Inspection evidence clearly indicates that house membership, supported by heads of house and their team of tutors, continues to maintain a family tradition, which provides stability, preserves the individual and group identity, and offers all its students support, respect and a discipline based on common sense and fairness.
61. Staff listen to their students sensitively, they understand and empathise with students' individual and collective needs. They are particularly in tune with the needs of disaffected students. The provision is further strengthened by the efficient use of, and work with, external support agencies, which enable the school community to learn with confidence in a safe and secure environment.
62. The personal, social and health education programme encompasses health, drugs and aspects of sex education helping students to make informed choices, develop relationships and enhance their self-esteem. It also contains elements of anti-bullying and a very good careers guidance and education provision. The careers programme is of a high standard and co-ordinated by a very committed and caring tutor. With the assistance of tutors, specialist speakers and the careers service, students are provided with good quality information, support and preparation for work experience. Students are provided with very good opportunities to meet and work with employers, and this enables them to develop their individual social and personal skills and make informed choices about post-sixteen provision. The careers programme is valued by parents, students, and employers and systematically recorded and monitored to ensure high standards are sustained.
63. The health and safety co-ordinator works closely with staff at all levels to ensure health and safety is given priority. Systems are in place and good practice, as well as systematic monitoring, ensures the safety and well-being of the school community.
64. Procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress, for using assessment to guide curricular planning and for monitoring and supporting students' academic progress are exemplary at GCSE and in the sixth form.
65. Based on detailed information provided by the local education authority, the school constructs a powerful framework within which to build an accurate picture of individual progress across the courses to examination and beyond. It therefore provides accurate information to underpin personal guidance and target setting and identifies those students who need support from their house tutor or a mentor. It is easy to measure the value added to prior attainment of each individual, whole classes and subject departments. Thus it provides very clear information on which to improve teaching and learning for individual teachers and for departments. The school is rapidly developing good procedures for managing what it recognises as sensitive information.
66. Targets set for the school at GCSE are based on a combination of Cheshire test scores established at the age of eleven, National Curriculum test scores provided by feeder primary schools, National Curriculum tests at the age of fourteen, and the school's internal assessment results. An increasingly sophisticated system is developing which enables teachers to set realistic and challenging targets for individual students.
67. Procedures established in the sixth form are very good and the result of sensitive adjustment to perceived need. When analysis of A level results showed under-attainment amongst students with lower prior attainment on open entry to the sixth form, the monitoring system was more tightly adjusted to isolate lack of effort and to more precisely allocate support. Students are involved in their own review procedures in regular one-to-one interviews with tutors. Parents are well informed in good time of any problem.
68. Similarly, when detailed analysis showed that boys under-attained at GCSE in 1999, a whole school policy of supporting the attainment of boys ensured an impressive reversal of trend in just

twelve months. For example, the A\*-C score in geography for boys rose from 31 per cent in 1999 to 71 per cent in 2000. Assessment is used very well on a school-wide basis to identify weaknesses and to monitor improvement. The process is not yet as strong amongst all individual departments. Departmental assessment is particularly well used in mathematics and geography and informal assessment in art is a powerful tool for maintaining high standards.

69. The assessment of the attainment and progress of students with special educational needs is carefully managed in the Learning Centre, with the object of raising literacy levels to a point where students can join mainstream classes for increasing lengths of time where they are then assessed within subject departmental procedures.
70. Procedures for assessing attainment and progress at Key Stage 3 are less effective because pupil review is more diffuse and assessment less sharp. The school recognises this and plans to make better use of the strong house structure already in place to sharpen assessment and target setting as it enters its planned review of the Key Stage 3 curriculum. The school does meet its obligation to assess in terms of National Curriculum levels at the age of fourteen and to inform parents correctly.
71. Procedures for monitoring attendance and punctuality are good. Heads of House have specific responsibilities for monitoring attendance throughout the school. Clear and comprehensive records are kept. The systems in place ensure that all absences are followed up promptly and effectively, and the school works hard to discourage internal truancy. The school receives very effective support from the Educational Welfare Officer.
72. The school has good policy and procedures to ensure good behaviour and attitudes. Teachers and many support staff, as well as lunchtime assistants work diligently to ensure students conform to the school's code of conduct, which supports respect, self-respect, self-discipline and consideration for others, and provides an appropriate framework for achieving high standards of good behaviour.
73. The procedures for monitoring and discouraging oppressive behaviour are good. They are implemented well by committed and hard-working teachers, who clearly advocate a culture of non-oppressive social behaviour. Teachers make effective use of strategies, such as anger management, mentoring and the students support group to discourage all types of oppressive behaviour. The school has an effective policy and procedure for investigating, recording and monitoring all racist incidents.
74. The last inspection required the school to achieve more consistency in its tutorial system and delivery of the PSHE programme. The school has made good progress in these areas and continues to provide a stimulating and supportive learning environment.
75. The statutory requirements for the identification, assessment and review of students with special educational needs are met very efficiently. The requirements for day-to-day provision as specified in students' statements of special educational need are fully implemented. The register of students is maintained very carefully, with regular revision in the light of conscientious monitoring and assessment to ensure that students are placed at the appropriate stage of the Code of Practice. Good use has been made of Access Initiative funding to improve the safety provision for students with physical impairment. Students with special educational needs enjoy regular social contact with their peers through access to the same curricular and extra-curricular experiences, including total integration into the pastoral system through their membership of the mixed-ability tutor groups. Students are well cared for by experienced teaching and support staff who have good knowledge and sympathetic understanding of their individual needs.

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

76. The vast majority of parents report a very positive and constructive relationship with the school. These parents feel comfortable about approaching the school and have indicated that concerns are addressed adequately. Parents rightly report that the school is well led and managed, and provides a very interesting range of activities outside lessons. However, a small, but significant, minority indicate that they are not happy with the levels of homework set for their children. Inspection evidence indicates that homework is set regularly, is generally challenging and enables students to make progress. Occasionally, the amount and style of homework set is inadequate.

77. The quality and content of information that parents receive are effective and of a good standard. Parents appreciate the information provided through the school prospectuses and annual report from governors. These documents comply with statutory requirements and are written in a user-friendly style and the prospectus is well presented in a glossy colourful format. This information is complemented by regular correspondence between the school and home to inform parents of events, students' individual progress, achievements and concerns. Occasionally some students fail to ensure that the correspondence is delivered to their parents.
78. Parents are actively encouraged to support the learning of their children. They are regularly invited to participate in workshops; their attendance has increased at parents and consultation evenings and this is primarily due to the hard work of the school. The school presents a number of drama productions, including Grease, which involve parents and these events are often well supported. During the inspection the school ran an inter-primary and secondary school five-a-side football tournament. This event was supported by a number of parents and grandparents. The school takes the initiative to keep parents of students with special educational needs informed about their progress, with parents' evenings and informal contacts well used as methods of communication. Parents are appropriately involved in work at home. The homework planners indicate that parents regularly monitor their children's progress and many support their efforts. The parents of students with statements of special educational need are kept fully informed about progress, including being invited to reviews. Most parents have signed the home-school agreement to indicate their continuous support for the school and their child.
79. The Parents-teachers association is actively involved in the work of the school and provides further opportunities for parents and the school to work together. The parents' group provides funds and social events, which support learning in the school. Inspection evidence indicates that events are well attended and help the school to purchase homework planners.
80. There is good attendance by parents at the review meetings for students with special educational needs. The school maintains good contact with parents and keeps them well-supplied with information about students. In addition to the normal school parents' meetings, the Learning Centre offers separate opportunities for parents to visit and discuss progress.

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

81. The headteacher and senior management team provide very good leadership for the school. There is a clear emphasis on improving learning for students, based upon a good understanding of what constitutes good teaching. Senior staff are very aware of their responsibility to promote high standards of student attainment and to support middle managers and teaching staff in achieving targets for improvement. This strong commitment to high achievement is complemented by a desire to ensure appropriate personal development for all students. The widely shared Community Code expresses the desire to encourage all students to recognise that personal rights and freedoms are dependent upon the fulfilment of their responsibilities to the school and wider community. Students enjoy high quality relationships with each other and with their teachers, and access to a full range of educational opportunities because of the strong ethos of the school.
82. The headteacher has a clear understanding of what needs to be done to ensure continued improvement. A report from the headteacher to the governors in January 2000 summarised progress with developments across the full range of the school's activities. It set out a vision for the future development of the school over the next five years and identified milestones to inform development planning. Significant curriculum developments have been identified and are being continuously addressed, including the development of the curriculum at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form in line with national changes, and the development of literacy in all areas of the curriculum. Approaches to the monitoring and evaluation of teaching, learning and standards have evolved successfully, well supported by strong relationships between senior managers and subject departments within the school. A self-evaluation project has been implemented over the last two years which has provided all staff with a clearer understanding of strengths in learning and areas for development. New statutory performance management arrangements are being implemented effectively and a decision has wisely been made to ensure that key elements of the self-evaluation strategy are maintained and integrated. It is important that senior staff maintain a direct assessment of the quality of teaching to complement the new performance management arrangements.

83. Statutory targets for student performance have been set and, to date, partly exceeded. These targets are kept under review with officers of the LEA and revised appropriately in the light of success to date. The school's ability to set whole school targets is very well informed by developing processes for target setting for individuals and groups of students. Data is provided to all subject areas and individual teachers through a consultative process linking departments with senior managers. The review processes for evaluating achievement against these targets has been instrumental in improving teaching and learning in a number of subject areas. The confidence and accountability of middle managers, in many cases already strong, have improved as a result of their acceptance of increasing responsibility for standards of attainment. Form tutors are appropriately involved in monitoring and reviewing targets with individual students in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. Arrangements are in hand to extend this process to students in Years 7 to 9.
84. Governors have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. The governors' statutory responsibilities are fully met although there is a need to ensure greater consistency in the implementation of the daily act of collective worship. The governors' committee structure is used effectively to contribute to the development and monitoring of school policies, such as policies for sex education and performance management. Governors are well informed through visiting presentations by heads of departments and other senior staff. They make an important contribution to determining and supporting priorities in the school development plan, including the opportunity to express views about specific developments in subject areas. They are very well informed about the target setting process and how added value is assessed, enabling them to monitor critically the achievements of students.
85. The school's budget is very well managed on an annual cycle of planning and monitoring, supported by a longer term view from senior staff and governors which includes a rolling programme for refurbishment of accommodation. The budget is constructed on the basis of the curriculum needs of the school together with an appropriate contingency fund used, in part, to support current developments. Financial management is secure and the issues raised in the most recent auditor's report have been attended to. The governors and senior staff apply the principles of best value through their monitoring and evaluation of the school's achievements, making comparisons with similar schools and ensuring value for money comparisons in the use of resources.
86. The school's provision for students with special educational needs is very well managed. All the legal requirements are met, including the identification of a governor who takes responsibility for oversight of the provision, and a clear and comprehensive policy which is available for parents and with which staff are familiar. The recently-appointed special educational needs co-ordinator gives very good leadership to a large team of specialist teachers and learning support assistants, who meet the needs of students in the main school and in the Learning Centre. A comprehensive plan for the next five years has been drafted which offers a secure framework for the development of policies and practices for all students with special educational needs.
87. There is a good match between the number, qualifications and experience of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum. Few teachers are required to teach in curriculum areas outside their normal specialisms and, where this does occur, there is no detrimental effect on the quality of students' learning. The long-term absence of a music teacher was beginning to have an impact on the quality of provision for students. This has now been resolved. Teachers of special needs students are well qualified and experienced and good use is made of learning support assistants to support physically handicapped students who have a statement of special educational need. The provision and deployment of learning support assistants in a wider role, however, are limited. Excellent support staff in science and design and technology contribute significantly to the quality and effectiveness of students' learning. Two foreign language assistants are deployed effectively by teaching staff and form a valuable resource for the development of students' modern foreign language skills.
88. Staff training and professional development needs are well organised and well managed by a senior member of staff. The staff development committee has played a key role in the strategic planning of whole school development and how this can be supported by good staff development procedures. It continues to play a valuable part in the development of performance management procedures. Teachers new to the school, and newly qualified teachers, are given good support.
89. The school accommodation is of good quality and mostly in good decorative order. The premises



have been adapted to meet the needs of physically handicapped students. Lifts, ramps, modified toilets and medical facilities are sufficient to allow students in wheelchairs access to curriculum areas. Emergency evacuation chairs are provided at the top of each stair well. Facilities for teaching physical education are particularly good. The shared use of the community leisure centre enables the school to have access to a wide range of specialist facilities. There are sufficient general classrooms and specialist areas to teach the curriculum effectively but, in mathematics, science, history and geography, some rooms are too small for the number of students in teaching groups. The widespread distribution of teaching rooms for some subjects, and the use of some rooms for teaching more than one subject, results in teachers carrying books and resources from area to area. Inadequacies in the fabric of the building result in some classes in mathematics, geography and religious education experiencing noise distraction from neighbouring areas. The amount of specialist accommodation in music is inadequate when, on occasions, three classes are timetabled simultaneously. The accommodation and facilities of the designated Sixth Form Centre are of a high quality and make a significant contribution to the success of the sixth form.

90. The provision of resources to support the delivery of the curriculum is good. There are sufficient computers, associated peripheral equipment and software to meet National Curriculum requirements. These are well distributed throughout the building. Students in design and technology and in science have good access to computers but too few computers are available in English. There is no software available for use in geography and no computer aided manufacturing equipment in design and technology. The school has begun to use a computer integrated learning system to support the literacy development of students with special educational needs. Learning resources for art are excellent and strongly support the high standards in the wide range of courses offered. The provision of textbooks in geography and mathematics is sufficient to allow GCSE students to take copies home for individual use. In geography, however, books for Key Stage 3 students need updating. The use of resources in music is inadequate; there is good keyboard and ICT provision but these are only available to groups taught in the specialist area in which they are situated. The library and associated learning facilities are well used by students and well managed by a qualified and experienced librarian. The centre has good information technology facilities and a suitable range of general and subject specialist books to support the curriculum. The number and range of books for supporting multicultural understanding, however, are limited. The computer facilities in the Sixth Form Learning Resource Centre are used effectively.

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

91. The school has no major weaknesses. However, in order to maintain the momentum of continuous improvement the school should now:
- Maintain the rigour and perseverance of existing strategies to further improve attendance

(See paragraph 24)

- Review the structure of the curriculum for Years 7 to 9 with particular attention to:
  - Time allocations for history and geography
  - The relationship and overlap between religious education, social studies and personal and social education
  - The way in which a second language and social studies are introduced in Years 8 and 9

(See paragraphs 45, 46, 202)

- Review the time allocation for religious education in Years 10 and 11 in the light of the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus, and with a view to introducing an accredited short course

(See paragraphs 47, 202)

- Ensure that teaching strategies consistently take account of the range of individual attainment levels in many classes by:

- Providing resources and activities which are appropriate for students across the full range of attainment present
- Reviewing the amount and distribution of in-class learning support to assist students with special educational needs

(See paragraphs 31, 33, 41, 42, 87, 146,184)

- Adopt a whole school policy and curriculum for the teaching of basic skills, including numeracy across the curriculum

(See paragraphs 39, 147)

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	247
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	57

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
4%	25%	50%	20%	0.4%	0%	0%

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

### Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	1312	312
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	101	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	69	0
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	257	13

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	4

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	37
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	64

### Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	6.5%
National comparative data	8.7%

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.5%
National comparative data	1.1%

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	141	118	259

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	103	114	116
	Girls	93	80	77
	Total	196	194	193
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	75 (66)	74 (71)	74 (66)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	39 (24)	50 (43)	39 (30)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	109	118	101
	Girls	96	89	77
	Total	205	207	178
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	79 (73)	79 (79)	68 (65)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	38 (36)	49 (48)	32 (34)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	126	120	246

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	74	113	121
	Girls	85	111	116
	Total	159	224	237
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	65 (64)	91 (95)	96 (98)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	40 (41.5)
	National	38.4 (38)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	School	15	93.3
	National		N/a

### Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Male	Female	Total
		2000	54	85

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	16.1	20.0	18.5 (20)	1.0	3.1	2.3 (1.1)
National	17.7	18.6	18.2 (17.9)	2.6	2.9	2.7 (2.8)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	School	11	81.8
	National		82.5

### Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	0
Indian	3
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	2
White	1611
Any other minority ethnic group	5

### Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	68	2
Other minority ethnic groups	2	0

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

## Teachers and classes

### Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	93
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.2:1

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	19
Total aggregate hours worked per week	617

### Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78.5
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### Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	23.2
Key Stage 4	21.7

## Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	3,954,416
Total expenditure	3,997,319
Expenditure per pupil	2484
Balance brought forward from previous year	248,952
Balance carried forward to next year	206,049

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1629
Number of questionnaires returned	296

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	48	46	5	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	50	47	1	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	30	64	1	0	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	27	57	13	1	2
The teaching is good.	38	59	2	0	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	39	49	10	1	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	65	32	2	0	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	63	35	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	35	53	10	0	2
The school is well led and managed.	55	43	0	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	47	49	2	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	36	50	4	1	9

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

### **ENGLISH**

92. The 2000 GCSE results in English were much the same as results nationally for both average points and for the proportion of higher grades A\* to C. English literature results were well above the national average for both average points and for the proportion of higher grades A\* to C. Girls' results have been significantly higher than those of boys. Over the last three years, average points have remained stable. In 2000, results were much the same, although the number of students gaining A\* and A grades at English literature rose significantly.
93. In the Year 9 National Curriculum tests in 2000, results in English were well above the national average. Results were above the average for similar schools. Over the period 1998 to 2000 students' performance has been above the national average. In 2000, there was a further rise in the proportion of students gaining Level 5 or above in the National Curriculum tests.
94. In both A level English and English literature students' performance in 2000 was above the national average. In 2000 all candidates passed both the English and English literature examinations.
95. On entry to the school, students' attainment in English is above the standard expected nationally. The standards achieved by girls are generally higher than those achieved by boys. By the age of fourteen, standards in the work seen were above those expected. Students are capable speakers and listeners, and their responses to the texts they read are good. They make careful and astute analyses of plot and relationships in novels and plays, basing their judgements on what characters do and say. For example, after reading *Macbeth* Year 9 students were able to develop ideas for staging specific scenes. They write in a range of styles in a convincing and appealing manner. For example, Year 7 students were able to write effective descriptions based on the walking shot technique used in many film and television dramas. Handwriting is generally satisfactory. Most students are able to spell monosyllabic and common polysyllabic words accurately. In lessons there is a strong emphasis on the need to improve punctuation and spelling. By the age of fourteen, all students, including those with special needs, make good progress.
96. By the age of sixteen students achieve standards above those expected. Girls achieve higher standards than boys, much as they do nationally. Standards in speaking and listening are good. The majority of boys and girls listen attentively. They are keen to answer questions. Where students are well prepared for discussions, they can make sophisticated contributions and maintain discussion at a high level. In a well-planned lesson in Year 10, for example, students were encouraged to explore the construction of Carol Anne Duffy's poetry. In order to sequence and analyse *Valentine's Day* they completed a word association exercise before using their knowledge of technical language, metre and rhyme to complete a version of the poem. One group's understanding was clearly demonstrated by the comment "The poem's got metaphors... but it's a metaphor... an extended metaphor!"
97. By the age of sixteen reading standards are good. A majority of students are able to read aloud with confidence, fluency and expression. Lower attainers are encouraged to improve the quality of their reading aloud. During a shared reading and discussion of *The Six O' Clock News* Year 11 students showed an understanding of significant ideas and attitudes. They were able to refer to the text when explaining their views. For example, one girl explained, "The English stereotype the Scots. The Scots hate the English. The BBC delivers the news to a small group of people in the south east of England." Standards in writing are good. The writing by girls is generally of a higher standard than that of boys. Insufficient use is made of information and communications technology when drafting. Students write for a suitable range of purposes. They produce an interesting range of extended writing. Good oral work prior to writing often helps students to write more extensively. For example, in a Year 11 lesson a group preparing for their GCSE examination analysed the language, explained the planned impact and judged the effectiveness of key symbols, episodes and characters in *The Lord of the Flies*. A boy succinctly explained the significance of the conch: "When they respect it they have a chance. Once they ignore it they are lost!" Most students are able to improve the fluency and accuracy of their writing with re-drafting. Handwriting is generally good. Most students spell and punctuate accurately, well



supported by the fact that in lessons there is a strong emphasis on improving punctuation and spelling.

98. In the sixth form, the students studying A level English language produce a very good range of original work. They show a thorough knowledge of the theory of language and its development. They contribute to technical discussions about language with a fluent ease. For example, a Year 13 group were able to analyse, discuss and create text in a range of genres. Their analysis of style in a variety of texts is comprehensive and discerning. In A level English literature, students show good understanding of the techniques used by writers, social context and themes of classic novels, poetry and Shakespeare's plays. They build on the critical skills acquired in Key Stage 4. For example, Year 12 students were able to identify key methods used by John Donne to demonstrate an air of innocence at the beginning of *The Good Morrow*.
99. Throughout the school, well-targeted work, combined with high expectations of learning and behaviour, result in a majority of students making good progress. By the ages of fourteen and sixteen, the progress made by lower attainers and students with special educational needs is good. Students with English as an additional language progress at the same rate as other students.
100. The attitudes to learning of the majority of boys and girls are very good in each stage. Most students are very well motivated. Teachers' excellent management of behaviour encourages students to co-operate so that the behaviour of most students is excellent. By the age of sixteen the ability of students to work independently and take leading roles of their own accord is good.
101. Teaching is very good at each stage, and is often excellent. All of the teachers have an excellent knowledge of both language and literature. The majority of lessons are extremely well managed at each key stage. The overall effectiveness of teachers' planning is very good, particularly the planning for individual lessons and sequences of lessons. Teachers identify the learning targets for lessons and make them clear to the students. In a Year 8 lesson designed to consolidate students' understanding of *accent* and *dialect* the teacher made sure that learning targets were clear and that students appreciated the difference between these features of language. This resulted in students showing that they had a clear understanding. For example, one group defined *accent* as the sound of what you say and *dialect* as the words you use. There is very good use of constructive oral comments in lessons to help students to improve. The quality and use of day-to-day assessment is good for all groups. Homework is used very well. The stimulating range of experiences provided for students is one of the results of the good schemes of work developed at each stage.
102. Since the previous inspection there have been many major improvements. The overall standards achieved by students by the ages of fourteen and sixteen have risen. Attainment in Key Stage 3 national tests is well above the national average. Results in GCSE are above the national average. The proportion of students gaining grades at A to E at A level was one hundred per cent in 2000. The quality of teaching is now very good and often excellent. Procedures for monitoring both teaching and learning have been developed. The English department has raised standards by: continuing further to develop initiatives to raise the achievement of boys; putting greater emphasis on teaching the use of standard English vocabulary and grammar in writing; and developing the students confidence and skills to speak effectively in a wide range of situations.
103. Leadership and management in the department are very good. The subject is making a very significant contribution to the education of all students in the school. The head of department provides a clear sense of direction for colleagues by her example and through a number of key initiatives. For example, these include Successmaker sessions at lunchtime. The arrangements for monitoring teaching are effective. Documentation is comprehensive and focused. Schemes of work are well balanced and cover very well the National Curriculum and examination syllabuses. Resources for teaching, books in particular, are plentiful and well cared for. However, the lack of computers in the department for both students and staff and limited access to central information and communications technology resources is a weakness. This limits students' drafting experience. It restricts the development of the good practice seen, for example, in word-processed GCSE coursework. Accommodation for students at Key Stages 3 and 4 is good and enhanced by stimulating displays that are well organised and of good quality. Accommodation for sixth form students is very good.

## MATHEMATICS

104. The results in the national tests taken at the age of fourteen are above the national average and have been so for the last five years. The results match those gained in schools that have a similar intake of students. Boys perform slightly better than girls, they are further above the national average for boys than the girls are above the figure for girls. All the evidence gathered during this inspection indicates that this good standard is being maintained. At the highest levels expected of this age group, there is also some improvement. Students in a top set in Year 9 were able to derive complex formulae, based on Pythagorean triads, displaying a level of mental agility that should guarantee success in the highest level of test paper. Students in lower sets doing less difficult work show equally appropriate achievement. A small group of Year 9 students, many with special educational needs, gained a secure understanding of probability by a practical investigation using dice. They were able to write up their findings by drawing an accurate bar chart. Students enter the school with standards close to the national average. The improvement in standards evident by Year 9 is good achievement.
105. By the age of sixteen, the results in the GCSE examinations are well above the national averages and well above the results achieved in similar schools. In 2000, 62 per cent gained the higher grades (A\* to C) compared to 47 percent nationally. Observation of lessons and examination of students' books and test records confirmed the maintenance of this high standard. In 2000, only 12 out of the 246 students in the year failed to get a GCSE in mathematics. This figure is likely to be even smaller in 2001. All the students in the present Year 11 have successfully completed their coursework, finished the syllabus and are revising for the examinations in May. Again the performance of boys is notable. Nationally, girls outperform boys. In this school, both are well above their national figure, but boys do slightly better. The outstanding feature of students' mathematics is the competent and methodical way they approach problems and quickly recognise the correct techniques needed to find the solutions. For example, high attaining students revising factorisation had no difficulty spotting the need to consider the highest common factor when dealing with an expression including fractions. The rise in standards from Year 7 to Year 11 represents very good achievement and is equally evident in students of all attainment.
106. In the A Level courses taken at eighteen, results are above the national average and have been so over recent years. In 2000, 46 per cent of candidates gained an A or B grade compared to the national average for comprehensive schools of 40 per cent. When individual results are compared to performance at GCSE, most students exceed expectation. There is a very healthy uptake of A Level by both boys and girls and the subject is making a good contribution to the school's overall performance at this level. Each year, a small number of students successfully undertake the further mathematics course. Observation of lessons and examination of students' very complete records of work showed that these high standards are being maintained. The work in all the A Level lessons is set at the level required for an A grade and, given appropriate help where needed, students are successfully handling the problems set. Within the space of one lesson, Year 13 students virtually mastered the difficult technique of "iteration" as a method of solving equations. Students are very independent, happy to take responsibility for their own learning and well prepared for the demands of higher education.
107. The teaching of students of all ages and levels of attainment is very good. Of the lessons seen, none were less than satisfactory, 90 per cent were good or better and over half were very good or excellent. Teachers have very high expectations of their students and constantly challenge them with more difficult work. The degree of difficulty is very finely judged. This results in students who are not bored, are enthused by their obvious success and become confident learners. Students at this school are not frightened of mathematics and expect to be able to do it. When students in a high set in Year 10 found a particular problem on formulae difficult, they immediately alerted the teacher who quickly intervened and gave further guidance. All were able to continue and successfully complete the exercise. Students taking further mathematics work with the teacher in a tutorial context and are often able to take the lead in suggesting possible routes to the solution of complex problems.
108. Good classroom management and positive relationships with students arise naturally from the interesting and stimulating nature of the lessons. Students behave very well, concentrate and work hard. Low attaining students in Year 10 spent a very productive hour essentially revising their multiplication tables, because the work was presented in a new context and made interesting.

109. Students' work is constantly assessed, both during lessons and when done as homework. They are given very immediate knowledge of success or failure. When it is success, which it usually is, this positive feedback is very motivating. When there is error or lack of effort, teachers are skilled in helping students to understand the sources of the error and in persuading them to try harder.
110. Very imaginative teaching methods are helping low attaining students, including many with special educational needs, to succeed in learning mathematics. Students are in small groups and taught by teachers with a very good understanding of their problems. Lessons contain many short activities, there is good use of computers and a rich variety of practical work and games are used to make learning effective and enjoyable.
111. Occasionally, lesson planning is not sufficiently focused on the learning objectives. This can result in activities going on for too long, with a consequent loss of pace and interest, or an over-reliance on the teacher's energy to keep the lesson going. This is a relatively minor weakness, but if corrected would raise the standard of teaching to an even better level.
112. Teachers are aware of the problems that some students have because of weak literacy skills and try to help them overcome their difficulties. There is a need for training and an agreed policy to improve this aspect of teaching.
113. Information and computer technology (ICT) is used in mathematics lessons, but the extent to which the curriculum for all students can be enriched is limited by problems of access to the computer suites.
114. The accommodation is unsatisfactory and has a limiting effect on the progress of some students. Some of the classrooms are crowded by a full sized class, which leads to discomfort for students and the teacher. Several rooms have been adapted from larger spaces and have very poor soundproofing. The noise from ordinary classroom activities in neighbouring rooms can distract students seated near to the partition walls. The rooms used for mathematics are not located together. This makes it difficult for teachers to use the full range of equipment and learning resources. It also compromises the monitoring of teaching and the sharing of good practice.
115. The department is well managed by an experienced head of department, supported by loyal and dedicated colleagues. The department has made an energetic and successful response to the recent National Numeracy Strategy and significantly improved liaison with the local primary schools. Little criticism of mathematics was made at the last inspection, nevertheless improvement is evident. As a result of all teachers' shared commitment to the department, standards have risen and the quality of teaching is better.

## **SCIENCE**

116. By the age of fourteen attainment in science is well above the national average. There are no significant differences between the performance of girls and boys. This is confirmed in the lesson observations where the standards of work are good to very good. Students show a sound understanding of scientific facts. A good lesson on measuring speed allowed students to demonstrate numerical skills in handling results as well providing a student with physical disability an opportunity to take part enthusiastically in the work. The contribution of the learning assistant in this was of a high quality. Investigations are of a good standard with students working carefully and safely.
117. Standards by the age of sixteen, as indicated by GCSE results in double science, are above the national average. Observations indicate that students of all abilities are attaining levels which are at least satisfactory and often good or very good. Investigational work of a high quality is to be seen throughout. In Year 11 students designing an investigation into electrical resistance show good skills of measurement, data processing and graphing. Work on adaptation and competition allows students to introduce experiences from outside their lessons and discuss thoughtfully, contentious issues such as culling. In lessons on chemical reactions and weathering, students are able to demonstrate good practical skills and safe working practices.
118. Very good standards are achieved by lower attaining students following a programme based on the 'Science Plus' course which leads to a Certificate of Achievement. This has been imaginatively developed to allow students to enter for the GCSE single science award and achieve

good grades. This is seen as a strength of the department. An appropriate amount of teaching time aids the effectiveness of this work.

119. By the end of the sixth form standards are very good with students achieving high grades in all three major sciences. Their practical skills are of a high order and they are seen to produce project work, for example in bacteriology, at an excellent level.
120. The teaching in Years 7 to 11 is always of a good standard with many instances of very good practice. Planning is effective. Lessons are well matched to the needs and previous attainment of the students. In all cases there is good pace and work is appropriately matched to the ability of the students. Lesson objectives are clearly stated and applicable resources are available and used effectively. The teaching of lower attaining students is particularly good. The teaching at A level is of a high standard with staff exhibiting very good personal knowledge of the subjects and enthusiasm and commitment in their teaching.
121. Students in Years 7 to 9 have a good attitude to their studies, working enthusiastically and with purpose. Investigational work is popular and conducted in a calm and safe manner. The recent introduction of work concentrating on thinking skills (CASE materials) is intended to enhance both performance and enjoyment of practical work. In a lesson on making salts the students worked carefully and accurately to produce good results. In an environment with many potential hazards they behave in a responsible manner. A lower attaining pupil using a laptop computer for recording the work produced excellent results which in turn enhanced the enjoyment of the work. At sixth form level attitudes and behaviour are excellent with many articulate students responding in a mature and confident manner to the questions and tasks set.
122. The leadership and management of the department are of a high standard with all staff contributing to the development of excellent programmes of study. Student progress is effectively monitored, recorded and disseminated. Many enhancing opportunities are offered to students including field trips, liaison with higher education institutions, visiting speakers and 'Egg Race' activities. Links with local primary schools are very good. Staff qualifications and experience are well matched to the needs of the subject, accommodation is appropriate, and the hard work and effectiveness of the technical assistants adds greatly to the quality and effectiveness of the teaching and learning.
123. Since the previous inspection attainment in science, at all levels, has continued to improve. The quality of teaching and learning demonstrates progress and there are no weaknesses in the use of mathematics and graphs. Information and communications technology activities are being developed, with further improvements planned. This is a very good department with no weaknesses and many commendable features.

## **ART AND DESIGN**

124. Standards in art and design seen during the inspection show that students' attainment by the age of fourteen is above the standard expected nationally. This is reflected in the teacher assessments in 2000, which show that a significant number are achieving at above the national average. Students demonstrate a high level of knowledge and skills and understanding. They understand concepts and processes and apply technical skills very competently and have a sound knowledge of art and artists. Observational and drawing skills are well developed across all abilities. Year 9 students demonstrated a clear understanding of line and proportion when producing good quality drawings of sweets to develop into a composition based on Pop Art. They confidently discussed the work of Lichtenstein and gave informed opinions of why they liked or disliked his work. Levels of achievement are good; students of all abilities are producing work that is often above expectations.
125. Standards at the age of sixteen are overall well above the national average. Students have a very well developed understanding of different forms of visual expression and confidently use a wide range of materials to express creative ideas. In textiles and three-dimensional work, higher attainers are producing highly innovative exciting work of an exceptional standard, which is a direct result of the stimulating teaching at this level. Independent study skills are well developed and are evident in the good quality studies of artists and cultures. For example Year 11 students produced excellent results in ceramics after researching the work of artists such as Munch and using his painting of *The Scream* as inspiration. GCSE results have continued to rise over the last

four years. In 2000 results were well above the national average with 83% of students gaining GCSE grades A\*-C. The results in the endorsed courses of Painting and Drawing and Textiles were excellent with 90 per cent and above gaining the higher grades. The achievement of girls is above the national average and the achievement of boys is well above.

126. In the sixth form, students following the GCE A level course are working at well above the national average. Students work with a high degree of individuality and show in depth analysis and exploration of ideas and style. Work is frequently large scale and some students' painting is of exceptional quality. Studies of facial expressions show a high level of conceptual and personal response and students can articulately discuss their work and intentions. A significant number of students have been selected to further their studies on educational visits abroad, which acts to further raise standards in the department. At GNVQ, students are achieving at above the national average. They experiment with and manipulate a range of two and three-dimensional materials to produce exciting good quality bodices and hats based on the work of artists and fashion designers such as Vivienne Westwood. In 2000 the number of students gaining GCE A level grades A-B was 53 per cent which is well above the national average. A third of the students gained a grade A. All students entered gained grades A-E. The entry at GNVQ advanced was small but all students were awarded merit.
127. The level of achievement of most students in Year 7 to 9 is good with students of all abilities making good progress in lessons and over time. There is no significant difference between boys and girls. They arrive in Year 7 with attainment overall in line with the national average and by Year 9 most are achieving at levels above the national standard. They learn quickly because the quality of teaching is predominantly good. Lower attaining students in Year 7 improved their understanding of proportion and made good progress when encouraged to re-work their drawing to a higher standard. Over the key stage, the structured course gives students a sound understanding of the formal elements and introduces them to a wide range of techniques. Students increasing knowledge of artists and their styles helps them to abstract ideas into three-dimensional projects. For example students in Year 8 used features from Renaissance paintings as an influence for the surface decoration of triptych frames. The work at Key Stage 3 provides a firm foundation for Key Stage 4 where students make rapid progress. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is very good, students are encouraged to take a more active part in their learning and study past and contemporary art whilst developing their own style. Higher attainers make rapid gains in the understanding of techniques, which culminates in excellent results. All abilities gain the confidence to channel their strengths into successful outcomes. The quality of learning within the sixth form is very good. Students make very good progress over the two years and quickly take on the challenge of individual study and interpretation. Their work shows a growing depth of understanding and sophistication in concepts and the handling of a wide range of media.
128. Attitudes and behaviour are good at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4. Students respond very well to the effective teaching, enjoy art and design and are keen to learn and this contributes significantly to the progress and achievement in all years. There is a very positive working atmosphere in lessons, which supports learning and leads to high levels of achievement. This is linked to the high standards of behaviour and encouraged and expected within the department. Students arrive promptly at lessons, settle quickly, listen attentively to instructions and participate in discussion using appropriate vocabulary. The large number of students attending the art clubs held by the department demonstrates the high level of enthusiasm for this subject. Art and design is a very popular subject choice in options and the take up for examination courses is high. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, students are highly motivated and respond very well to the challenges of the projects presented. A high degree of pride is shown, with folders and sketchbooks reflecting a wide range of stimulus, which has been researched and recorded in their own time. The quality of work completed reflects a high level of commitment. For example A level students attend life classes at the local college which has further raised their standards of work. Students are confident in themselves as artists and what they can achieve and a significant number go on to study the subject at degree level.
129. The overall quality of teaching is predominantly good at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Teachers have a good relationship based on mutual respect and the high expectations demanded across the age range create an excellent learning ethos. In a Year 7 lesson, students successfully used two-point perspective when enlarging quite complex drawings to A1 size. Projects are well planned, using interesting resources linked to artists and cultures. This ensures that students experience a range of approaches and make good progress in

developing their knowledge and technical skills. Specialised vocabulary is built into projects and teachers enforce it when introducing lessons and recapping over previous work. Higher attaining students respond well to difficult questions and those of lower attainment are given good support and encouragement to answer confidently. Teachers give good evaluation and assessment in their dialogue with students at Key Stage 3 and a marking policy is in place. However, students would have a clearer understanding of the level they were working at, if it was linked to National Curriculum levels and an effort grade was given separately to that of attainment. The quality of lessons include a range of enjoyable and challenging activities for all levels of attainment and teachers channel the strengths of students into areas of success. For example, special educational needs students in Year 11 produced work of a good level, when experimenting with a range of unusual and varied materials in textiles. In the very best lessons, teachers give very clear explanations, demonstrate have a brisk pace and build in an element of humour to maintain the students' interest. Students are encouraged to use ICT to research and extend work at Key Stage 4 but this is less well developed at Key Stage 3. Teachers have a very good command of the subject and the specialisms they teach, and this is reflected in the high level of attainment in the endorsed courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. A major strength of the sixth form is the emphasis given to individual thought and learning. The high quality of individual attention and knowledgeable advice plays an important role in raising standards. For example, the very good quality of the teacher's advice gave a pupil very clear direction on the use of Futurism, with specific references to the work of Boccioni. Students are treated as individual artists and very well supported.

130. This is a very good department. The head of department provides excellent leadership with a very clear vision of the departments aims, which have been enhanced by his involvement with national agencies in curriculum developments. A very good range of opportunities is offered and the well planned use of curriculum time, with the schools support of the subject, allows the teachers specialisms within the department to be put to very good use. The teachers show a high degree of commitment, are dedicated to raising standards and have contributed strongly to the many initiatives that the department has been involved in. This is reflected in the very high profile of the subject within the school, locally and nationally. The recommendation from the last inspection, that documentation be reviewed, has been addressed. Effective links with feeder schools strongly support progression from Key Stage 2. The involvement of the students in a range of projects, such as working with artists in residence and exhibiting exceptional work on a regular basis in a range of galleries is a significant factor in raising achievement. The excellent quality of display in classrooms and areas of the school strongly contributes to the ethos of the subject and acts as an inspiration to students. Art is a strength of this school.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

131. GCSE results for National Curriculum technology subjects as a whole were above average in 2000. 55.5 per cent of students gained A\* to C grades against a national average of 50.1 per cent. This is an improvement since the last report when results were reported as below average. When each subject component is considered separately, food technology and graphic products results were above average. Electronic products and resistant materials results were below, but close to, the average. Graphic products and resistant materials results have risen over the last three years. Electronic products results have declined and food technology results have been consistent over the same period. Comparative figures show that students achieve less well in technology than in many of their other GCSE entries. Results for the child development option course were above average in 2000. For those students in food technology who are not entered for the GCSE examination, a Certificate of Achievement award has been a valuable accreditation. A level results in 2000 were lower than the previous two years and yielded an average points score of less than the national average.
132. Attainment for students aged 14 measured by teacher assessment is below average, but inspection evidence from lessons and work seen is that, by the end of the key stage, students' attainment is average. Some higher attaining students reach higher standards than this. For example, Year 9 students in textiles have a good standard of practical skill with hand and machine stitching. They use good research skills to gather information, analyse results, draw conclusions, and present the information in an organised way when designing cushion covers. In general, however, students do not use two and three-dimensional drawings with enough precision and accuracy to record and develop ideas. For example, Year 9 students were not able to show

clearly how the mechanism for their mechanical toy would work because they had insufficient guidance on how to represent the movement on paper. Many students rely on information from textbooks and magazines as their only research sources. Where information from the Internet and CD-ROM is used, it is sometimes included in project folders without editing.

133. Based on inspection evidence attainment for students aged 16 is average. Students are able to use a wider variety of research techniques and gather information from first hand sources but for many students good research is not always supported by a good standard of hand drawn graphics. For example, Year 11 students in resistant materials undertake ambitious GCSE projects and most follow a good design methodology but, with the exception of a few higher ability students, their graphic skills are not well developed. Year 11 students in one resistant materials lesson did not have their design and development work available as they carried out practical work. They were unable to explain clearly how the project would develop, indicating a lack of thorough planning. Practical standards were low, tools and constructional techniques used inappropriately, and students worked without care and accuracy. Students in a Year 11 child development lesson were able to show through questions to visiting speakers that they had a good understanding of the physical and emotional processes surrounding childbirth and that they could identify the various reflex tests carried out by the midwife. Students of all abilities were able to make good independent notes during the lesson.
134. Attainment for current sixth form students is better in Year 13 than in Year 12. The larger group size enables a wide range of project work and sharing of ideas. One higher achieving student is able to use very good sketching skills in a skilful way to create a visual notebook of his developing ideas. His research and analysis skills are extensive. Graphic and practical standards within the group are variable. Most students follow a good design methodology but lack flair in their graphic work. Year 12 students are developing competent design skills.
135. Achievement is good at all key stages. Higher attaining students achieve well and make good progress. For example, students in a higher attaining resistant materials group developed a better understanding of how movement could be transmitted by modelling mechanisms in card and developed good investigative skills as they carried out the task. A lack of varied teaching materials resulted in only satisfactory progress for some lower attaining students in some mixed-ability groups. Support for students with statements of special need is good and they make good progress.
136. Students enjoy work in technology subjects and this, together with the good working relationships which teachers have established, contributes to the generally positive attitudes seen in most lessons. Behaviour is good and students are willing to discuss their work and act on advice. Students co-operate well with each other and with teachers when sharing equipment and performing routine tasks. Sixth form students work independently, using teachers in a consultative role and discussing their work in a mature way.
137. The quality of teaching is good at all key stages. In two thirds of lessons seen teaching was good or very good, the remainder satisfactory. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Teachers are knowledgeable and experienced. They use good management skills to organise complex activities in practical work areas. Lessons are well planned and are well structured to provide a good framework for learning. Lesson objectives are clearly explained and students have a clear understanding of what is expected of them as they undertake individual work. In the most successful lessons seen, students were given clear lesson objectives, regular checks on progress and an overall review of the lesson to reinforce the learning process. Teachers provide good support for the development of students' literacy skills through the use of technical vocabulary. Information and communications technology is integrated into project work at appropriate stages of a design project and students are beginning to make good use of computers as an additional tool to improve their work. Where teaching was only satisfactory it was usually because students were not provided with work at a level appropriate to their ability, a lack of confidence in delivering the lesson or over-long introductory explanations. Much benefit has been gained from teachers observing each other teach, identifying good practice and promoting a variety of teaching styles. Less experienced members of staff have been given good support.
138. The leadership and management of the department are good. Since the appointment of the present co-ordinator the subject area has been drawn together as a more coherent whole. Subject documentation is detailed and the development plan contains a clear direction for development. Good assessment procedures are in place which include the opportunity for

students to be involved in their own assessment. The use of National Curriculum levels in day-to-day assessment means that students are aware of the level they are working at and of what they need to do to make progress. Students in the sixth form are given detailed written and verbal comments on their work which form a good basis for individual target setting. The school has chosen to deliver the Key Stage 4 National Curriculum technology requirement to some students through Art and Design endorsed courses in textiles and graphics. These courses have been carefully structured to meet requirements and checks are made to ensure that all students receive their entitlement. Students receive a broad and balanced technology experience which includes opportunities to use computer aided design but, as yet, there is no opportunity for them to work with computer aided manufacturing equipment. A child development course is a valuable option at Key Stage 4. A wide range of extra-curricular activities provides further enrichment and many students take the opportunity to gain an additional qualification through the food hygiene course run on a voluntary basis by teachers. The department has good resources and accommodation but the widespread location of rooms adds to the difficulties of managing them efficiently. Very good technician support, particularly with the use of information and communications technology, enriches the learning opportunities for students.

139. Since the last inspection the key issue of providing technology for all students at Key Stage 4 has been addressed, overall GCSE results have improved, information and communications technology has been thoroughly integrated into project work and there are better opportunities for computer aided design. The requirement to provide computer aided manufacturing opportunities still needs to be fulfilled.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

140. By the age of fourteen in 2001, the scrutiny of exercise books and the inspection of lessons indicate that attainment is good. The highest attaining students work at well above the national average; those with average prior attainment are working at and above the national average and those with low prior attainment are achieving in line with expectations. Students in the Learning Centre learn well in a secure environment.
141. In Year 11, attainment in class in 2001 is at the national average, but not as good as in previous years. Students preparing for their examination in geographical decision making lack confidence in using what they know to answer questions. Attainment is better in Year 10 where students learn the land forms of river valleys and their land use patterns. Very good assessment has been used to identify students' potential and set realistic targets for each group.



142. At GCSE, attainment has improved since the last inspection: in 2000 it is very good with 78 per cent reaching A\*-C and twice the national average gaining the highest grades of A\* and A. Students do better in geography than in most of their other subjects and make better progress than in 75 per cent of schools nationally. Girls have maintained this high standard for the last three years but there was a steep drop in the attainment of boys in 1999 that was efficiently corrected the following year by well-planned strategies.
143. Attainment in class in the sixth form is good and often very good. In class, Year 13 students engage in a learning dialogue with their teacher about the management of coastal land forms that stimulates thought at pace. Year 13 students have already gained grade A in their first module and at A/S Level twelve of fifteen students match or better their target grades in their first module; nine attain the highest grades of A or B. They competently analyse theoretical mathematical models of urban development and apply them well to the structure of real cities, learning the strengths and weaknesses of theoretical approaches.
144. Attainment at A Level over the last three years meets the requirements of the examination board with average points scores being consistently half a grade to a grade above the national average. Numbers are too low to make other comparisons but students add good value to their prior attainment and good numbers follow their study of geography or related topics to university.
145. Teaching and learning are always at least satisfactory, and good in the majority of lessons. The quality of teaching is very good in 10% of lessons. The best teaching is to the sixth form and then at GCSE. The widest range of teaching is in Years 7 to 9. Teachers are effective, efficient and professional with good subject knowledge which influences the way they organise their lessons and materials and deliver explanations. Where teaching is very good, very good subject knowledge is an influential factor that helps students gain complex knowledge and understanding, as for example in a top Year 8 set where students very quickly grasped the notion of sustainable development in tropical rain forests. They are also skilled at teaching examination technique because, in 2000, GCSE classes improved their performance by between half a grade and a grade and a half over the course. Sixth form students add similar value. Exercise books show that GCSE students are being well supported to pass the examination. Consequently students make good progress across the school from average attainment on entry.
146. The range of teaching styles is narrow: learning is driven strongly from the front at pace by the use of teacher's voice. Video is well used in a visual subject to provoke, for example, deep reactions from a set of lower attaining students watching a clip about an Indian tribe in a tropical rain forest. What is learned is often firmly controlled, particularly in the lower school and occasionally the quicker learners are held up whilst waiting for the slower ones to finish. Where work is prepared to suit the level of individual students and where open-ended tasks are given then students work well at their own level and pace. Those physically handicapped students with statements of educational need are very well supported to attain in class, but there is insufficient in-class support for the lower attaining students at Key Stage 3.
147. The department is making a good contribution to the development of literacy skills but does not yet plan its contribution thoroughly after Year 7. Similarly, the use of number is frequent in geography and because students are generally competent at arithmetic, this helps their learning of geography. But this is not yet planned to help consolidate and extend the students' use of number. Even though students have sound basic skills at the use of computers, they do not all receive after Year 7 a piece of work taught through the use of information technology. Similarly, whilst the quality of course work is good at GCSE, and mostly very good at sixth form, there is no fieldwork after Year 7 in the lower school. These last two were weaknesses at the last inspection. There is an opportunity to remedy them during the review of Key Stage 3 curriculum which is now underway in the department.
148. There is clear evidence in good displays celebrating students' work that students are expected to research topics and find out for themselves in the lower school. The department's planned venture into the development of thinking skills within the teaching style of the department in the lower school is expected to extend this style of teaching and learning as well as involving students more actively in other parts of their learning so that they can apply even more intellectual energy.
149. Teachers' expectations of students' work and behaviour are high and are mostly matched by the students' expectations to be well taught. There is therefore an agreed identity of interest and very good relationships between teachers and students aid the progress of learning. Relationships in

the sixth form are particularly good. Most students talk at length in response to good, well-spread open questions; they are willing to speculate and are unafraid to be wrong.

150. The use of assessment at GCSE and in the sixth form to identify attainment, support individuals and to inform planning is exemplary. The system employed in Years 7 to 9 is not as sharp.
151. Homework is well set and marked and homework planners used to record what is expected. Books are marked regularly and returned; students understand what the marks mean.
152. The department is well led from within the team so that the best is brought out of individual teachers, some of whom carry heavy responsibility in other parts of the school: this does not prevent them from making a full contribution to the department. Accommodation is adequate, as are resources for learning, but there is no satellite weather station and no up-to-date computer software. Some atlases are out of date and Key Stage 3 textbooks are not the most up-to-date available.

## HISTORY

153. The results in the 1999 GCSE examination were above the national average and close to the average for other subjects in the school. In 2000 the percentage of students gaining GCSE higher grades of A\* - C continued the overall improvement that has been taking place since 1997.
154. Results at Advanced Level also show a continuing improvement with the percentage of students gaining A - C in 2000 rising to 75%, an increase of 30% on the previous year.
155. Attainment at the end of Year 9 is good and students show good progress against their previous attainment. Levels of literacy are good overall although there are occasions when the need for further improvement in literacy skills does effect the work of some students. Year 7 students show the ability to use art and craft in their understanding of history through their creation of model castles, weapons and other artefacts such as a copy of the Magna Carta. All students have a good grasp of chronology and understand the order of events. Up to the age of 14 higher attaining students use a good range of writing styles, such as letters or the recreation of diaries, and do so with flair and imagination. All students of this age can produce extended pieces of writing, such as the Study of the North American Tribes, which show an insight and understanding of their topic. This ability to empathise with historical events is well developed and students show a clear understanding of such diverse topics as the trial of Charles 1<sup>st</sup> or the reasons for inflation in the 1920's Germany.
156. Attainment by the end of Year 11 is also good and students make good progress. Students in Years 10 and 11 have a good understanding of the topics studied with Year 11 students having a good understanding of cause and effect as demonstrated by their ability to discuss the causes and consequences of the Cuban Missile Crises. This is also illustrated by the cogent arguments put forward in their long essays on first world war military strategy in which students used a wide range of source material, including the Internet, to form and explain their opinions. However, there remain some students who, although their understanding of history is good, their written work still continues to lack a clear structure.
157. By Year 13 students are handling source material with confidence. Students have the ability to analyse events and characters, such Napoleon's military leadership or changes in the role of women, and produce clear and well argued conclusions. Students are well prepared for their examinations.
158. Overall, teaching is good. It was good or very good in 90% of the lessons observed. and in these lessons the level of students' learning was good. In all other lessons observed the teaching and learning were satisfactory. Teachers have a very good understanding of their subject which enables them to plan the use of a range of interesting activities. The strength of the relationships with students is a major factor in maintaining their attention and ensuring they approach work with confidence. Questioning is often used well to test students' understanding of previous lessons and, for older students and sixth form students, to encourage discussion. The display of key word lists and the production of a pamphlet to help Year 11 students enable students to develop a good working vocabulary of historical terms. Writing frames are used extensively for younger students and this enables lower attaining students to make good progress. Tasks are challenging, but the

very effective use of resources such as cartoons, pictures and videos enable students of all abilities to rise to the challenges. Students have a positive attitude to learning and show the ability to concentrate well. Students work well together and develop the skills of working independently.

159. Students' learning is further enhanced by attractive and informative wall displays. Students take great pleasure in the display of their own work which contain such diverse items as model castles, pamphlets giving advice against air raids and propaganda posters from the second world war. Although use is made of computers the size of some of the classes does inhibit their wider use. The department has a well structured assessment policy. When used appropriately this gives a clear view of the students' progress and provides them with advice by which their work could be improved. There are some inconsistencies in the use of and approach to the marking of students' work and there is a need to ensure that the marking policy is followed by all staff. The department is managed well and good progress has been made in identifying areas which will improve students' attainment. There is a need, however, to implement systematic monitoring of students' work to enhance standards further.
160. The management and leadership of the department are good. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. The standard of teaching has improved and this, combined with clear management and the development of resources, has improved the learning of students. The placing of students into ability sets has enabled lower attaining students to make good progress.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

161. Attainment at GCSE in information technology is well above the national average for A\* to C grades and above the school average for A\* to C grades. Attainment in information and computer technology (ICT) at age fourteen is above average. At Key Stage 3 all students have discrete ICT lessons. The scheme of work is challenging and enables them to make good progress. In a Year 7 class students were making good use of a range of software functions to produce effective newspaper pages. In Year 9 spreadsheet models were created to calculate quantities needed for building work. By age 16 most students have made good, and in some cases, very good progress in discrete ICT lessons which continue to be available for all. They are able to talk with confidence about their use of software and make appropriate choices to cope with the challenging asks which are set. Spreadsheets include conditional functions and Web sites are designed for specific audiences, with the more ambitious students able to include some animation. The "Success maker" initial learning system is used well in both Key Stages 3 and 4, to help students with special educational needs to make good progress with their numeracy and literacy skills. In the sixth form all students have opportunities to develop their ICT skills, attainment overall is good. On a recently implemented A level course, students have achieved a very good standard and are able to demonstrate a detailed understanding of higher level skills, which they are able to put to good use in practical applications.
162. In all years, students have a very positive attitude to their ICT work. They are attentive, maintaining a high level of concentration throughout lessons. Those on the GCSE course are able to offer detailed answers and comments while maintaining a brisk pace in their practical work. All students adopt a mature approach to collaborative tasks and are very willing to share ICT skills and knowledge. Sixth form volunteers provide valuable support in ICT lessons for younger students.

163. Teaching is good, and often very good at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4 teaching is very good, and some excellent teaching was seen in the sixth form. Schemes of work are detailed and provide for progression throughout the school in discrete ICT lessons. Resources are well produced and differentiated. Good classroom management, and the supportive working environment which is engendered, enables a brisk pace to be maintained in most lessons. When students are working at computers teachers provide good support and guidance. Work which is printed or completed for homework is regularly marked.
164. This area of the curriculum is very well led and managed. Equipment is very well maintained and supported, making it very reliable. Access to the Internet is available in most areas of the school where it is used well for research but not yet for e-mail. The curriculum has been audited and ICT is used well to enhance learning in many subjects, where students are able to use the good level of skills and knowledge which have been developed in ICT lessons. Response to the last inspection report has been good. However, there are still some subject areas, which could profitably exploit ICT to a greater extent, and the number of computers has slipped below the average for a school of this size.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

165. Standards in French at the end of Year 9 were in line with the national average in 2000. Over one half of all students reached the expected level and almost one third exceeded it.
166. In 2000, the percentage of candidates who gained A\* to C grades in GCSE German was well above the national average. All candidates gained at least a grade G. In French, the percentage of candidates who gained A\* to C grades was close to the national average and the percentage who gained A\* to G grades was above the national average. The percentage of candidates who gained A\* and A grades matched the national average in both French and German. Girls performed significantly better than boys in French. The GCSE results in 2000 indicate continued improvement in German, but the results in French were lower than in previous years. Results in A level examinations match expectations. Those in German are better than those in French.
167. Standards of work seen in Key Stage 3 lessons are satisfactory. Most students are able to take part in simple, structured conversations on well-rehearsed topics. Higher attaining students are beginning to use their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary to adapt language models to suit their own individual needs. Pronunciation is at least intelligible and often good. During the lessons observed, there was little evidence of independent use of the foreign language for real, communicative purposes. Students with special educational needs make good progress and can take part in tightly controlled exchanges which require short, simple responses. They copy words and short phrases correctly.
168. In Key Stage 4 lessons, standards of work are above national expectations. Higher attaining students develop the ability to write some extended passages and use an appropriate variety of past tenses. They develop a wide vocabulary. Oral skills within structured role plays are good, but all students demonstrate a lack of confidence when they are required to speak independently. Responses rarely go beyond the minimum demanded. The foreign language is not used routinely in the classroom for everyday transactions. Students with special educational needs make good progress. They can take part in short, rehearsed exchanges with one another using cues or prompts to help them.
169. In the sixth form, standards match the expectations of the course that students are following in French. Standards in German are good. Students develop the ability to engage in extended conversations on impersonal topics and to cope with increasingly complex and idiomatic language. Independent learning is evident in the students' research of coursework topics on the Internet and through their use of foreign radio and television broadcasts.
170. The quality of teaching throughout the school is good. Since the last inspection, aspects of teaching such as the use of the foreign language by the teacher and undue reliance on the course book have improved. Unsatisfactory teaching was observed in only one lesson, where relationships were insecure and the tasks set for the students did not match their needs. In two thirds of lessons, the quality of teaching is good or better, including some that is excellent. The planning of lessons is very good. Clear objectives are explained to students at the beginning of each lesson and reviewed at the end. Teachers provide a variety of appropriate activities to enable

learners to develop their skills. There is a lively pace to most lessons, which contributes to the enthusiastic response of students and sustains their interest. Very good use is made of the foreign language assistants with students throughout the ability range and helps them to make good progress. Extensive use of the foreign language by the teacher sets an appropriate challenge to listening skills. Not enough insistence is made on making students use the foreign language for real purposes. The provision of opportunities for independent talk is limited, and consequently most students do not develop their oral skills as well as they could.

171. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The dynamic and energetic head of department leads by example, and she has developed with her colleagues a clear focus on, and a shared commitment to, the raising of achievement. Documentation is good. The procedures for monitoring and reviewing students' achievement in Key Stage 4 are very effective in encouraging students to become aware of what they need to do in order to improve. The development in Key Stage 3 of procedures that set clear targets for individual students would have a beneficial impact upon standards. Further development of a formal programme to monitor all the teaching in the department would lead to more effective dissemination of good classroom practice throughout a large department.

## **MUSIC**

172. By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment in music is in line with national expectations for students of a similar age. At Key Stage 4, standards are generally in line with, or better than those expected of, students of a similar age, and from similar schools. GCSE results, for 2000, indicate that 60% of students achieved A\*-C grades which is a little below the national average for music, but results for the previous two years were well above the national average.
173. Standards, post-16, are in line with those expected of students of a similar age. Here again, the results, over the past few years, have been variable, with few students entered for the A level music examination, but there is currently an increase in numbers, as students are attracted to the music technology examination. Standards, in the instrumental lesson observed, are in line with those expected from students of a similar age and length of time learning. Standards achieved in extra-curricular activities are good. There is no significant variation in the standards achieved by girls and boys or by those students with special educational needs.
174. At Key Stage 3, students demonstrate a sound knowledge of musical terms, forms and features, for example of ostinato, blues and dynamics. Composition, improvisation and performance work centres mainly on the use of keyboards and classroom percussion instruments. Listening is essentially a whole class activity that is determined by the nature of the available accommodation. Students perform with limited technique and their composing and improvising skills are often underdeveloped. There is very little classroom vocal work.
175. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, students apply their knowledge, skills and understanding in practical activities that integrate performing, composing and appraising. Good relationships are developed between teachers and students. This results in a conscientious approach from students to their work. The higher attaining students are developing the ability to hear the sounds that they are notating. Students, in the sixth form, make good use of ICT to support their learning.
176. The majority of students, in Key Stage 3, work hard in lessons although collaboration is sometimes inhibited by the lack of opportunity for small group work. Students are familiar with keyboards and a limited range of classroom percussion instruments, but have little access to musical sound sources from other cultures. Most students persevere with tasks, involving improvising, composing and instrumental performing. A minority, usually boys, find difficulty in remaining on task for practical activities and, occasionally, their attitude to learning has a detrimental effect on class progress. In Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, students demonstrate a positive attitude to their work and are able to help one another with study tasks. Many play a full part in the musical life of the school. Students' attitudes and values at Key Stage 4, and in the sixth form, are often in contrast to the earlier key stage.
177. Music is well taught by hard-working and committed teachers. Schemes of work need revision to take account of Curriculum 2000, as do the procedures for the assessment of students at Key Stage 3. The subject is well managed and the work of visiting instrumental teachers supports the curriculum aims of the department.

178. All teachers have secure knowledge of their subject, but lesson objectives should be made clearer to students, especially at Key Stage 3. Rapport with students is generally good and occasional instances of poor discipline, usually in Key Stage 3, rarely impede the progress of the lesson to a significant extent. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall.
179. Some teaching in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form has a positive impact on the students' learning. Here, the strengths of the teaching lie in the quality of planning, in the challenge of work, some of which inspires students, and in high musical expectations. Students enjoy their lessons, have positive attitudes, show initiative and take responsibility for their work.
180. There is insufficient teaching space when three Key Stage 3 classes are timetabled to take place concurrently, or for instrumental teachers, if more than one is present at any given time. In lessons, students have good access to keyboards in one teaching room, but access to music information technology is somewhat restricted.
181. Instrumental tuition is available at the school and some 10% of the school population receive lessons. These are provided by teachers engaged by the school, and students usually pay for their lessons. The number of students learning instruments at school, although in line with the national average, is smaller than may be expected for the school.
182. A comparatively small number of students is involved in the regular extra-curricular activities which include keyboard club, choirs, junior band and senior band. During rehearsals of the concert band, students worked on music that afforded them an appropriate challenge. The commitment demonstrated by staff and students to such activities is commendable.
183. There has been no significant improvement since the last inspection in the standards achieved at Key Stage 3, in the challenge and rigour of some teaching and in the behaviour of a minority of students. In order to improve, schemes of work for Key Stage 3 should be developed alongside appropriate modes of assessment. The department should also give consideration to the layout of the available accommodation for teaching and rehearsal purposes and, through development planning, set budgets which, over time, will enable a significant improvement in resources to be effected. In Key Stage 3 particularly, attention should be given to vocal work and to developing more differentiated performing and composing tasks, to ensure that all students maximise the benefit of such work.
184. The priorities for improvement are to promote higher standards at Key Stage 3 by providing greater challenge for students, by ensuring an appropriate match of work to the students' abilities and by implementing more effective behaviour management procedures.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

185. Standards in physical education are above average overall and represent good achievement and progress. Students' positive attitudes combine with good teaching to ensure that both boys and girls learn effectively and make good progress as they move through the school.
186. Results in GCSE physical education have fluctuated over the past three years. In 1998 they were below average, and improved to above average in 1999. The most recent results in 2000 were in line with the national average, with both boys and girls achieving similar standards. In previous years, girls had attained more highly than boys. The course is a popular option, and students achieve well in this examination, with results which are similar to those gained in their other subjects.
187. A level physical education has been successfully introduced and has also proved to be very popular with students. In 2000, the results of the first group to take the examination were above average. All 13 students were successful, with three gaining the higher A/B grades; a very creditable initial outcome.
188. In work seen during the inspection, standards in Years 7 to 9 are above average. By the age of 14, more students than usual are reaching expected standards in their activities, including students with special educational needs. In badminton, Year 7 students perform enthusiastically, with good foundation skills and a secure understanding of the principles of play. Standards in

gymnastics are above average and, in Year 7, girls of all levels of attainment show good control and body tension as they perform individual and partner sequences of movement, with effective skills of observation and analysis as they evaluate their work. Standards in swimming are above average. Almost all boys and girls in Year 7 are able to swim 25 metres. The higher attaining students show effective front and back crawl stroke technique, whilst those with lower attainment apply themselves well to improving their body position and leg action.

189. By the age of 16, standards in physical education are average. Most students have a sound understanding of the effects of exercise on the body and know how to prepare themselves for exercise. They show secure basic techniques in trampolining with a developing awareness of mechanical principles and safety requirements. In Year 10 badminton, both boys and girls perform skilfully with good racket control and footwork, and are able to apply their skills well in strategic play. For those taking the GCSE course, standards are generally average, although practical work is above average. Most students in Year 11 have an understanding of the principles of training and exercise programmes, and are able to accurately describe the differences between the three basic energy systems.
190. By the age of 18, standards in the A level physical education course are above average, and students demonstrate secure knowledge and understanding, particularly in anatomy and physiology, and psychology, although some are less secure with biomechanics.
191. Students, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in physical education, particularly in Years 7 to 9 and in the sixth form. Learning skills are good, and students are co-operative and very well behaved in lessons. Many are enthusiastic and have very positive levels of interest in the subject, although non-participation by a small number of boys in Year 11 is cause for concern. For most students, however, their commitment and effort are good. The mature approach to their studies of the sixth form students is commendable.
192. The quality of the teaching and the learning that it promotes are good throughout the school. An important strength of the teaching lies in the good relationships teachers have with the students which helps to create a co-operative atmosphere for learning in almost all lessons. Teachers have very good knowledge of the activities they teach. As a result, students learn correct techniques and improve their knowledge and understanding, for example, in Year 7 swimming lessons, where progress was good in improving students' technique in front and back crawl. In the most effective lessons, teachers frequently question students to check on their learning and understanding. This was illustrated well in a successful Year 7 gymnastics lesson where girls were challenged to explore and refine their partner sequences, and received positive support in understanding how the quality of their work could be improved. This extended the depth and breadth of their learning. Similarly, in a very good Year 13 lesson reviewing verbal guidance in the acquisition of skill, the high level of teacher expectation demanded in-depth responses from students of all abilities and ensured that they made good gains in understanding. Areas for development in teaching include the need for greater consistency in setting clear objectives for lessons and sharing these with students, together with including clear guidance for improvement in the marking of written work in the examination courses.
193. Leadership and management in physical education are good. Curricular planning is good, and the links established with the main feeder primary schools are a major strength which is contributing to the improved standards in Years 7-9. Progress has been made in developing assessment procedures in physical education, and particularly in the use of data relating to students' previous attainment in setting targets for improvement and checking their progress in examination work. There is need to establish a formal approach to monitoring teaching and learning within the department in order to ensure consistency, and promote further improvement by identifying and sharing the key features of the good range of successful practice.
194. Improvement in physical education has been good since the previous inspection. The extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities for boys and girls has been sustained; facilities are very good and resources for teaching are good. The curriculum has been strengthened with the introduction of the A level course. Importantly, teaching and learning have improved and, as a result, students' progress and the standards achieved are now better in Years 7 to 9 and in the sixth form.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

195. The GCSE results for 2000 were significantly above the national average and compare favourably with other results in the school. 65% of the students entered gained grades A\* to C. The results for girls were above the national average and those for boys were in line. These results maintain a recent pattern of success at GCSE. The majority of students do not study the subject to GCSE level but show high levels of success with certification in the Northern Partnership Record of Achievement. No sixth form students were entered for A level GCE in 2000. The one A/S level student gained a grade B. There are 14 A level students in the sixth form in 2001.
196. Students start Year 7 with satisfactory attainment although a minority are unable to retain basic knowledge learned in earlier years; some students are unable to remember what happened on Good Friday or Easter Sunday. However, work seen in Years 8 and 9 shows evidence of good progress, in many instances above the national average. Students in Year 8 are able to show good progress in what they know, understand and can do by, for example, writing a letter from Amnesty International to the Pharaoh of Egypt. Those in Year 9 study conflict and are able to write about the work of King Hussein for peace in the Middle East. By the age of fourteen, overall standards are above the national average. Students with special educational needs make good progress and attain to their potential. Higher attaining students are encouraged to improve their attainment through extended work.
197. By the age of sixteen, students who do not study the examination course make satisfactory progress and the great majority attain certification. Those in GCSE groups make very good progress exemplified by excellent oral and written attainment in a lesson about spirituality. These students are very conversant with technical vocabulary such as 'mediator' and 'advocate' and are able to have empathy with the worship of others.
198. The attainment of students in the sixth form is satisfactory to good. Students are competent in oral and written work. They are able to write successful essays on 'Freedom and Determinism' and to understand theological issues in biblical texts.
199. The quality of teaching ranges from satisfactory to excellent with the majority of lessons being good or very good. There are three religious education specialist teachers, together with additional teachers of the subject in Years 7 to 9. All teachers have a sound knowledge and understanding of the subject. Together they have produced a very comprehensive set of resources for the subject. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives. The management of students is predominantly very good, based on the use of a range of teaching strategies. Imaginative approaches are used to enable students to understand complex issues and concepts from a contemporary perspective. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and this contributes to a positive working atmosphere. There are occasional instances of students not fully understanding their targets or not receiving work appropriate to their level of attainment. Homework is set regularly and marked effectively with comments which enable students to understand their progress. The length and depth of homework are generally appropriate, although it sometimes consists, inappropriately, of finishing off classwork.
200. Religious education makes a considerable contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students. They learn about the worship of all major religions and have the opportunity to experience the quiet, meditative style of prayer in Buddhism and Hinduism. Students learn about the moral codes of world faiths in Years 7 to 9 and also in the ethics and philosophy course in Years 10 and 11. Students' social development is enriched by considering crime and punishment, human rights and third world poverty. Their cultural development is deepened by visitors such as the northern president of the Islamic Council and by visits to cathedrals in Liverpool.
201. The leadership and management of the department are very good. A team ethos has been developed in which all teachers are encouraged to make a significant contribution. The head of department has a vision for the future development of the subject and the strategies to see this through. The rooms used for teaching the subject are satisfactory, although external noise intrudes at times. The department has access to a good range of resources which are well used to stimulate learning. Information technology is used appropriately by groups of students and individual.
202. Since the last inspection much work has been done to align the schemes of work with the requirements of the Cheshire Agreed Syllabus. The time allocation for the subject in Years 10 and 11 is below the minimum recommended for teaching the Agreed Syllabus. An allocation of 5% of



curriculum time would enable a short course GCSE to be introduced successfully for all students. The time allocation for religious education in the sixth form is also below the recommendation of the Agreed Syllabus. In Years 7 to 9 religious education is taught very successfully. However, there are overlaps and links with work in social studies and personal and social education which could be exploited in a positive way.

## **DRAMA**

203. Drama is taught as a separate subject in the curriculum in Years 7 and 8, and offered as a GCSE option in Key Stage 4 and as an A/S and A level option in the sixth form.
204. At the end of Key Stage 3 there is no national test to determine the level of students' attainment but standards are satisfactory and in line with national expectations. Standards of attainment in Key Stage 4 are satisfactory and have been consistently broadly in line with national standards since the last inspection. In GCSE in 2000, the proportion of students achieving grades A\* to C was a little above the national proportion. All students entered achieved a grade and the proportion achieving grade A was well above the national proportion. Standards of attainment in Key Stage 5 have been consistently broadly in line with national standards though in 2000 the proportion of students not achieving a grade was higher than the national proportion.
205. In Key Stage 3 students develop the capacity to work co-operatively and learn to improvise responses to a variety of stimuli. They develop skills of voice and movement through group discussion, planning and performance. Students in Year 8, for example, prepare and realistically act out the story behind pictures they are given. Low levels of prior attainment do not prevent students from participating fully and making imaginative contributions to group presentations.
206. In the GCSE drama course in Key Stage 4, students improve their planning and negotiating skills in the preparation of performance pieces. They use space effectively for movement and grouping and make imaginative use of properties and costume. They develop the capacity to work quite independently of the teacher, taking responsibility for their presentations and helping each other. Students in Year 11 have made good progress in the preparation of a complex improvisation on the song "Little boxes", containing an imaginative variety of related group responses. Though their performance is recorded on video for examination purposes, they perform confidently and without inhibition and subsequently analyse their work maturely. The course is very successful in enabling students with a wide range of levels of prior attainment to work together and make meaningful contributions.
207. Students in Key Stage 5 develop good knowledge of the history and techniques of drama and use the experience of attending professional performances to inform their understanding of presentation. Their preparation of group performance pieces is thoughtful and sophisticated. Students in Year 13 show a mature capacity for self-criticism as they polish their presentation of an election broadcast, demonstrating good skills of production and performance.
208. Students' attitudes to work are good. They respond with enthusiasm, work co-operatively with each other and their teachers and appreciate each other's performances.
209. Teaching is good. Good knowledge and understanding of the subject inform well-planned lessons with a variety of well-paced activities to engage and stimulate students. Non-specialist teachers of drama in Key Stage 3 are supported by a helpfully detailed and prescriptive scheme of work. Good concern is shown for standards in the regular assessment of work and the monitoring of progress.
210. Drama is taught by well qualified and experienced staff. It is well managed, with good use made of the resources available. Shared teaching and cross-moderation in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form ensures good formal monitoring of teaching and the delivery of the curriculum. The process of formal monitoring of teaching in Key Stage 3 is not yet established.
211. Drama makes a significant contribution to students' personal development. It explores moral and social issues through regular group discussion and performance, develops cultural experience through the use of plays, and offers students the opportunity to participate in a drama club and regular public performances.

212. There has been good progress since the last inspection when drama had only just been established as a separate subject. The examination courses in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form are now well-established and successful. The number of students opting for the GCSE course has increased, with two groups now in Year 10. Drama is developing as a separate subject in Key Stage 3, currently in Years 7 and 8 but its development is planned for Year 9.