

INSPECTION REPORT

MAYFLOWER SCHOOL

Billericay

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115232

Headteacher: Linda Bamford

Reporting inspector: David M Bain
3258

Dates of inspection: 26–30 March 2001

Inspection number: 187545

Full inspection carried out under Section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensve

School category: Community

Age range of students: 11-18 years

Gender of students: Mixed

School address: Stock Road
Billericay
Essex

Postcode: CM12 0RT

Telephone number: 01277 623171

Fax number: 01277 632256

Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs. Stephanie Dawkins

Date of previous inspection: March 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
3258	David M Bain	<i>Registered inspector</i>	Additional A Level subjects	What sort of school is it? How high are standards? How well are students taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should school do to improve further?
9472	John Edmond	<i>Lay inspector</i>		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development; How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
1578	Maureen Sinclair	<i>Team inspector</i>	Business education; Religious education.	
30198	Reg Chick	<i>Team inspector</i>	Physical education; Life skills; Equal opportunities.	
20767	Jerry Royle	<i>Team inspector</i>	Music; Information and communication technology.	
20412	Diane Shephard	<i>Team inspector</i>	Modern foreign languages.	
1049	Brian Evans	<i>Team inspector</i>	Geography; English as an additional language.	
1990	Graham Preston	<i>Team inspector</i>	Design technology; Economics.	
30901	Sue Schofield	<i>Team inspector</i>	Art.	
3467	Margaret Rees	<i>Team inspector</i>	English.	
27719	Paul Metcalf	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics.	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
20243	David Benstock	<i>Team inspector</i>	Science.	
1085	John Laver	<i>Team inspector</i>	History; Personal, social and health education.	
20457	Brian Fletcher	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics; Special educational needs; Numeracy.	
12844	Mick Saunders	<i>Team inspector</i>	English; Literacy.	

11672	Peter Harle	<i>Team inspector</i>	Special educational needs.	
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The inspection contractor was:

*Westminster Education Consultants
Old Garden House
The Lanterns
Bridge Lane
London
SW11 3AD*

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Mayflower High School is a large, mixed comprehensive situated on the northern side of Billericay, an advantaged area. There are currently 1466 students on roll, including 250 in the Sixth Form. The school is popular and over-subscribed and takes students from a fairly wide catchment area, including surrounding villages and some from Basildon and Wickford. The intake of the school is fairly balanced, as judged by students' past attainment and results of cognitive abilities tests. It loses some abler students from its main feeder primary schools to grammar and specialist schools in surrounding towns. However, only 124 students are identified as having special educational needs, mostly with moderate or specific learning or emotional and behavioural difficulties. The proportion of students with special educational needs is well below the national average, whilst the proportion with statements is below average. The latter includes 11 students with places in the school's Dyslexia Unit, which has places for four students in each year. Almost all students come from a white UK heritage background, with only a few students speaking English as an additional language and none at the early stages of learning English. Six and a half per cent of students are eligible for free school meals, which is below the national average of 18 per cent. Currently just over half of Year 11 progress into the Sixth Form, where all follow AS/A Level courses, although the proportion has been higher in some previous years. Most of the rest continue their education in local colleges, with less than one in ten moving into employment. Over two-thirds of the last Year 13 moved on to higher education.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Mayflower is a good school with many very good and some outstanding features. Both staff and students enjoy working in the school. Teaching is generally good, and occasionally inspiring, and leads to good quality learning which ensures that high standards are achieved by students of all abilities, particularly in Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form. Attainment is above the national average at all Key stages. The leadership and management of the head and other key staff is very good and is correctly focused on improving teaching and learning in order to raise standards. Strategies for performance management, induction of new staff and school development are excellent, as is the contribution of the community to students' learning. The school gives good value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Enables students to achieve high standards, especially at Key Stage 4 and post-16.
- Provides very good leadership and management, with a clear strategic plan for improvement overseen by a very effective governing body.
- Provides good quality teaching and learning experiences, especially in English, art, drama, special needs and in the Sixth Form.
- Monitors students' academic performance and personal development and provides very good support and guidance to students, including personal, social, health and careers education.
- Provides excellent induction for new staff and has an excellent strategy for performance management, encouraging staff development.
- Provides very effective links with parents and excellent community links.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- The breadth of the curriculum, especially post-16.
- Standards in core subjects and information and communication technology at Key Stage 3, to bring them at least in line with results in similar schools, and in science, French, German and aspects of design technology in Key Stage 4.
- Aspects of the accommodation and facilities provided to support students' learning.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Overall, the school has made good improvement since the last inspection in 1996. Significant improvements have been made in the management of the school, which is now a strength. Improvement in the planning and monitoring of budget expenditure has been good. As a consequence, the school has been able to improve significantly the quality of the environment. However, whilst there has been an improvement, litter is still prevalent and there is a wide variation in the quality of display around the school. Good progress has been made in refining assessment strategies and ensuring assessments inform students and teachers. Satisfactory progress has been made towards meeting statutory requirements. There is now some religious education in the Sixth Form, although not enough, and there is a well thought through policy on collective worship which, if implemented, would enable the school to satisfy the law.

STANDARDS

The table below 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	A	A	A	A
A Levels/AS Levels	C	C	C	

Key	
<i>well above average</i>	A
<i>above average</i>	B
<i>average</i>	C
<i>below average</i>	D
<i>well below average</i>	E

Attainment on entry is broadly average, although above average in some year groups. Achievement in external tests at age 14 is disappointing. Whilst results are above the national average in mathematics and science and in line in English, they are all below average compared to schools with a similar proportion of students entitled to free schools. The trend in the school's average points score over the last three years has not matched the improvement shown nationally. Standards, therefore, are not high enough at this key stage.

In contrast, GCSE results in 2000 were well above average, as they have been in recent years. 62 per cent attained five or more A*-C grades compared to 47 per cent nationally and almost all students attained at least five grades A*-G. When compared to similar schools, based on either free school meals or prior attainment, the average points score is also well above average. In 2000, results were significantly better than nationally in English language, English literature, art and design, business studies, drama, history, music, physical education and Spanish, and for girls in religious education. Results were well below average in French and German, and below in science and design technology. They were just above average in mathematics. At both Key stages, the school has set appropriate targets, both overall and for individual subjects. At Key Stage 4, these have generally been met.

A Level results are good. Although the average point score is only close to the national average, students until now have not taken general studies. The proportions both of those who passed and of those who achieved the highest grades, A and B, are well above average for comprehensive schools. Results in individual subjects vary between years, but in 2000 they were exceptional in mathematics and physical education. They were also very good in history, biology, business studies, psychology and design and communication.

Work seen during the inspection, generally confirmed external results. Standards improve as students move up the school and were above average in at least half the lessons seen in economics, history, business education, drama, English, physical education and religious education. Standards were rarely above average in design technology, information and communication technology, modern foreign languages and science. Students are confident and articulate, and have good literacy and numeracy skills. Examples of excellence were seen in nearly half the drama lessons observed and in some lessons where standards were well above average in art, English, mathematics, music, religious education and economics.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Students really enjoy coming to school and remain very enthusiastic in the Sixth Form. They show interest in their lessons, have a strong desire to improve their work and take intense pride in it. They enthusiastically participate in the many extra-curricular activities.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good, both in lessons and around the school, despite cramped conditions in some classrooms and corridors. Last year, there were no permanent exclusions and a low number of fixed-term exclusions. Respect for property is less good, with some thoughtless dropping of litter. A few students act inappropriately in class, without thought for the impact of their actions on others, but are dealt with effectively by most teachers.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Relationships in school are good. Most students are courteous and friendly and respect the feelings of others. Many enthusiastically take on responsibilities when given the opportunity and they are encouraged to express their opinions.
Attendance	Good. Attendance is above the national average, with unauthorised absence in line with that nationally.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of students' learning is good. Students are generally enthusiastic learners and are provided with good quality teaching, especially at Key Stage 4 and post-16, some of which is outstanding. Overall, teaching was satisfactory or better in 98 per cent of lessons, including 45 per cent where it was good and 23 per cent where it was very good or excellent. Some very good teaching was seen in all subjects and year groups. Examples of excellence were seen in English, drama, economics, life skills and special needs. Overall, teaching was very good in art and drama, and good in English, history, Geography, music, physical education, religious education, economics, PSE including life skills, psychology and sociology. It was good in about half the lessons of all other subjects except ICT. Teaching in English is good, often very good or outstanding, it is very well planned and uses a wide range of strategies which actively engage students. In mathematics it is sound with some good features, and is often very good in the Sixth Form. In science it is satisfactory and improving, following a period of staffing difficulties.

Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of their subjects and good classroom management, except where there are staffing difficulties. Lesson planning is effective, especially for older students. The best lessons contain a range of enjoyable and challenging activities for students

of all levels of attainment. Teachers use effectively a range of teaching methods and in the best lessons encourage students to become active learners. Teachers' expectations of students are good, but improve as students move through the school. Skilful questioning is often used to assist understanding and teachers' expositions are clear. However, where teaching fails to develop interest, learning is adversely affected. In most lessons, students channel their energy into constructive learning, are encouraged to express views, debate and develop research skills, and are enabled to become autonomous learners. Good use is made of ICT in English and history, for example, but little use in mathematics and science. Much better use is made of ongoing assessment to inform teaching than at the time of the last inspection, but marking still too often fails to indicate to students what they need to do to improve their work. Marking in drama is, however, exemplary. Homework is used effectively. Students with learning difficulties receive good support and, overall, teaching successfully meets the needs of all students, including those identified as gifted and talented.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good at Key stages 3 and 4, where the school provides a wide variety of learning opportunities to meet the needs of students of all abilities. The curriculum post-16 lacks breadth, with very limited vocational provision. Links with the community are excellent. Extra-curricular provision and careers education are very good. Not all statutory requirements are met in ICT at Key Stage 3 and religious education post-16.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Good. Students are supported well both in class and when withdrawn to develop key skills. Both students and parents value provision. <u>Good monitoring and target setting support progress.</u>
Provision for students with English as an additional language	There are few students for whom English is an additional language, and none at an early stage of English acquisition.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for personal, social and health education, through PSE and life skills, is a strength of the school. Provision for moral and social development is good. Students are treated as responsible individuals. Spiritual and cultural development are satisfactory. Cultural development is strong within English and the arts subjects, but the multicultural dimension is under-developed across the school.
How well the school cares for its students	Good. Teachers know their students very well. Students appreciate greatly both the academic and personal support given. Child protection procedures are complied with fully. Procedures for monitoring attendance, behaviour and personal development are very good. Use of assessment and monitoring of academic progress is now good.

The quality of the school's relationships with parents is a strength of the school and its links with parents are very effective. Parents are kept very well informed and the quality of reports on students' progress is very good. Parents' contribution to students' learning is good.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The head provides excellent leadership and a clear vision for the school. She is well supported by skilled senior and middle managers. Development planning is excellent.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body provides very strong support to the school, is well informed and fulfils its responsibilities very well. It has an effective committee structure.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. The school has an impressive range of strategies to monitor its performance. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching are good and support staff development. Tracking of students' progress is developing well. The strategy for performance management is excellent.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The use of resources is well planned, with careful application of the principles of best value. Financial planning is very good, as are administrative procedures. Induction of new staff is excellent. There is a good match of teachers to the demands of the curriculum and adequate learning resources, but accommodation still has shortcomings.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students work hard and make good progress. • Children enjoy coming to school • Teaching is good. • Examination results. • The school is well led and managed. • They feel comfortable in approaching school with any concerns. • Provision for students with special educational needs. • The quality of pastoral care. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework. • Staff turnover and its effect on teaching. • Information on how children are getting on. • Extra-curricular activities. • Behaviour in some classes. • Lockers and aspects of accommodation.

The inspection team agrees with the very positive perceptions of most parents. Inspectors found an appropriate amount of homework was set, but not all students were good at managing it. Inspectors found behaviour generally to be good. Where it was less good, it was sometimes linked to staffing

difficulties. The school provides good information to parents about students' progress and good extra curricular activities. Parents would be more aware of extra-curricular provision if a programme of activities was published regularly. Inspectors share concerns about the lack of lockers and aspects of accommodation, but, as with the majority of parents, are impressed by the improvements made to the accommodation and general environment since the last inspection.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

1. At the time of the last inspection, students' attainment was reported as above average at Key Stage 4 and post-16, but closer to average at Key Stage 3, on the evidence both of what was observed in lessons and external examination results. Overall, the current position remains broadly the same.
2. Attainment on entry varies between year groups, but overall is broadly average, although the current Year 7 is clearly well above average. In that year group, the proportions who achieved an average level or better in their Key Stage 2 tests were above average, although the proportion achieving above average in English was only in line with the national average. As well as Key Stage 2 results, all students sit cognitive abilities tests (CAT) in Year 7 and again in Year 9. These confirm the differences between year groups and support the school in setting targets both for year groups and for individual students. The catchment area of the school is quite wide, although the majority come from Billericay and the surrounding villages. The school loses some abler students to Essex grammar schools and a few to specialist schools in other towns. However, the proportion of students on the special needs register is less than a third of the average nationally, and the proportion with statements is less than half the national average, despite the presence of the dyslexia unit. Analysis of results is further complicated by the differences in gender between year groups. Whilst most year groups are fairly balanced, in the current Year 7 and last year's Year 11 there are significantly more boys. Whilst the cohorts in Years 7-11 are broadly comprehensive, the Sixth Form is not. Apart from a small number in previous years on an intermediate level GNVQ in business education, all students follow an AS/A Level course. Entry requirements set for some of these courses are more stringent than is usual.
3. Overall attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 in standardised tests (SATs) is satisfactory, but somewhat disappointing. When compared to all schools nationally, the average points score achieved was well above average in mathematics from 1997-99 and above in 2000. In science, it has been consistently above average, but in English it has declined from well above average in 1997 to average in 1999 and 2000. In 2000, the proportions achieving Level 5 or better were above average in mathematics and science and average in English. The proportions achieving Level 6 or better were above average only in mathematics. Overall the trend in results has not matched the improvement shown nationally. When compared to schools that are similar in the proportion of students entitled to free school meals, the average point score in 2000 was below average in all three subjects. However, the proportion attaining Level 5 or better was average for similar schools in mathematics and science, but below in English; whilst for Level 6 or better it was well below average in English and science, but average in mathematics. When these results are set against the attainments of the same students three years earlier, it is clear that their achievement is average in English and science but below average in mathematics. In 1999, it was above average in all three subjects. The school has responded appropriately to these disappointing results and all three departments have been required to address them in their development plans. Cognitive abilities tests

taken this year by Year 9 students suggests they have made significant progress since they took similar tests in Year 7. The results of teacher assessments in design technology, geography, history, ICT and modern foreign languages are well above national averages, except for the proportion assessed as Level 6 or better in ICT, which is below average. Teacher assessments in art, music and physical education were good in 1998 but have not been published over the last two years; a surprising omission given the strength of these subjects in the school. Targets set for 2000 were met in mathematics, but not in English and science. Appropriate targets have been set for future years; the school being responsive to adjustments necessary to produce more positive comparisons with similar schools.

4. Overall, attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 in GCSE has been more consistently good, although with considerable differences between subjects. The average points score and the proportion of students attaining both five or more A*-C and A*-G grades have been well above average for each of the last four years, as was the proportion attaining at least one grade in both 1998 and 2000. When compared to similar schools, both based on the proportion of students entitled to free school meals and on prior attainment at Key Stage 3, the average point score in 2000 was also well above average. Using other indicators, on grades A*-G and A*-C, it was above average. The proportion achieving five or more grades A*-C has risen over the last few years, from a low in 1997 of 55 per cent to a high in 1999 of 66 per cent. The drop to 62 per cent in 2000, compared to 47 per cent nationally, can entirely be explained by a gender imbalance in the cohort. There were considerably more boys in the year. Only 55 per cent of boys attained five or more grades A*-C compared to 76 per cent of girls. This compares with 43 per cent and 53 per cent respectively for all maintained schools in England. Thus, although both boys and girls achieve results well above national averages, the proportion of girls achieving five or more A*-C grades is significantly better than for boys. The school has identified this gender difference in its development plan and is adopting a range of strategies. Its analysis of GCSE performance based on Key Stage 3 results shows the performance of significantly more boys declining in Key Stage 4, with a similar number of girls improving significantly. However, results in individual subjects suggest that some have very successfully found a solution to improving the performance of boys and inspection evidence suggests that the differences are less pronounced in the current Years 7 to 11 than they were in last year's Year 11. Sound targets have been set at GCSE, although initial analyses based on improvements in cognitive ability tests (CAT) between Year 7 and Year 9 suggest that these targets could be significantly surpassed. The effect of the move to a number of short course GCSEs has yet to be seen.

5. In 2000, results were significantly better than national averages in English language, English literature, art and design, business studies, drama, history, music, physical education and Spanish, but significantly below average in French and German. Girls were also significantly better than average in religious studies. Results in English language have improved dramatically, from 62 per cent grades A*-C in 1998 to 78 per cent in 2000, compared to 56 per cent nationally. An amazing 91 per cent of girls achieved grades A*-C compared to 64 per cent nationally, but so did 68 per cent of boys compared to 48 per cent nationally. In contrast, although still well above the average of 61 per cent nationally, results in English literature declined to 68 per cent A*-C in 2000, compared to 84 per cent the previous year. This decline can mostly be put down to the higher number of boys in the year, as 83 per cent of girls achieved grades A*-C compared to 56 per cent of boys. In both subjects 61 per cent of girls achieved the highest grades A*-B. In mathematics, in

comparison, results are only a little above national averages; 52 per cent compared to 47 per cent, with girls outperforming boys by slightly more than nationally. These results were significantly down on the previous two years, from 62 per cent in 1998, and display a worrying decline. Results in science appear to show a similar decline, but entries have changed. In 2000, most students entered double science with only 11 less able students entered for single science. In 1998, about one fifth took single science and another fifth triple science, whilst in 1999 around two fifths took single science. However, in 2000 results were below average, with only 44 per cent entered for double science achieving grades A*-C compared to 49 per cent nationally, despite having a full 20 per cent of curriculum time. Boys and girls achieved similar results. No student attained a higher grade in single science.

6. Amongst other subjects the best results were achieved in the arts, although only just over half the year group took one. In art and design, 84 per cent of 68 students attained grades A*-C compared to 64 per cent nationally, with a staggering 97 per cent of girls doing so. Despite this, these results were a drop on the previous year when 93 per cent overall gained grades A*-C. In drama, 87 per cent of 46 students achieved grades A*-C compared to 68 per cent nationally. All girls achieved these higher grades, but only just over half the boys. A third of girls achieved grades A* or A and almost all the rest grade B. Results in drama have been consistently good for some years. There have been very low entries for music in recent years. These increased to 15 students in 2000. Excellent results were achieved, with all except one attaining grades A*-C and 80 per cent grades A*-B. Very good results were also achieved in physical education. From 55 entered, 69 per cent gained grades A*-C compared to 52 per cent nationally, including 82 per cent of the girls entered.

7. As with arts, students do not have to sit a humanities subject, other than religious education, although most do so. Excellent results were achieved from the 71 students entered for history. 80 per cent achieved grades A*-C compared to 58 per cent nationally. This was an improvement on previous years, with a staggering 92 per cent of girls doing so, but also 69 per cent of boys. Over half the girls entered achieved grade A* or A, as did over a quarter of boys. This is exceptional. In contrast, although still above the national figure of 54 per cent, only 61 per cent of the 82 entered for geography gained grades A*-C compared to 76 per cent in 1998. Results were similar for girls and boys, unlike the national picture where girls outperform boys. Results in economics were disappointing. Of 23 entered, only 52 per cent achieved grades A*-C, a significant decline on previous years and a little below the national average. Most students entered religious studies with 60 per cent achieving grades A*-C, above the national figure of 52 per cent and an improvement on the previous year. Results were particularly good for girls with over half-gaining grade B or better.

8. Almost all also took a design and technology subject. Overall, only 44 per cent of those entered gained grades A*-C compared to 50 per cent nationally, with boys performing particularly badly. From a small entry, results were excellent in textiles with 89 per cent A*-C. Larger entries for electronics and resistant materials achieved results close to average of 54 and 51 per cent respectively. However, the largest entries were for food and graphics, where only 38 per cent and 18 per cent achieved grades A*-C. Staffing issues are said to have depressed technology results. In 1999, results in graphics had been good with 65 per cent A*-C. In addition to these technology-based subjects, the department also enters a small number of candidates for child development. In 2000, an excellent 86 per cent achieved grades A*-C. Fourteen students followed a GNVQ part

one course in engineering with excellent results, with 13 passing at intermediate level and one at foundation level. About two thirds of the year group entered for short course ICT. About half achieved grades A*-C, girls outperforming boys significantly. Very good results were attained in business studies, where from an entry of 89, 70 per cent achieved grades A*-C, including an impressive 86 per cent of girls. About two thirds of the entry were boys who also achieved well.

9. Results in modern foreign languages are varied, but generally of concern. In 2000, about half the year group sat French and about a quarter each for German and Spanish, with a handful sitting more than one language. Whilst results in Spanish were well above national averages with 65 per cent A*-C compared to 49 per cent nationally, in French and German only 37 and 28 per cent did so compared to 46 and 52 per cent respectively. In French and German, boys' results were particularly poor with only 16 and 21 per cent gaining grades A*-C, whilst in Spanish 53 per cent did, well above the national average.

10. The majority of students in the Sixth Form enter two or more A Levels. In general, results at this key stage are good, whilst some are exceptional. In 2000, 31 candidates sat less than two A Levels. Their average point score was close to the national average. 122 students entered two or more A Levels. Their average point score of 16.5 was close to the national average of 18.2. Candidates in this year group did not enter for general studies unlike candidates in many schools, which thus reduces their potential point score. 37 per cent of all A Level entries were passed at the highest grades A or B and 95 per cent were passed, compared to 37 and 91 per cent for all maintained schools nationally, and 32 and 89 per cent for comprehensive schools. A small entry of 12 candidates for GNVQ advanced level achieved an average point score well above the national average, and the three candidates entered at intermediate level all passed.

11. Results in individual subjects at A Level vary between years, particularly where cohorts are small. In most subjects in 2000, all candidates entered passed. Results were particularly impressive in mathematics where 64 per cent achieved grades A or B from a large entry, physical education where 75 per cent did, history 59 per cent, biology 56 per cent, business studies 52 per cent and psychology where 50 per cent did. 50 per cent also achieved higher grades in design and communication, but from a small entry. Of the other subjects where everyone passed, the proportion of A/B grades was also around or above average in art and design, chemistry, economics, English language and information technology. All passed in English literature, music and French but with fewer higher grades. In physics and drama, although one candidate failed in each, results were around national averages both at pass and A/B level, whilst in human biology a third attained higher grades but two candidates failed. The pass rate was around average in geography and environmental science but with no higher grades. A small group entered Spanish, but only half passed, none with higher grades, whilst only two-thirds of a larger sociology group passed, 20 per cent with higher grades. There was no entry for either German or religious studies in 2000. In previous years, the latter had produced good results. Entries for AS Levels were low, except in mathematics, and were, in general, around or above national averages. No targets for A Level have been published. The change to the new Curriculum 2000 AS and A Level structure could affect results significantly for 2001 at AS Level and 2002 at A Level.

12. The school celebrates students' achievements in other areas. In sport, this has included recently: a junior British champion in archery; a boy representing Essex and the East of England in

hockey; students selected for Eastern Counties rugby; a boy selected for Essex in cricket and for a local club tour abroad; honours in district athletics competitions; and success in a range of other sports including basketball, cross country, football, golf, karate, netball, rounders, swimming and tennis. Students have successfully competed in public speaking competitions. Two boys reached the area final of the English Speaking Union's debating competition, three girls competed in the Business and Professional Women's Association speaking competition and, at the time of the inspection, students were participating in the area final of the Rotary Club's *Youth Speaks to the Globe*. Students participate in a range of music concerts, including a recent tour to Belgium with the Essex Police Youth Band and concerts at Billericay Town Day and for local elderly residents. Student drama productions include *Our Country Good*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Doll's House* and *The Millennium Tales* which involved over a 100 students. Year 10 drama students performed for local primary school children and GCSE and A Level students performed their examination pieces for staff and parents. Examination work in art was exhibited at the local library and at a private view open to the local community. Year 10 students on the 'Bonus' course painted a mural at a local primary school.

Standards in lessons and in the work survey

13. At the time of the last inspection, attainment was judged to be good in English at Key Stage 4, post-16 mathematics, science, design technology, history, French and German, Sixth Form Russian, art and design, business studies and A Level drama and physical education. Other subjects were described as sound, except for GCSE ICT, geography in the Sixth Form, Spanish and music at Key Stage 3.

14. Extensive studies of work completed this year, both through a general work survey and separate subject work surveys, and through observation of standards in lessons, reveal significant variations between subjects. Overall, attainment was above average in 42 per cent of lessons observed and average in a further 42 per cent. The proportion of lessons where students are working above average improves as students move through the school, 35 per cent in Key Stage 3, 44 per cent in Key Stage 4 and 52 per cent post-16. Most subjects are taught to mixed ability classes. Standards were above average in all economics lessons, the vast majority in history, business education and drama, and over half in art, English, physical education and religious education. Standards were rarely above average in design technology, information technology, modern foreign languages and science, and were below average in at least a quarter of lessons in each of these subjects, as well as in mathematics. As mathematics and science are taught to ability sets, standards in lower sets would be expected to be below average. However, standards observed were significantly lower in science than in mathematics. Attainment in science, design technology and modern foreign languages has adversely been affected by staffing difficulties. Examples of excellence were seen in nearly half the drama lessons observed and some lessons where standards were well above average in art, English, mathematics, music, religious education and economics.

15. Students with special educational needs attain well, and make good progress. The support they are given enables them not only to have the maximum possible access to the curriculum, but also to make very good individual progress. Evidence was seen across the curriculum, and

especially in English, drama, art and music, of such students attaining at least as well as their peers. The Bonus course at Key Stage 4 provides students with extra support in their GCSE work, increasing their opportunities to attain examination success. The small number of students for whom English is an additional language make very good progress across the school and generally attain well above average.

16. Most students arrive in Year 7 with standards in English which are at least at the nationally expected level. About a quarter have attained higher than average results in Key Stage 2 tests, a lower proportion than in mathematics and science. Whilst Key Stage 3 results suggest some underachievement in English, evidence from the inspection indicates that sensible strategies are in place to address. These are beginning to have a discernible effect. By the age of 14, even the least able students are quite capable and thoughtful writers in a range of forms. By 16, their critical skills are evident in their detailed analyses of media and literary texts, and post-16 their writing is characterised by critical and creative intelligence. Similar qualities are evident in students' reading. They read aloud with good intonation and expression. Speaking and listening skills are developed strongly in English and in many subjects across the curriculum.

17. Provision for literacy is good and developing. The head of English is the literacy co-ordinator. A Literacy Group meets to oversee the implementation of the published literacy policy. Its membership includes a deputy head, the heads of department of science and supportive education, a representative from humanities and the teacher in charge of liaison with primary schools. In-service sessions have been devoted to whole-school literacy. A day's training was provided in October 1999 to familiarise staff with the National Literacy Strategy. Workshops were conducted on directed reading activities, writing frames, drafting and literacy auditing. This was followed with the distribution of materials on the 'literacy supportive classroom'. These gave advice on boardwork, display, the use and correction of punctuation, literacy teaching within subjects, the establishing of key words associated with particular disciplines, and note-taking. Another in-service day in February 2001 consolidated work on reading-support and writing frames. A literacy textbook was to be distributed to all Year 7 students so that a common source of reference would be available to them and their teachers. The school's policies on assessment and marking are important additional elements in the support and encouragement of students' literacy.

18. Evidence from the inspection showed good, but uneven, attention being paid to literacy across the school. In English and drama, emphasis was given consistently to matters of literacy at word, sentence and text level. Good practice was noted in history, business studies, art, physical education and special needs. Key words were emphasised, writing was well supported, and the reading demands of the subject were given specific attention. In a number of areas, however, including mathematics, geography, modern foreign languages, and religious education, there was little evidence of the school-wide literacy policy being consistently implemented. This suggests that in order for provision to be improved and developed, the monitoring of approaches and procedures across the school should be prioritised. Currently the literacy co-ordinator has insufficient time to fulfil that function. The Literacy Group has a clear remit in respect of auditing and monitoring, but has yet to start this. These matters should be addressed and clarified in order to promote consistency and best practice across the school. However, overall the impact on students' literacy of practice across the curriculum is good and is raising standards of attainment.

19. In mathematics, students are taught in ability sets and thus standards vary between sets.

Overall, standards are above average in Key stages 3 and 4 and well above average post-16. By the end of Key Stage 3, most students acquire a good range of number skills which they can confidently apply to problems in shape, measure and data collection. By the end of Key Stage 4, this is extended and many are well on the way to becoming good mathematicians. Those who take mathematics post-16 are highly numerate and have a very good grounding in solving problems by careful application of mathematical methods. Students apply their numerical skills well in other subjects. For example, in science, they accurately measure temperature, voltage and current. In design and technology, students use their knowledge of shape and angles and in history they correctly place historical events on a time line. In art, students use their knowledge of symmetry and tessellating shapes when drawing patterns. In geography, they interpret tables and graphs to compare rainfall and temperature and in Spanish, play number games to confirm their knowledge of Spanish numerals.

20. In the other key skill of information and communication technology (ICT), attainment is at the expected level in Key stages 3 and 4 and above at A Level. Provision across the curriculum is overall satisfactory but there are strengths and weaknesses. Some good examples of word processing were seen in English with drafting and redrafting of work. Good use was observed in history and geography with effective use of databases, and students make good use of the internet and CD ROMs for gathering work for their individual projects. Modern languages are in the early stages of development, but the use of spreadsheets was observed. The department has recently created its own web-site. Satisfactory work was seen in design and technology, using programs to develop control technology and programs for the designing of an electric printed circuit. Good use is made in art at Key Stage 4 using a photo program for image manipulation. The use of ICT to support learning in mathematics, science, religious education and music is unsatisfactory. In music, this is explained by a lack of ICT hardware, which will be addressed when new accommodation is provided.

21. In science, standards reflect closely those achieved in the most recent tests and examinations. By Year 9, for example, most students make careful observation of chemical reactions and record data systematically, but only a few can extend this to compare results with predictions. By Year 11, overall knowledge of essential facts and development of experimental skills are only modest, even for students with above average ability. In the Sixth Form, however, most students have developed a good feel for experimental investigation and the depth of subject knowledge has developed quickly. In design technology, standards in Key Stage 3 are in line with national averages. Most come into the school with fairly limited design and make skills, but are now beginning to achieve appropriately. By the end of Key Stage 4, overall standards are broadly in line with those nationally, but vary between courses. Standards in electronic products are above average and students demonstrate strong scientific and numerical skills. Those in food technology and resistant materials are at least in line with those nationally. Standards in textiles across the school are below average, with students demonstrating less strong design, planning and making skills. This contrasts with the very good results obtained by a small GCSE textiles group last year. Standards in graphic products are improving, but they currently display less developed design ideas and a limited range of graphical skills.

22. Overall, standards in arts subject are high in Key stages 3 and 4 and at least in line with national standards post-16. Standards in art and design clearly reflect this. By age 14, students

demonstrate an above average level of knowledge, skills and understanding. Observational and analytical skills are very well developed. By age 16, students show a well-developed understanding of different forms of visual expression, confidently using a wide range of different forms. In the Sixth Form students work with a high degree of individuality. Standards are similar in drama. As they move through the school students show themselves to be progressively familiar with, and confident in, the conventions of drama. Over time they become impressively autonomous learners. By the end of Key Stage 4, students improvise effectively. In a Year 11 class, the range and source of themes chosen for performance pieces were impressive. High level dramatic skills are demonstrated, with students willing to take risks, experiment and support each other in the practice and refinement of dramatic conventions. Post 16 these skills are developed further. Standards in music are at the expected level by the age of 14, but well above for the few students who carry on with music at Key Stage 4 and post-16. Many start with a low level of understanding when they arrive in Year 7. By the age of 14, students' listening skills are well established, singing is of a satisfactory standard, but improvisation skills are less well developed. Students' composition skills are not as well developed as their performance skills. By 16, those continuing with music are confident and competent instrumentalists and have well developed composition skills. Attainment has improved significantly since the last inspection.

23. Within humanities subjects, standards are highest in history, where overall they are good. Standards are above average in the key areas of knowledge and understanding and the acquisition of historical skills. By the age of 16, students display skills of analysing and evaluating historical evidence that are above average. Standards are also above average post-16, where students develop confidence in debating challenging issues and increase their ability to evaluate the reliability and usefulness of a range of historical sources. In geography, standards are broadly in line with national expectations at Key Stage 3, but above average in other years. Older students show good knowledge and understanding of human and physical geography including the environment. Mapwork skills are generally above average, but for many presentational skills are less good. In religious education, students' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above the expectations of the Local Agreed Syllabus, with most having a good understanding of the life and teaching of Jesus and the religious significance of events in the Christian calendar. Understanding of other religions is less good, but understanding of moral and social issues is far higher than normal. At Key Stage 4, standards are above average with high quality assignments. In Key Stage 4 economics, students demonstrate levels of understanding well above the national average, and some are able to use graphical techniques confidently to illustrate supply and demand relationships. Standards are also above average post-16, with students using the main theories and concepts in their analyses of economic problems. In law, Year 13 students display a good knowledge of case law and are able to analyse in responding to individual cases. Attainment is generally above average. In psychology, students show good understanding both in their studies of ethical implications in social psychology and in their study of developmental disorders. Attainment is in line with that expected at the end of an A Level course. Standards in sociology, whilst still broadly in line with those nationally, are more varied. Some display good subject knowledge and analytical skills, but others display less confidence.

24. Standards in French and German are close to average across the school, whilst those in Spanish are above average, especially in Key Stage 4. At age 14, standards in listening are above average, but speaking standards are more varied. Writing skills are consistently developed in

Spanish. By age 16, students are able to express themselves competently in speaking and writing and reading is well developed. Those following the short course make less progress. By age 18, abler students are able to manipulate language and write competently about abstract and topical issues. In physical education, almost all students attain in line with expected standards and many work beyond. At the end of Key Stage 3

students are particularly good at consistently applying skills accurately, whilst in Key Stage 4 they are able to select and combine skills well. In the Sixth Form they display good theoretical knowledge, for example in anatomy. Standards in business studies are well above average at GCSE and good in both A Level and vocational A Level groups.

25. Almost all parents expressed positive views about standards achieved in the school. Of those who returned the parental questionnaire, 95 per cent felt their children were making good progress at the school. A few felt the able could be challenged more, and some that poorer teaching affected standards in mathematics, science and languages. Some were also concerned at the possible effect on standards of pressure on students in Year 12 of the new AS Levels. However, in general parents were positive. Some highlighted improvements in standards from those achieved in primary schools and others highlighted standards achieved by children with special educational needs, including those in the dyslexia unit.

26. In general, standards are very good overall in Key Stage 4 and sound overall in the Sixth Form, with some excellence. However, results in 2000, confirmed in part by inspection findings, raise some concerns about the achievements of some groups of students. Until recently, in the core subjects of English, mathematics, science and ICT, too little emphasis has been placed on raising attainment at Key Stage 3 and, as a result, attainment has not kept pace with improvements nationally. Similarly, although some of the subject differences at Key Stage 4 have, in part, been a consequence of staffing difficulties, only recently has the school started to address underachievement by boys in Key Stage 4. Whilst this underachievement is not as apparent in the school this year, as it was with last year's Year 11, it is still there, as it is in most schools nationally, and further strategies need to be developed to address it. Parents' concerns, that the most able are not being sufficiently challenged, also need to be addressed more systematically across the curriculum. The provision of clubs for the gifted and talented is welcomed by parents and students, but challenge in lessons varies. Able students are effectively challenged in many subjects, such as history, and achieve very high grades, but in some others, irrespective of whether the subject is taught in ability sets or mixed ability groups, the needs of the ablest are not addressed sufficiently and few highest grades are achieved.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

27. The last inspection report noted that attitudes and relationships were generally good, and that students were attentive and well-motivated and concentrated well. They worked well in groups and were encouraged to gain independence.

28. Students really enjoy coming to school and remain very enthusiastic in the Sixth Form. Attitudes to learning are very positive, especially when the standard of teaching is high and the teacher has consistently high expectations, as seen in lessons in all departments. All year groups show interest and involvement in their lessons and students apply themselves both to their work and to extra-curricular activities. Negative attitudes are rarely seen, and then only with a weaker teacher. The pace at which students, including the less able, work and their capacity to work independently and to persevere are good in all subjects and very good in many across the curriculum. Sixth form students have a mature approach to their studies.

Students have a strong desire to improve their work and take intense pride in the finished product. This was especially evident in a Year 8 English lesson, where students had created beautifully presented stories. Good examples of students taking responsibility for their own work were seen in many lessons.

29. The last inspection report noted that behaviour was good in lessons, though sometimes less satisfactory outside. It expressed concern about the early morning routines of students getting into the school buildings.

30. The overall standard of behaviour is still good. Both students and parents consider that staff successfully maintain high standards of behaviour and the inspection findings support this view. The quality of behaviour in 80 per cent of lessons is at least good, and is very good or excellent in 40 per cent. Behaviour was unsatisfactory or poor in only 5 per cent of lessons observed, and this occurs nearly always where the teacher fails to inspire or control the class. In such cases the teacher loses students' respect and the quality of the lesson deteriorates fast. One group of younger students readily admitted that 'if the teacher is a pushover', they will show off, but that they usually knew when to stop. It is of concern that even many of the most highly motivated of students will misbehave if teaching is poor. However, this is rare and high standards of behaviour in class prevail overwhelmingly and make a major contribution to learning. Students co-operate well and concentrate hard, though there are occasional instances of poor concentration or passivity, usually amongst the least able. However, the sense of urgency and pace in lessons is normally good or very good.

31. Behaviour round the school is civilised, and has improved since the last inspection. Students behave sensibly when arriving at and leaving school; they wait patiently for classrooms to open and queue quietly for buses at the end of the day. Most negotiate the crowded staircases and stairwells between lessons without difficulty. However, some of the smaller students expressed concern at the crush, and not much overt adult supervision is noticeable at these times. Students behave well at break time and when queuing for and eating dinner. However, respect for property is only moderate; students are still thoughtless about dropping litter, and although it is cleared up immediately after dinner, the hall looks a mess as dinnertime finishes. Some litter, including abandoned food, is in evidence even on the upper floors of classroom blocks, and chewing gum is still dropped around the site. There is some graffiti on furniture and in at least one toilet, but no major vandalism was noted.

32. Last year the number of exclusions was very low: no permanent exclusions and only 18 temporary ones, relating to 15 students. The school has introduced sensible measures for identifying those at risk of exclusion and for doing all it can to keep them at school. In particular, it usually succeeds in avoiding exclusions in the Lower School. Most exclusions only last a day and students are re-integrated unobtrusively. The school maintains proper records of exclusions and follows the LEA reporting system.

33. The school impresses on new students and their parents the need to consider others, and most students react very positively. Examples of oppressive behaviour round the school, or of bullying or racism, are rare, though two minor fights were seen. All year groups interviewed are confident that, if bullying is reported, it gets dealt with. There is anecdotal evidence, however, that

some students tend to mock accents that are not local. Respect for others' feelings, values and beliefs is generally high, particularly at the top end of the school and most students are sensitive to the needs and feelings of others. However, a small proportion of students lack understanding of the impact their actions have on others. For example, a few boys in Years 7 and 8 choose to be unaware of the disruptive effect of shouting out or making loud irrelevant comments in lessons. A few students appear arrogant and some boys display an unattractive 'laddishness'. Together these detract from the tolerant and supportive society that the school usually manages to promote.

34. Many students take an active part in the day-to-day life of the school, as was seen in the enthusiastic support for the school and year councils, whose advice is welcomed by senior management. There are opportunities throughout the school for students to take responsibility, for example as counsellors (ChiPs) listening to students' concerns, library assistants, year council representatives, and team captains. Year 11 students become prefects and sixth-formers have been given an important role in helping supervise break times around the school. Year 8 students become receptionists. Students enthusiastically take up the school's wide range of popular extra-curricular activities. Students are encouraged to express their opinions and take up these opportunities. During the inspection, some students took the opportunity to voice both their concerns and positive thoughts on the school to inspectors, both in groups and individually.

35. Relationships amongst students and between staff and students are good. Students are courteous to each other and friendly to staff. They relate positively to each other and work well together in lessons, particularly in pairs. Students react politely when addressed, and are friendly and helpful to visitors. Throughout the inspection, students co-operated positively with inspectors.

36. At the time of the last inspection students' attendance and punctuality, both at the start of the day and to lessons, were reported to be good. Attendance over the last three years has remained steady at 92.6 per cent, 92.4 per cent and 92.7 per cent, which is consistently above the national average. This level has been maintained so far in the current year at 92.5 per cent. In 1999/2000 authorised absence at 6.4 per cent was below the national average and unauthorised absence at 0.9 per cent was broadly in line with the national average of 1.1 per cent. However, so far this year unauthorised absence is running at about 0.75 per cent, most of which can be attributed to about seven or eight students. High attendance has a very positive effect on the attainment and progress of students. The legal requirements for recording and reporting attendance are fully met. Whilst there was some anecdotal evidence, both from parents and students, of a few students truanting from lessons, students indicated that this was now difficult to achieve without parents' co-operation and that, when it did occur, the culprits were almost all caught.

37. Students generally display a responsible attitude to punctuality. Their time-keeping at the start of the day is good and most return from breaks punctually. The morning tutor periods start on time, but because the timetable allows no time for changing classrooms between lessons, most lessons start five or more minutes late.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

38. At the time of the last inspection, teaching was described as good in Key Stage 4 and post-

16 and satisfactory at Key Stage 3, with the weakest teaching observed in Year 8. Good teaching was seen in most subjects, the strongest in art and weakest in music, with teaching frequently good in English, history, science and design technology. Weaknesses were identified in: the pace of some lessons; the challenge to the most able; the matching of tasks to ability; and poor classroom management in some lessons.

39. Since that inspection, the school has used a range of strategies to improve teaching and learning. These include school self analysis, departmental reviews, detailed analysis of all examination and test results, a line management system which supports subject leaders, performance development reviews with all teachers, lesson observations, the sharing of good practice and focused training. The head is proud of the achievements of staff and the quality of learning, which enables most students of all abilities to make good progress. Students interviewed, both before and during the inspection, identified the quality of much of the teaching as being a strength of the school. In particular, they spoke of the willingness of many staff to give freely of their time to help them improve. Some also identified particularly the support provided for students with special educational needs. However, students also raised issues of inconsistencies between teachers and identified a few weaknesses, both occasionally in classroom management and more particularly where a subject had been covered by a succession of temporary teachers.

40. Overall, both the quality of teaching and the quality of students' learning are now good. Most students are enthusiastic learners; they receive good quality teaching in most lessons, particularly at Key Stage 4 and post-16, and some outstanding teaching. Overall teaching was satisfactory or better in 98 per cent of lessons observed, including 45 per cent where it was good and 23 per cent where it was very good or excellent. These are substantially better than average figures for secondary schools. Some very good teaching was seen in all National Curriculum subjects and in all year groups. Teaching is best post-16, where 90 per cent was good or better, compared to 67 per cent at Key Stage 4 and 57 per cent at Key Stage 3. However, whilst there was little difference in the proportion of good or better teaching between the different year groups in either Key Stage 4 or post-16, in Key Stage 3 teaching was strongest in Year 8. In this year, a third of teaching was very good which was the most for any year group. There was least very good teaching in Year 10. In contrast, teaching in one in every ten lessons seen in Year 11 was judged as excellent, as was one lesson in Year 7. Examples of excellence were observed in the teaching of English, drama, economics, life skills and special needs. Overall, teaching was very good or better in two thirds of art and drama lessons; nearly half in religious education, personal and social education, including life skills, and special needs, and around a third in English, economics and physical education. It was good or better in most history, music, psychology, sociology, PSE and economics lessons, over two-thirds of lessons in English and geography and just under two-thirds in physical education and religious education. Teaching was good or better in about half the lessons of all other subjects except for ICT, where it was always satisfactory but only good or better in a third. Some unsatisfactory teaching was observed in English, science, French and business education, but these lessons were exceptions. In general, the school is clearly succeeding in improving the quality of teaching and learning. The post of assistant head responsible for teaching and learning was unfilled at the time of the inspection. However, the provision of such a role supports the curriculum deputy and subject leaders in building on current good practice to improve teaching and learning still further. There is a significant amount of good teaching in the school, much of which could become very good if the best practices were adopted more consistently. Since the last inspection, the school

has successfully built upon strengths in most departments and most work well as teams of staff, with individual autonomy no longer an issue.

41. Across the curriculum, teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subjects, and of how best to teach them, are good. However, there have been some staffing difficulties over the last few years in some subjects, including science and design technology, which has resulted in some timetables being covered by non-specialists and, in a few cases, a succession of temporary staff. ICT is often taught by non-specialists who do not always have the necessary expertise to extend the knowledge of the more competent students. In the best lessons, teachers' enthusiasm for their subject inspires students. For example, in drama, teachers' secure subject skills and knowledge enable Year 11 students to use a wide range of dramatic conventions confidently in their performance pieces. In business education and law, teachers use up to date references, such as how British Airways now operates, to increase students' understanding of topics. In music, teachers' skills are used well to demonstrate different styles of music, and in physical education a teacher's subject knowledge supported a group in learning the benefits of weight training. In science, teachers have secure knowledge beyond their specialist subjects, with two teachers enthusiastically having volunteered to teach psychology. In art, the high level of knowledgeable advice and evaluation of work plays an important part in raising standards.

42. Lesson planning is generally effective and, in most subjects, is based upon the needs of individual students. However, it is better at Key Stage 4 and post-16. In some Key Stage 3 design technology lessons, teachers' limited involvement in planning results in less clear lesson objectives and slower development of students' understanding. In most lessons, teachers' choice of task and careful exposition ensure that students of differing abilities make good progress, independent of whether the subject is taught to classes set by ability or to mixed ability groups. In art, well-planned lessons include a wide range of enjoyable and challenging activities for all levels of attainment. In some lessons, tasks are varied to meet the needs of individual students, although greater use of this strategy would be beneficial, particularly at Key Stage 3. In English, for example, students are grouped within classes in different ways for different purposes to ensure the needs of individual students are attended to. In contrast, some modern foreign language lessons are not always planned to take account of the needs of individual students. However, in general, both higher and lower attaining students are challenged and encouraged appropriately. Most teachers have high expectations of students, although this does vary. In history and English they are appropriately high. In science, expectations are sometimes unrealistically high, whilst in mathematics expectations of the ablest are not always high enough. Teachers work hard and expect students to do the same.

43. In the best lessons, teachers adopt a range of teaching strategies and actively involve students in their learning. Teachers make learning objectives clear to students at the start of lessons. Teachers' expositions are generally clear, and in the best lessons, skilful questioning is used both to review previous learning and to develop understanding. In art and economics, for example, an element of humour is used to maintain students' interest, with exceptional explanatory skills used in economics to challenge students intellectually. In physical education, all teachers produce lessons of great enjoyment, which promote high levels of enthusiasm and interest amongst students. In mathematics, most lessons begin with mental and oral work that fires the enthusiasm of students, and good question and answer techniques are adopted which keep students on task. In contrast, the technique of questioning is not well established in science with the result that many students are able to avoid participation. In English, teachers employ methods which give momentum to lessons and

which fully involve students. For example, in a Year 11 lesson on *Animal Farm*, a series of activities had students annotating Squealer's speeches, comparing identical moments from the book and the film, and looking specifically at rhetorical features associated with propaganda. Students were given time and space to show what they knew and could do, but within a clear and challenging framework of focuses and deadlines. They were made to work hard, but responded with commitment and enjoyment and showed real gains in knowledge and understanding. In a GCSE food technology lesson, the teacher effectively combined the use of video, a presentation and focused questioning to help students complete a product investigation and analysis. In a Year 9 languages lesson, a good variety of activities covered at a cracking pace gave students time to consolidate work done before as well as cover new work. Students' learning is affected directly by both the strengths and inadequacies of teaching. Where teaching fails to develop interest and enthusiasm, learning is less good. There is a tendency in Key Stage 3 geography, for example, for teaching to develop into a routine pattern of working, with students dependent on directed tasks rather than thinking for themselves.

44. In most lessons, students are lively and their enthusiasm and energy are channelled constructively into learning. There is a positive working atmosphere in lessons, which supports good learning. Students' intellectual, physical and creative skills are well developed across the curriculum and very well post-16. The best teachers respond to students' interests and in most lessons relationships are good. In some less good lessons, teachers are reluctant to leave their lesson plan to follow up interesting and legitimate questions raised by students. In many subjects, such as English, drama, history, law, sociology, psychology and religious education, students are encouraged to express views and feelings. They do so in a confident manner and are generally listened to with respect. Students in sociology and business studies, for example, augment their understanding by completion of case studies and projects which require them to apply the knowledge they have gained. The development of research skills and use of sources is encouraged in history, business studies and most additional post-16 subjects, such as law, sociology and psychology. Students are being encouraged to become autonomous learners in many subjects. In drama, for example students are willing to take risks, experiment, and support each other in the practice and refinement of dramatic conventions. In most subjects, basic skills are taught well with specialised vocabulary used appropriately and displayed around rooms to support the development of literacy skills. The range of resources in geography for developing younger students' enquiry skills, for example through role-play exercises and games, is limited. In contrast, in a Year 9 history lesson on the aftermath of the First World War, students were given a briskly-paced simulation exercise requiring them to make a series of decisions about peacemaking which helped them appreciate the dilemma of the peacemakers. ICT is used effectively in many subjects to enhance the quality of work and support understanding. This is particularly true of history, English and geography, but is only now being developed in other subjects such as business studies and religious education. The limited use in mathematics and science is unacceptable.

45. In the vast majority of lessons, teachers' classroom management is good and very good post-16, where students usually adopt very mature approaches which prepare them well for higher education or employment. Sometimes, where it is less skilled, a small number of less motivated students have a disproportionate effect on the lesson and, on a few occasions, the rest of the class becomes uncooperative, as observed, for example, in some Key Stage 3 languages lessons. Students respond differently to different teachers and different subjects. Teachers have to earn

students' respect, but where they do so they are rewarded by the enthusiastic response of most students. Most staff make good use of the time available in lessons, especially where they plan for a variety of activities to be completed at pace. However, in a few subjects, such as in some geography and mathematics lessons, students' attention wanders towards the end of lessons with the last ten minutes often becoming wasted time. In contrast, in art, for example, teachers manage classes very effectively, often in cramped conditions, making good use of time and resources. The use of display is very varied. In some subjects it is excellent. For example, in religious education displays highlight students' good attainment, such as front page newspaper articles on the death of Martin Luther King and students' accounts as reporters of the miracles in Galilee. This contrasts with poor presentation of some other humanities rooms in history and geography.

46. The quality and use on ongoing assessment to inform both teachers and learners of the effectiveness of students' learning was a key issue for action in the last inspection report. In general, this has improved significantly and is now satisfactory at Key stages 3 and 4 and good post-16. In mathematics, students are assessed frequently and the results form part of a record of continuous assessment. In physical education, the department has addressed the issue of students' ability to evaluate each other's performance and teachers assess students' performance and plan accordingly. Similarly, evaluation of performance is a critical aspect of the learning in drama. However, the quality and usefulness of the marking of students' work still vary both between departments and between individual teachers within departments. Most teachers mark, but too often, as in science, insufficient detail is given to students on how to improve. Marking in drama is exemplary. Teachers' full and supportive commentaries on written work make clear how to make progress; they read as interesting and practical dialogues with students. A detailed common marking policy allows for some departmental flexibility. If it was adopted consistently, the quality of marking would be good. In some subjects, such as languages, students have too little awareness of the levels at which they are working, despite the very good progress and assessment system adopted in the school. In general, though, students' own knowledge of their learning improves as they move through the school and is good in Key Stage 4 and very good post-16.

47. Homework is used effectively by most teachers, and students often spend significant amounts of time completing tasks, which are generally appropriate. Some parents indicated that too much homework was set. Interviews with students suggest that this is not the case. Whilst, some students spend significantly longer on homework than others this is generally their choice. There are, however, some inconsistencies in keeping to homework timetables and, where a subject is taught to a class by more than one teacher, the teachers do not always co-ordinate the setting of homework appropriately. For some students, the first year of the new AS Level courses appears to be producing excessive amounts of homework. Teachers may need to adjust the amount set to take account of the increase in the number of subjects taken by students and their reduced non-contact time. Some students make good use of the library to support research, whilst others use a range of homework clubs. Planned improvements to library provision will particularly benefit those students who do not have access to a computer at home.

48. Students with learning difficulties receive good support from teachers and support assistants. Specialist teaching is good at both Key stages 3 and 4. The best teaching showed deep expertise linked to enthusiasm and commitment. Teachers take a delight in the success of students, and students respond well, often with enthusiasm. Teaching by special needs teachers is characterised

by good quality planning, preparation and target setting linked to clear criteria for success. Resources and equipment are very well used. Subject teachers are generally aware of individual needs and liaise well with support staff. As a consequence, students with special educational needs make good progress, especially in Key Stage 3. Progress is satisfactory at Key Stage 4. The small number of students for whom English is an additional language make very good progress. No specific teaching arrangements are needed for these students, none of whom are at the lower stages of acquisition of English.

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

49. Overall, the quality and range of learning opportunities in the curriculum are good at Key stages 3 and 4. The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum with a flexibility of choice and an appropriate mix of long and short courses leading to GCSE certification. The curriculum committee meets regularly to discuss aspects of the curriculum, but minutes of meetings suggest that it is more reactive than rigorously proactive in curriculum matters. There is a brief curriculum policy with comments on aims and objectives but less evidence of a philosophy or rationale for the curriculum.

50. The taught timetable of 25 hours is in line with DfEE recommendations and all lessons are taught in mixed ability groups, except for mathematics from Year 7 and science from Year 8. Until recently modern foreign languages were also taught in sets according to ability. The department has moved to teaching mixed ability classes in order to address weaknesses in its previous delivery, but is also experimenting with some ability grouping for the ablest in some years. The Key Stage 3 curriculum offers an appropriate balance of subjects and all students study French at Key Stage 3 and take a second language (Spanish or German) in Years 8 and 9. The Key Stage 4 curriculum provides for some choice through a properly introduced and well-supported programme of options at the start of Year 10. However, some weaknesses in the organisation of the option programme mean that design and technology is blocked against religious education and students are unable to take full GCSE courses in both subjects. Some students, however, attend top up lessons in religious education at lunchtimes in order to enter the full course. Furthermore, physical education is blocked against languages so that the number of students opting to take full courses in languages is less than usual. Students wishing to take two languages are able to opt out of design and technology so that they are disapplied from the National Curriculum.

51. Curriculum provision is particularly good in art, which has recently introduced studies in architecture in an attempt to improve the interest and raise the achievement of boys. In addition to art and music, all students receive a period of drama each week in Key Stage 3, and a large number choose it as an option at Key Stage 4. Unusually, all students are now being entered for either GCSE physical education or for a qualification as a junior sports leader, with a choice of either a short or full course, dependent on their other options. Dance is taught as a module within physical education at both Key stages, but there is no discrete dance as part of the school's arts offer. Provision is good in English, which provides a full and imaginative coverage of the National Curriculum. There is a good range of courses in design and technology, although some of these courses are chosen so stereotypically that gender imbalances are evident in a number of classes.

Economics and business studies are introduced as options at Key Stage 4, and students choosing history have a choice between

the Schools Council and a world history course. Staffing difficulties in design technology have resulted in a very successful GNVQ Part 1 in engineering having to be dropped as an option. There are currently no vocationally based options offered at Key Stage 4. This is an area of potential development.

52. Discrete information technology lessons are offered in Year 7 only and there is an expectation that other subject areas will contribute to students' ICT capability in Years 8 and 9. At present, the management and co-ordination of ICT across the curriculum are unsatisfactory, and students are not given sufficient opportunities to apply and develop their ICT capability in mathematics and science. Consequently, the statutory requirements for these subjects are not met, especially at Key Stage 3. However, good use of ICT is made in many other subjects, including English and history.

53. Good provision is made for the least able through the Bonus course which is offered as an alternative to double science certification and is designed to develop students' confidence and self esteem. Elsewhere, much of the curriculum for students with special educational needs is concerned with maximising access to the normal school curriculum. There is a focus on literacy and numeracy, and information technology skills are well used to support this overall aim. For example, technical language development and linked spelling work are provided for science lessons, and support work reinforces this process in science lessons. Extensive extra-curricular activity in the learning support department before school and at lunchtimes provides a valuable extension to mainstream work.

54. The curriculum for students in Years 12 and 13 is satisfactory, but there are weaknesses in its breadth. All Sixth Form courses are A and AS accredited with the exception of a vocational A Level in business education in Year 12 and an advanced GNVQ in business in Year 13. Entry requirements in the Sixth Form are stringent so that a number of students are denied the opportunity to continue their education at the school, especially those wishing to pursue vocational and non academic qualifications. The lack of provision for such courses means that the Sixth Form does not provide a broad range of worthwhile opportunities that meet the interests, aptitudes and particular needs of all students in the school. An intermediate level GNVQ has been successfully offered in previous years, but was not chosen by students in the current Year 12. However, the offer of only one such course and a vocational A Level to more than a third of students who do not obtain five or more higher grades at GCSE is unacceptable for a large comprehensive school. In contrast, a wide range of A Level subjects is offered, sometimes as a result of interest shown by students. The science department offers human biology and environmental science, in addition to the three traditional sciences, and sociology, psychology and law are offered as new subjects at this key stage.

55. The provision for the development of key skills (communication, numeracy and information and communication technology) in the Sixth Form is unsatisfactory, although the school has introduced this year a good general studies programme covering literature, media, arts, sociology, politics and religious education. However, the time allocated to religious education is insufficient to meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus, so that the statutory requirements for the curriculum, in the Sixth Form, are not met.

56. Progress since the last inspection in curriculum provision has been satisfactory and the school has tackled many of the issues regarding time allocations in Key Stage 4. The curriculum now meets statutory requirements for religious education at Key Stage 4 but not in the Sixth Form, as was the case at the last inspection.

57. Provision for personal, social and health education is very good, and is a strength of the school. The programme is effectively co-ordinated and is taught by a team of specialist and experienced staff. Students between the ages of 11 and 14 are taught a full range of personal and social skills, and they study issues such as drugs and health awareness. The programme also includes citizenship and careers guidance. Students in Years 10 and 11 are taught a life-skills programme which extends the provision lower down the school and includes more careers guidance. All students in Year 12 follow a new general studies course, which includes aspects of cultural, scientific and social awareness. This is a welcome development, which broadens students' knowledge in preparation for entry to higher education. The quality of the teaching of the personal, social and health education programme throughout the whole school is very good. Teachers plan the lessons well, have high expectations of students and employ a range of resources which motivate and inform them, as was seen for example in a lesson on health and safety in the workplace and a lesson concerned with raising awareness of, and suggesting remedies for, bullying.

58. Provision for careers education and guidance is very good. A coherent programme of careers commencing in Year 9 through to the end of Key Stage 4, is provided with very good support from a committed and enthusiastic co-ordinator. In Year 9, careers advice becomes more formalised. Support is given to students when considering options. In Years 10 and 11 further support is provided through a life-skills programme which is further supplemented by weekly visits from the school's careers advisor. The Careers department has a wide and varied library resource and makes good use of Careers aided computer programmes.

59. A series of very well-planned work-related events continues throughout Key stages 3 and 4. This includes a three-week work experience placement in February of Year 11. The work experience programme is thoroughly prepared and monitored. The work experience co-ordinator with the valued assistance of Trident, a careers service, takes care to fit the experience to the students' vocational interests. 80 per cent of students continue the placement through the February half term break. In February 2000, the school recorded a 100 per cent commitment from the students to the work experience programme. This programme is greatly appreciated by parents.

60. The school has forged good links with the business community and its local Business Education Partnership. In Year 11, the students experienced a mock interview with members of the business community. The interview process begins in Year 10 when students prepare Curriculum Vitae and complete job application forms. The 40-minute interview concludes with written and verbal feedback. Additional initiatives are a Year 9 Industry Opportunity day, the Year 10 and 11 Study Skills programmes, and Young Enterprise schemes. All these initiatives link students with employers, which enhances the students' awareness of the skills and attributes required when entering employment.

61. The school's policy on equal opportunities has been reviewed, as required by the last inspection, and the second draft of a new policy is under consultation. A large working group

reflecting many aspects of school life formulated the policy from an audit of the school's needs and national requirements. The new policy has a statement of equal opportunity and addresses issues on the Student Charter, extra-curricular activities, work experience, the learning environment and staff responsibilities. The policy does address issues of ethnicity and cultural diversity, a weakness of the previous policy as identified in the last inspection. In practice, the school is monitoring all equal opportunity issues. However, until recently, monitoring the achievement of groups of differing age, gender and capability has been rather superficial. The more systematic tracking of students' progress, with the introduction of academic tutors, has enabled the school for the first time to coherently analyse differences in achievement, identify possible reasons for them and adopt strategies to address areas of underachievement.

62. Equality of opportunity is considered when the curriculum structure is being decided. All students have equal access to the curriculum at Key stages 3 and 4, but not post-16. The paucity of vocational courses, particularly in the Sixth Form, results in a considerable number of students having to move to other educational establishments at the end of Key Stage 4 in order to study their chosen subjects. For example, a number of students were interviewed who wished to follow a vocational performing arts course. Despite there being a successful business education department, recruitment to an intermediate level GNVQ has only been successful in some years. There is no offer of NVQ courses with which such a non-A Level cohort might supplement their studies. Strategies are being introduced to address the differences in performance between boys and girls, especially at Key Stage 4, in order to enable students of both sexes to achieve as well as they can. As well as the introduction of the study of architecture in art, for example, the physical education department is introducing a greater variety of teaching and learning styles, in particular to address boys' acquisition of knowledge in GCSE theory lessons.

63. The introduction of the Bonus Scheme at Key Stage 4 addresses the needs of some students in Year 10 and 11 who are experiencing academic and/or social difficulties. The school is embracing the issues of inclusion. A successful Dyslexia Unit benefits a much wider cohort of students than its designated entry. However, access to the site for students with some disabilities would at present be impossible. In planning for new buildings, this should be addressed, although significant resources would be required to make some of the other blocks fully accessible.

64. The last inspection report praised the quality of the school's links with its feeder schools and with local industry, and noted the extensive use of the site by the local community out of hours.

65. The enrichment of students' curriculum through the school's strong links with the local community and through its wide extra-curricular programme has become a strength of the school. Its contribution was recognised when it received a Curriculum Award 2000 in recognition of its distinctive and valuable contribution to the community. The school is keen that students should learn to give of their time. Both the Saturday theatre school and the choir entertain senior citizens and the choir takes part in musical performances in the town centre at Christmas. The School Council, in conjunction with senior management, organises extensive charity work and allocates the substantial sums raised to a number of charities. Recent major donations have included setting up a school in India and a large gift to Comic Relief. The head teacher set a fine example by undertaking a sponsored climb of Mount Kilimanjaro.

66. There are very strong links with the local press and the school's press releases lead to frequent positive newspaper articles. Journalists have helped train Year 10 students in how to construct newspaper stories and the school has also been involved in a recent television news programme. There are links between the art department and the haemodialysis unit of a local hospital and with the artistic community, which provides artists in residence. Business studies and GNVQ students benefit from the school's extensive links with the business community. Year 10 students relish the chance of joining a local off-road driving course. The on-site community centre, run by the school, is a major contributor both to the life of the local community and to the funds of the school. It runs a range of activities, such as evening courses for adults and students and a pre-school and language school. It provides facilities for local groups such as football clubs and a choir, and hires out the premises for caravan rallies and other private functions.

67. The last inspection reported that the school's extra-curricular provision effectively enhanced the curriculum for a large number of students. This continues to be the case. The school provides a significant number of subject-based clubs, which students enthusiastically join. In most departments there is at least one club or activity in which students can participate as part of the school day. There are clubs and additional work sessions throughout the school, such as the creative writing club or the 'Aple' club for the academically gifted; the learning support department runs clubs to help lower attainers. An active Christian Union meets regularly. The computer facilities are available outside lessons for completing course work or accessing the Internet. The choice of sporting clubs on offer is a strength of the physical education department, and is welcomed both by students and by parents. During the inspection, members of the debating society took part in a local public speaking competition.

68. In addition to the clubs, the school welcomes a large number of visitors, mostly from local industry working with Year 9 students, or academics or business professionals advising on academic or career progression. However, there are also several visits from the local police force to reinforce the personal, health and social education programme, and the visit of a children's author was a great success with Year 8. There is an extensive range of interesting visits to local sites, such as Castle Hedingham and Georgian Southend, or to museums, theatres and other institutions, which are as varied as trips to look at universities and an outing to the Clothes Show. The school also provides a large variety of popular sporting and language trips abroad.

69. The school has established close and very successful links for the transfer of students from all its four main feeder primary schools, and it ensures that the many other schools that send only a few Year 7 students are not neglected. It has recently developed a detailed, well thought-out procedure for the successful transfer of Year 6 students. This includes subject enhancement training late in Year 5 and a summer school for the gifted and talented. This year the school is taking part in a pilot scheme for transferring student records electronically. However, it is recognised that curriculum links with feeder schools are currently relatively limited and could be developed further. Currently, links are mainly confined to literacy and numeracy. One member of each department has responsibility for primary links. Some extension of their role, possibly to include some regular teaching alongside class teachers in the main feeder schools, would support greater continuity between phases and help address some under-performance at Key Stage 3. The school is an active member of an effective

consortium of all schools in the area. It has close links with its sister secondary school and effective links with further and higher education institutions. It participates in the SCITT student teacher training project and provides work-experience students to the local primary schools.

70. The school's overall provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is satisfactory, although there is no overall policy for co-ordinating and promoting these aspects. Provision for spiritual education is satisfactory, which is an improvement on the previous inspection. Opportunities are taken in some year assemblies and in registration periods to develop students' spiritual awareness. This was evident for example in a Year 9 assembly in which students were asked to reflect on those who are less fortunate than themselves. Similarly, some form tutors in morning registration periods lead their groups in discussion of the 'Thought for the Week'. During the inspection this was on the theme of 'If we don't see the light we remain in the darkness' and several students held sensible discussions on how this could relate to their lives in and out of school. However, not all tutors follow up the 'Thought', and the school does not comply with statutory requirements for providing a daily act of collective worship. Opportunities to develop or celebrate spiritual awareness occur in some lessons. For example, students in religious education lessons reflect meaningfully on their inner selves and the meaning of worship. Students in art lessons are encouraged to express themes of personal significance in their artwork, and students on a visit to Amsterdam were excited by meeting the artist Edward Hopper. Students in English lessons express their emotions through literature. However, such opportunities are much more infrequent in other subject areas.

71. Moral and social developments are closely linked, and the school's provision for both aspects is good, and better than at the time of the previous inspection. There are many opportunities for students to develop a sense of moral worth and individual responsibility. Students in Year 11 value the privilege of being selected as prefects and carry out a range of duties, whilst students in all years value their school and year councils as opportunities to elect representatives to act on behalf of their fellows. Students are also active in raising funds for charity. Students develop a sense of moral responsibility through taking part in organisations such as Amnesty International. Generally, throughout the school, students are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and to follow worthwhile role models, often provided by teachers themselves. Students are treated as responsible individuals, as witnessed by the contract between student and school, which is displayed in some classrooms. The school similarly promotes social development effectively by giving students a wide range of opportunities to work and socialise together, whether in clubs, sports teams or major school productions such as 'Blood Brothers'. Within lessons, students generally co-operate well, for example when doing paired work on computers. They learn the sense of living in a wider community by participating in the many extra-curricular activities which the school provides, including residential trips such as the one to Spain.

72. The school's provision for cultural development is satisfactory. As at the time of the previous inspection, certain subjects make a strong contribution to broadening students' cultural horizons, notably English, drama, music and art. The English department teaches myths from Africa, North America and the Caribbean as well as from Europe, and it arranges trips to outside theatres and invites professional storytellers and drama groups into school. However, opportunities are not extensive in other areas: for example music is not used much in assemblies or tutor time. The multicultural dimension of students' education is undeveloped in comparison to the specifically

indigenous and European dimensions. The art department encourages a study of artefacts, textiles, ceramics, painting and sculpture of ethnic, tribal and cultural origin; and the music department includes a study of music styles from a range of cultures. However, despite the study of different faiths within the curriculum, multicultural awareness is not much in evidence throughout the school. Students are given relatively little insight into the opportunities and challenges involved in living in a multicultural society, such as modern Britain.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

73. Pastoral care was reported to be good at the time of the last inspection. The house system allowed good relationships to be built up. Tutors were not making good use of the 20-minute daily tutor period. Students received a well-planned, successful, personal and social education programme from a team of specialist teachers. There was a high level of staff awareness of the school's health and safety and sex education policies, and draft policies for child protection and for dealing with substance abuse were being developed. Procedures for dealing with educational visits and accidents and emergencies were sound and effective.

74. Since the beginning of this academic year pastoral care has been delivered through a year rather than a house structure, and overseen by heads of school. In order to maintain continuity of student care and to develop positive relationships with parents, heads of year and tutors progress with their tutor groups right up the school, while heads of school maintain their position. This allows for the Head of Lower School, for example, to build long-term contacts with the primary schools. Each year group also has an academic tutor who provides a positive link between an individual's academic and pastoral staff and who has responsibility for monitoring students' progress. The school is very effective in its support and guidance to students and in providing for their welfare. This makes a very positive contribution to educational standards and helps students to feel happy and secure. The school has a welcoming and friendly atmosphere. Pastoral staff know their students very well and students confidently turn to them or other members of staff for help. The high quality of co-operation and liaison between all staff on pastoral matters is an important feature of the school. Students appreciate greatly both the academic and personal support given. Parents appreciate the school's comprehensive arrangements for introducing new students in Year 7, which start early in their last year at primary school. The good arrangements for transfer to university and college or for training for employment ensure that students move on with confidence.

75. The school complies fully with child protection guidelines, and liaison arrangements with social services and other external agencies are very good. They include using a counsellor to help students deal with personal problems. The school effectively supports students with special educational needs to meet the targets set in individual education plans and statements. The assessment and recording system for all aspects of special educational needs is good. It is very thorough and detailed, and appropriate files are kept on every student. Individual education plans and statements have clearly defined targets. There are very good links with outside agencies, and termly and annual reviews are clearly documented. There is an annual report to governors, and a link governor works with the special educational needs department.

76. The school generally complies with legal requirements for health and safety procedures. Though there is not yet a system for formally recording the results of safety inspections, procedures are in place for bringing concerns about health and safety to the notice of the appropriate staff. Provision for medical care and first aid are very good. Sick students are appropriately looked after in a new medical room. Regular tests are carried out on equipment. The school responded positively when notified of minor health and safety concerns, such as the lack of fire evacuation instructions in a few classrooms. However, those students questioned all knew the evacuation procedure.

77. The school operates very effective measures for monitoring and improving attendance. Procedures for monitoring and promoting discipline and good behaviour have recently been revised and are working well. Students consider them fair. The procedures for dealing with bullying and oppressive behaviour are effective, but the school is in the process of strengthening them. Staff have high expectations of good behaviour and promote an orderly and cheerful atmosphere throughout the school. These expectations are fully realised by the standards of behaviour observed round the school. Bullying is rare and then usually of a minor nature. Students in all year groups, and their parents, are happy that inappropriate behaviour is dealt with rapidly and effectively. Some older students are trained to become student counsellors (CHIPS) who can be approached by students experiencing bullying or other unacceptable behaviour. Some students spoke positively about the support they had received from these students.

78. When students have emotional or behavioural problems, the head of year, the special needs co-ordinator, the school counsellor and any appropriate external agency keep proper records and give good individual support to the students concerned.

79. Assessment was a key issue at the previous inspection. The school has made good progress in establishing clear procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress. Assessment procedures inform both teachers and students of the progress being made and provide a firm basis upon which future lessons may be planned. There is a good example of assessment promoting the continuity and quality of learning in history, where the grades given are linked to National Curriculum levels, self-assessment and target setting. In most subjects, assessment is understood by students and teachers and is well used to support learning and teaching. Assessment procedures are particularly good for students who have special educational needs. There are excellent links to the individual education plans and student statements. Manageable and achievable targets are set. Progress towards them is systematically monitored. In Science, assessment procedures are in place but are not linked to National Curriculum levels, which limits their usefulness. In modern foreign languages, assessment procedures are unsatisfactory and there is little consistency in practice between languages.

80. The procedures for monitoring and supporting students' academic progress are good, while those for supporting personal development are very good. Each year group has an academic and pastoral tutor who work very closely together to ensure that the progress of each student is carefully monitored. Teachers know the students well and have a full picture of their strengths and weaknesses. Strengths are singled out for commendation and prompt support is given to students who need it, for example, through the mentoring system at Key

Stage 4. Students have access to assessment information and may see for themselves the progress they are making. Self-assessment is a valuable part of the process and is a spur to achievement. The student planner provides good contact between home and school and the three individual targets ensure a clear focus for student development.

81. The programme for reports and parent-teacher consultative evenings is very well planned and provides for the exchange of high quality information that helps to improve the performance of the students. Each year group has two short and one long report per year. Parents and students may therefore measure the progress made and jointly decide what needs to be done. The National record of Achievement awarded to all Year 11 students is very informative and thorough. It gives a very good account of each student's achievements in all aspects of school life.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

82. The last inspection report noted that there were regular opportunities for parents to discuss children's progress and that they were informed of school events. However, some parents felt communication could be better. There was some parental help in running practice interviews, but in general there was little parental involvement in the day-to-day running of the school and no one volunteered to fill a parent governor vacancy.

83. Parents are now very positive about the school and there is a full complement of parent-governors. Parents' view that their children enjoy coming to school was confirmed by all student year groups. Parents consider that their children make good progress and they think that the school promotes good behaviour, a view confirmed by the inspection. They see teaching as being good, but some of those attending the pre-inspection meeting expressed concern both about the quality of part of the mathematics teaching, and about standards in modern foreign languages as a result of high staff turnover and the use of supply teachers. However, they feel that the school caters well for students of both higher and lower ability. These views were supported by the inspection.

84. Parents are comfortable about approaching the school, which has very high expectations of students and which is good at helping them to mature. They welcome the extensive pastoral help and guidance offered to their children. Most think they are kept well informed about progress and that the school works closely with parents, though in both cases a small minority of those responding to the questionnaire disagrees. Parents feel welcome in school, and more are now playing an active part in its life. A significant factor, recognised by parents, in the school's developing success is the quality of leadership. Parents acknowledge that students are expected to work hard and have to undertake a substantial amount of homework. Most think the quantity to be about right, though a minority tends to think there is too much and a few, too little. They consider that the school provides an interesting range of extra-curricular activities, though surprisingly a small minority disagrees.

85. The quality of the school's relationships with parents is a strength of the school and its links with parents, which it monitors carefully, are very effective. It is very good at consulting parents, for example through its biennial questionnaires, and when developing new policies or documentation that may affect them, for example possible revisions to the school day. It holds frequent parents'

information meetings on subjects of specific interest to groups of parents, and actively encourages them to make informal contact at any time. There is a weekly surgery for any parent to discuss individual concerns. Parents are invited to a wide range of musical and dramatic productions, sporting events, and other activities.

86. Parents are often actively involved in the special educational needs department's work with their children, and provide valuable back up to the service provided by the school. Parents in their turn are very appreciative of the department's work. One factor in this very good working relationship is the determination by all staff involved in the school's provision to give students full access to the curriculum.

87. The school keeps parents very well informed. It produces lively, interesting documentation, such as the prospectus, termly newsletters and the annual governors' report. Its induction documentation for new parents is clear and helpful, and the student planner contains much useful basic information about the school. A highlight is the school Internet website, which from September 2001 will contain copies of all general correspondence. There is a clear booklet on choosing subject options at the end of Year 9.

88. The quality of reports to parents on students' progress is very good. A short, snappy, interim report is followed up by a detailed end-of-year report which includes student self-assessment and targets, and from the upper school onwards, a highly professional National Record of Achievement. The Sixth Form report includes very frequent teacher assessments. Parents are generally happy with the amount of detail provided by the reports, which meet statutory requirements. However, a few parents expressed concerns that full reports in some years are sent well before the end of the year. Whilst their concerns are understandable, it is also appropriate for staff to stagger report-writing throughout the year in order to make the task manageable. Most end-of-year reports evaluate performance very effectively, but a few teachers use the academic comment section more to put grades into words than to set out what students understand, know and can do. Students' reports are properly reviewed with parents, and parents of those with statements of special educational need or with individual education plans are fully involved in the reviews of their children's progress.

89. The contribution of parents to children's learning at home and at school is good. Parents have the opportunity to keep themselves informed of their children's homework and to support day-to-day progress through the student planner. They are encouraged to use it to maintain a dialogue with the school and most tutors check assiduously to ensure that they do. A few parents are less diligent in using the planner effectively. Many parents contribute to their children's progress by providing home computers. Access is available to computers in the library and in some subject areas before and after school for those without computers at home. Attendance at parents' evenings and the school's social and cultural events, such as the Sixth Form art exhibition, is very good, but the weekly surgery with senior staff is not much used, although this is positive indicator that parents have few concerns. Currently, a small number of parent volunteers work in school, mainly in training in careers interviews, and others help with work experience placements. A thriving Parents', Teachers' and Friends' Association helps at school functions and arranges a number of well-attended fund-raising events which bring in useful sums for their children's benefit.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

90. At the time of the last inspection, an acting headteacher was in place following the retirement of the previous head on health grounds. A variety of weaknesses was identified in all levels of management of the school. The review and restructure of management systems were identified as a key issue, in order “to ensure that senior staff had clear roles within a coherent structure ...and to allow for the development and implementation of collective and coherent approaches to whole school issues.” Aims were said to lack detail and did not provide a sound basis for development planning, which was weak. Whilst middle managers were described as mostly effective, lots of professional autonomy was said to be limiting progress.

91. The current headteacher was appointed soon after the last inspection with a clear brief to restructure the management team and address the key issues identified in the inspection. That leadership and management are now strengths of the school is tribute to the enormous amount the head has achieved over the last five years. An experienced and successful head was appointed. She has provided excellent leadership to the school and has a clear vision, which, whilst centred on raising attainment through improving the quality of teaching and learning, also displays a care for all individuals within the school community. There is now a clear and effective management structure, including a senior management of two deputy headteachers and a business manager, supported by four assistant headteachers. Two middle managers are also co-opted onto the senior management team, providing an excellent link with middle management, as well as good professional development for the staff concerned. One deputy headteacher left prior to the headteacher’s appointment, another soon after. Another left last year, with an assistant head successfully applying for promotion to the post, leaving a vacancy in his previous position at the time of this inspection. From observation of senior management, it is clear that there has been a successful move from a task-based approach to one where there is clear understanding of roles and responsibilities and a coherent approach to the leadership of the school.

92. Management at all levels has been restructured. Significantly the school has moved from a popular house system to a year structure, with the appointment of both heads of year and academic tutors for each year group. The roles of both include academic as well as pastoral monitoring. This system works well. In addition there are four experienced staff performing the roles of heads of school for each of the school’s Key stages and community education. These staff have specific responsibilities related to their roles, including primary liaison, option choice, preparation for higher education and community links. The structure is complex but highly effective. There is also a fairly traditional management structure for subject areas, although some grouping of subjects is being undertaken to provide for more coherent management. A clear line management structure has made subjects more accountable than previously, whilst attempting not to lose some of the strengths of the previous departmental autonomy. Subject leadership is generally good. Whilst some staff fulfil more than one role within the school, the previous structure, which allowed staff to accumulate points without reference to their ability to successfully carry out the roles, has been dismantled.

93. The headteacher’s leadership is very strong. Her style is open and consensual, but clearly focused. The impact she has had on the school is acknowledged by staff, governors, parents and students. She is ably supported by her senior colleagues and most middle managers. She meets frequently with her deputies and business manager, and formally every two weeks after school with

the senior management, as well as for a briefing one morning each week. All school meetings are appropriately minuted and professionally organised. The roles of all managers, senior and middle, are now clearly laid out in the staff handbook. All staff have well written individual job descriptions which expand upon their roles. The head is a qualified trainer for the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH), and the experience brings an added dimension to her role in school. One deputy has recently passed NPQH training and the other has just commenced it.

94. The school has an appropriate, concise set of aims. They are broad and all encompassing: creating a caring and stimulating learning environment, realising students' potential, encouraging self esteem and respect for others, and promoting partnership with the community. Whilst not explicitly centred on teaching and learning and raising attainment, school documentation clearly indicates that this is implicit. The school development plan usefully expands the aims with statements indicating how each aim will be achieved and a set of key characteristics of the school. These are very thorough. Students are clear that the school values, amongst other things, academic achievement, respect for each other and care of individuals. The school's aims and values are very well reflected on a day to day basis within its work. For example, the school has successfully achieved recognition as an Investor in People. The report on this identified the importance attached to personal development within the school and the active partnership which exists between staff, students, parents and governors. It found communication within the school to be good. It is; despite being a large school, staff are successful in creating an ethos more commonly associated with smaller establishments. Students in all years indicated clearly their confidence in approaching their head of year when necessary, as well as their tutors, but also indicated that they had access to the head and other senior staff. In 2000, the school received a prestigious Curriculum Award in recognition of its distinctive and valuable contribution to the community; one of its clear aims was thus successfully met and rewarded. The school's aims are supported by an extensive range of policy documents which are regularly reviewed and, in general, are successfully implemented.

95. The governing body gives very strong support to the headteacher and staff. It is well informed about the work of the school and has a well-organised committee structure which is serviced effectively by senior staff. As a consequence, governors are able to carry out their strategic role successfully. A meeting of the premises committee was observed during the inspection. In this professionally organised meeting, governors asked appropriately searching questions of senior school staff and architects who were presenting possible plans for future building work. All committee meetings are minuted and received by the full governing body. Care should be taken to ensure that minutes record the governors' role in discussions clearly and more fully. Governors were fully involved in the preparation and implementation of the action plan prepared after the last inspection, and also annually in the preparation, monitoring and evaluation of the school's development plan. Governors have a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, informed by thorough reports from the head, presentations from staff on developments and on examination results and substantial documentation. However, whilst the governing body is very effectively fulfilling most of its statutory duties and has appropriately considered and responded to the logistical difficulties of providing a daily act of collective worship, some statutory elements of the curriculum are not

being met. The governors' involvement in curriculum decisions has improved significantly since the last inspection. However, greater clarity of curriculum philosophy would support managers in enabling students to receive a balanced entitlement with some element of choice, without undervaluing the place of some subject disciplines.

96. The school has an impressive range of strategies to monitor and evaluate its performance. All senior staff have been trained in school self-evaluation. This has led to the recent introduction of departmental reviews, which are intended to occur every two years. The process, which has so far been used with religious studies and English, is both a thorough and a useful tool in the development of middle managers. The focus of advice is clearly on gaining greater consistency of best practice from all staff, but within a context of praising the strengths seen. Other strategies include an effective line management structure, performance management, Investors in People, analysis of examination results, target setting, lesson observation and surveys. Every two years, the views of staff, parents and students are surveyed by Leeds University using a questionnaire on all aspects and developments within school. Survey results are analysed and considered by governors and senior managers. This is an example of good practice. Clear line-management procedures include: analysis of examination results, lesson observations and staff training requirements. However, documentation suggests some difference in the depth of analyses carried out between departments. The monitoring, development and evaluation of teaching are augmented by the effective strategies being developed to monitor students' progress throughout the school. The appointment of academic tutors and redefining of the roles of form tutors have raised the importance of this role.

97. Overall, the monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching are good. The school has an impressive staff development plan and all staff undergo regular training and professional development, which is evaluated in terms of its contribution to raising standards and improving student achievement. The training budget is well spent in meeting the priorities identified by the school. Teachers' performance is now closely monitored by senior staff through the ongoing programme of department reviews, but monitoring by middle management is not consistently so strong. Subject leaders, particularly in larger departments would benefit from clearly designated time to carry out this monitoring role. The consistent application of school systems and policies remains a challenge in a large school, particularly given changes to staffing, including a number of temporary staff.

98. The school's development planning process, appropriateness of priorities and action taken to meet targets are now excellent. There is a clear development planning cycle which results in a three year plan. It is clearly a working document which is drawn up after thorough consultation. The process, which involves staff, governors, students and parents, is seen as important. Priorities and targets are developed from detailed analyses of the school context and departmental plans build on the agreed school priorities. The plan is reviewed annually and the evaluation shared with parents in the governors' annual report. The quality of what happens in individual classrooms is central to the plan. Overall it is an excellent and useful document, although the high level of detail is translated into success criteria which tend to be related to task completion rather than success in meeting the priority. The plan is augmented by a five-year plan for the site, and financial, staff development and ICT plans.

99. The school's strategy for appraisal and performance management is excellent. The school has established and developed its own 'Professional Development Review', which encourages staff to reflect upon their performance, and the learning outcomes achieved by their students. All teaching and non-teaching staff take part in the professional development review process and the procedures laid down ensure that staff training and continuous professional development are closely linked to individual, department and school targets.

100. The induction of staff new to the school is excellent and induction is tracked against a comprehensive checklist, which highlights opportunities for further professional development. All new staff are assigned to a mentor and offered a comprehensive induction programme. A fuller programme is provided for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and their reduced timetable commitment allows them to meet regularly with their mentor in order to identify and support targets for their further development. A similar programme is offered for support staff and teaching assistants.

101. The school is also part of the Mid Essex Consortium for School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) and presently provides placements for four trainee teachers across a number of subject areas. The course structure and content are designed well to develop trainees' knowledge, skills and understanding of teaching as well as to provide good development opportunities for staff at the school. Her Majesty's Inspectors, on a recent inspection of the provision, were impressed by the professional way that the consortium was run as well as by the enthusiasm and commitment of staff and senior managers.

102. The special educational needs department is very well led. The co-ordinator very successfully carries out her various responsibilities, ensuring that the students concerned make good progress and attain well, as well as meeting her statutory duties. All the issues concerning special educational needs at the last inspection have been resolved. There is now full clarity in learning targets, especially those forming part of individual education plans, and the requirements of statements are met; there is now good informal and formal liaison with departments, and management of special educational needs is now good. The final formal special educational needs policy is about to be ratified by governors, and resourcing issues have been partly met. The new policies for both whole-school special educational needs and the Dyslexia Unit have followed the appointment of a new co-ordinator and the establishment of the Unit since the last inspection.

103. Financial planning is very good, supported by efficient routine administration of the budget. The business manager meets regularly with the head and deputies as part of 'Group4', as well as being part of the senior management team. The principles of best value are applied well to the strategic use of available funds to support school improvement. Spending is closely linked to the priorities of the school improvement plan and governors take direct responsibility for oversight of financial management. The financial situation is much healthier than at the time of the last inspection when there was a deficit budget. A substantial amount has been saved over the last four years, which it is intended to use on new accommodation in order to address weaknesses that have been clearly identified. The learning support and dyslexia units both provide efficient and effective support. There is a flexible approach to staff training, which has enabled staff to attend weekend courses with additional remuneration. Resources from the local education authority for specific students are clearly earmarked.

104. Good budget systems are in place and some use is now being made of Audit Commission benchmarking data. When all income is taken into account, including substantial sums raised from the use of vending machines and hire of premises, the amount available per student is well above average. Currently expenditure is also well above average, but less than the income available because of the planned savings to fund building work. In recent years the amounts spent on teaching staff and learning resources have been lower than average nationally. Class sizes in some subjects are quite large and overall the proportion of time that teachers on average spend on teaching is in line with that nationally. The last full audit of the school's accounts gave rise to a substantial number of queries. However, most of these were a consequence of governors not having adopted new financial procedures. These have now been adopted and a subsequent follow up visit by auditors found most issues addressed. The remaining areas have since been responded to effectively. Financial administration is now good. Day to day management and administration of the school are very good. Despite the size of the school, communication is good. Staff attend a twice-weekly briefing from senior staff, but most other communication is through a school diary or through the academic and pastoral structures. There is also a suggestion box in the staff room, to enable staff at all levels to make proposals for change or to comment on current practice.

105. The match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum is good and the ratio of students to teachers is broadly in line with similar schools. The school is staffed and resourced to teach the curriculum and the majority of staff is deployed to teach their own specialist subject, especially in the Sixth Form. Staffing is particularly good in English, drama, art, history, business education and physical education, where the teachers are suitably qualified, highly skilled and well deployed. Staffing in the special needs department and the dyslexia unit is also particularly good, with many support staff undertaking training for external accreditation. However the special needs co-ordinator does not have adequate time to carry out her responsibilities. There are one and a half full-time equivalent qualified staff plus extensive numbers of learning assistants and good access to external agencies. Staffing in languages is unsatisfactory, because of split classes and frequent timetable changes to accommodate staffing shortages, and poor in design and technology where, during the week of the inspection, the curriculum was being covered by three part-time teachers and a supply teacher. Other subject areas also suffer from difficulties in recruiting suitable staff and the school has recently set up its own 'Recruitment Working Group' comprising teaching staff and governors. The group has been active in identifying ways of recruiting good quality staff and ensuring that information provided to potential new staff stresses the considerable professional development opportunities offered by the school. The high turnover of staff in recent years is due in part to the success of staff from Mayflower in gaining promotion elsewhere. The deployment of teachers could be improved. In some subjects, too many classes are split between teachers and lessons are sometimes not spread well throughout the week. There is a rationale for the allocation of non-contact time, but in practice there is wide variation between allocations to teachers with similar responsibilities. Those with lighter loads are used first to cover absent colleagues but, whilst this is recorded thoroughly, it is not analysed systematically over time.

106. At the time of the last inspection the accommodation was seen as being just sufficient to support achievement and the quality of learning. It was generally well used and managed and the deployment of rooms was sound. A number of areas needed refurbishment. The quality of displays outside the teaching rooms was generally poor, with the exception of the religious education area. Litter was a significant problem.

107. Since the last inspection an enormous amount of building and refurbishment work has been undertaken, with smart new facilities in the administration suite, food classrooms and the dyslexia unit, and many departments' classrooms are now arranged in suites. Accommodation for special educational needs is very good, although there is not enough space to fully satisfy the needs of the department. New picnic tables in the main quadrangle are now actively used on fine days. Funds have been collected to carry out the next phase of the school development. Architects are currently actively working on plans to redevelop D block, which currently constitutes the music department, some other classrooms and the defunct youth club; the new library would probably also be sited there. However, the situation is complicated and other buildings, such as the nursery school, may need to be re-sited before development can proceed. Changes to the accommodation are consulted on fully. Students are positive about changes that have occurred and use the School Council and year councils to voice their views on shortcomings to facilities and on proposals for change.

108. However, the accommodation overall remains unsatisfactory for many reasons. Some departments' classrooms are still not arranged in suites, for example English and modern foreign languages, and the library is only about half the recommended size. The restricted access afforded by narrow stairwells and corridors in the two largest blocks continues to cause concern. Some classrooms, such as the religious education room at the top of B Block, are too cramped for the size of classes they have to accommodate, and some need new carpets. The decorative state of some of the school, for example the business studies area and the physical education area, is unsatisfactory. Playground space is restricted and drainage problems have put some of the playing fields out of action.

109. Facilities for students' convenience, such as lockers and bus shelters, are not available at present and the inadequate size of the dining area demands a high level of supervision. Whilst some areas of the school are open to students in some years at break and lunchtimes, the school does not operate a policy of open access to the building. This is somewhat surprising given the general ethos of the school. More open access to most classrooms whilst indicating greater trust of students would also decrease the overcrowding on stairwells at the end of break and lunchtime. Although the quality of displays within some departments is satisfactory, the general standard is not high enough to enthuse students with the subject, and displays outside the departments continue to be of a low standard. Litter is still a problem, but less serious than before, as most is picked up very quickly. However, the facts that litter still remains an issue despite the good provision of rubbish bins, and that display remains poor in some areas of the school, suggest an unacceptable disregard for the quality of the environment by some students and a few staff.

110. The last inspection report considered the sufficiency, accessibility, quality and use of resources to be generally satisfactory. The position has now improved in that in about half the subjects, including English, mathematics, information and communication technology, design

technology, history, geography and the dyslexia unit, resources are now good, with enough readily accessible and appropriate resources of high quality. In most other subjects resources remain satisfactory with an adequate supply of reasonable quality. However, much of the new equipment in the music department cannot be used because of accommodation problems and the department lacks keyboards. In the physical education department, there is a good supply of appropriate resources, but they have a tatty appearance. Resources for special educational needs are just adequate. The good quality of the working relationships with the Dyslexia Unit means that the Unit's very good resources are often made available for general special needs use, which masks the inadequacy in basic resourcing. Only in modern foreign languages are resources unsatisfactory, with some of its text-books out-of-date and battered. Resources here are difficult to access, as the accommodation is spread around the school. Substantial improvements have been made to ICT facilities throughout the school. There is a new computer network, and the English and history departments, for example, use ICT effectively. Computer areas have been provided within most subject suites. However, virtually no use is made of computers in the science and mathematics departments. ICT is used effectively in school administration, both by office staff and by senior and many middle managers. For example, academic tutors use Assessment Manager in monitoring, analysing and reporting students' progress.

111. The library is a well-used, popular resource with about 10,000 books; this works out at about 7 books per student, which is well below the recommended level of 18. Its annual budget is about £8,000, which is also well below the level recommended by The Library Association. The library is quite well stocked in some subjects, including all the core subjects, but does not have enough languages, history or geography books and is short of biographies. Some of the stock needs weeding out and replacing. The library takes two daily newspapers and about 15 periodicals and has a small stock of videos, CDs and CD-ROMs. There is a handful of well-used computers. Resources for subjects in the Sixth Form are sound but there is no separate Sixth Form library, nor is there significant provision for them within the main library. However, they do have sound access to computers within their work area. Plans to provide an extensive library and resources area are included in the proposals for building development within the school.

112. The strength of the school's current management is exemplified in many ways, not least in the massive improvements that have been made to the site. At all levels of the school, from the students, staff and senior managers to the governors, there is a shared commitment to improve and a clear the capacity to do so in a collaborative manner.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

113. In order to improve the school further, governors, senior managers and staff should:

- Carry out a review of curriculum provision, especially post-16, ensuring that a broad and balanced curriculum offer is available in all three Key stages for all students irrespective of their ability.
- Continue to develop strategies to further raise standards across the curriculum, especially in:
 - * the core subjects at Key Stage 3, bringing them at least in line with standards in similar schools;
 - * information and communication technology at Key Stage 3;
 - * French and German, particularly at Key Stage 4;
 - * those subjects within design technology where staffing difficulties have had an adverse effect on standards.
- Continue to address shortcomings in the school's accommodation and the facilities provided for students to support their learning. In particular, it should implement its proposals to enhance teaching accommodation and the library, investigate innovative proposals to provide storage space for students and consider improvements to social facilities for students at break and lunchtime.

114. There are some other issues identified in the report, which the governors may also wish to include in their action plan. These include:

- * provision for ICT across the curriculum, but especially in mathematics and science;
- * addressing weaknesses identified in the report on science;
- * improving the multi-cultural dimension of students' education;
- * ensuring the good policies on collective worship and marking are implemented consistently;
- * developing further provision for religious education post-16 to satisfy the locally Agreed Syllabus.

THE DYSLEXIA UNIT

115. The Dyslexia Unit is currently responsible for 11 students in Years 7, 8 and 9, and has been established to provide specific support for up to twenty students from Years 7 to 11, four in each year group. There are two full time qualified teachers plus two learning support assistants, and access to appropriate outside agencies. Teaching and learning in the Unit, which forms part of the school's special educational needs provision, is very good. Staff possess a high degree of expertise, and there is an intensive and positive learning atmosphere. Teaching and learning are provided by a balance of withdrawal on a daily basis and in class support. The whole process is designed to give the students full access to the mainstream curriculum and it does so very successfully.

116. Management and organisation in the unit, which operates as a discrete entity, is very

efficient. All of the elements which may have an impact on the attitudes, self esteem, progress and attainment of the students concerned are taken account of, and as a result of this, students learn well, make good progress and generally attain at least as well as their peers. For example, information technology is very well used to minimise the problems often caused by dyslexia, and to maximise opportunities for students to demonstrate their achievements. Students are provided with lap top computers, and the expertise is available across the curriculum, as appropriate.

117. Students from the unit attain at least as well as their peers, and are often among the more able students in a class. Although none of the unit's students are from the immediate area around the school, they are fully integrated with other students in their years, and their social development is very good. They are open and positive in their attitudes, and are taking maximum advantage of the opportunities provided through the unit. This is an excellent example of integration, and all students involved, whether on the roll of the unit or not, gain from it.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	240
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	116

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	21	45	29	2	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	1216	250
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	75	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	20	0
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	124	0

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	15

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	15
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	25

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.4
National comparative data	7.7

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.9
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	117	126	243

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	71	93	90
	Girls	95	92	82
	Total	166	185	172
Percentage of students at NC Level 5 or above	School	68 (67)	76 (82)	71 (67)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of students at NC Level 6 or above	School	23 (24)	51 (56)	29 (22)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	82	88	94
	Girls	111	88	92
	Total	193	176	186
Percentage of students at NC Level 5 or above	School	79 (89)	73 (81)	77 (73)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of students at NC Level 6 or above	School	38 (59)	44 (48)	32 (38)
	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	144	111	255

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	75	138	140
	Girls	83	109	112
	Total	158	247	252
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	62 (66)	97 (97)	99 (99)
	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 student	School	47.4 (48.5)

	National	38.4 (38.0)
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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	100
	National		N/A

Attainment at the end of the Sixth Form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A Level or AS Level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	78	75	153

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A Level s or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A Level s or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	16.0	17.0	16.5 (16.2)	2.8	2.1	2.5 (0.9)
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	15	100
	National		N/A

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	1
Indian	13
Pakistani	2
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	1
White	1325

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	1	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	5	0

Any other minority ethnic group	0
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NB Ethnic background not available for 120 students

Other minority ethnic groups	1	0
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This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of students excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes:

Y7-11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	83.9
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff:

Y7-11

Total number of education support staff	27
Total aggregate hours worked per week	719

Deployment of teachers:

Y7-11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.7
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Average teaching group size:

Y7-11

Key Stage 3	27.2
Key Stage 4	22.7

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	4203657.00
Total expenditure	3910542.00
Expenditure per student	2601.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	587539.00
Balance carried forward to next year	880654.00

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1466
Number of questionnaires returned	485

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	39	53	4	4	1
My child is making good progress in school.	45	50	3	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	24	63	6	2	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	24	59	13	3	2
The teaching is good.	29	63	5	1	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	44	45	8	3	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	54	39	4	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	61	36	2	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	36	49	11	3	1
The school is well led and managed.	48	45	3	1	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	37	54	5	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	22	51	9	4	14

Other issues raised by parents

Seventy-eight of the parents who responded to the questionnaire wrote additional comments, most of which praised the school. Forty parents attended the pre-inspection parents' meeting. Most concerns raised by parents were contradicted by the comments of other parents. However, concerns were expressed about teaching in some subjects, especially mathematics, science and languages, and about behaviour in some lessons. Most concerns related to staffing issues. Some concern was expressed about the pressure Year 12 students were under with the new AS Level examinations. Some parents felt too much homework was set. In general, however parents were

extremely positive, most especially about the enormous amount that had been achieved since the current head had been appointed.

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

ENGLISH

118. Achievement in the 2000 Key Stage 3 tests (SATs) was close to the national average but below average compared to similar schools. Girls fell just below the national average points score, and the trend of results over the previous three years was a declining one. In the GCSE examinations for 2000 the position was reversed. In English language, the proportion of students gaining A*-C grades was well above the national average and above average compared to similar schools. The same was true for students gaining A*-G grades. There is an improving trend in these results in line with the national picture. In English literature achievement for A*-C grades was above the national average. There was a significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls, girls being well above the national average and boys rather below, although just above the national average for boys. For A*-G grades, performance was close to the national average: girls slightly above, boys a little below. In A Level language and literature examinations, results have shown a declining trend over the period 1998-2000. Students gaining A/B grades in 2000 were close to national course expectations. Students taking A Level literature in 2000 were well below the national figure for A/B grades. For both A Level courses, all students came within the A-E range, better than national averages in both cases. Standards of work seen confirm those achieved in external assessments at Key stages 3 and 4, but were higher than results suggest in the Sixth Form.

119. Evidence from the inspection indicates that sensible strategies are in place to address underachievement at Key Stage 3 and to encourage higher achievement at A Level and that these are having an impact on standards. There is a focus on the pace and variety of activities in lessons, together with the development of approaches to reading which give attention to media as well as written texts. The quality of teaching generally is an encouragement to high achievement. Overall, 4 per cent of teaching observed during the inspection was excellent, 38 per cent was very good, 33 per cent good, 17 per cent satisfactory, and 8 per cent unsatisfactory. Considering the Key stages separately, teaching was good at Key Stage 3 and post-16, and very good at Key Stage 4. The two unsatisfactory lessons seen during the inspection were both with Key Stage 3 students. One was given by a student teacher, the other by a teacher unwell at the time of the observation. These, therefore, should not be allowed to skew the overall picture of generally good teaching at Key Stage 3. The department is keenly aware of the comparative underachievement of students at Key Stage 3. The teaching observed generally showed the connection between teachers' clarity and pace and student commitment.

120. Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They employ teaching methods which give momentum to lessons and keep the attention of students focused. Within the course of a lesson, students will often be grouped in different ways for different purposes. By such means the needs of individual students are attended to, and higher and lower attaining students appropriately challenged and encouraged. Teachers' planning is generally explicit and detailed. Learning objectives are placed before students. Lessons generally begin with a statement of what is to be learned and end

with a plenary in which progress is checked and

consolidated. Schemes of work give a secure framework for planning and coverage of National Curriculum requirements. Teachers are particularly skilled in preparing students for GCSE examinations. Staff and students have very clear awareness of assessment criteria. This informs the feedback and target setting received by students to support their development and leads to satisfactory learning at Key Stage 3, very good learning at Key Stage 4 and good learning post-16. The characteristics of good teaching were seen to be predominantly, but not entirely, general. Where teaching fell short of the generally high standard, there was a discernible impact on the quality of learning. Where learning objectives are not identified with sufficient clarity, and where there is a comparative lack of momentum and purpose to lessons, students' motivation and achievement are correspondingly diminished. It was at Key Stage 3 where such features were most noted.

121. Students write progressively well for a variety of purposes and audiences. At Key Stage 3 they develop their abilities in writing poetry, stories, accounts, descriptions, argument and autobiography. Standards vary, but are satisfactory overall. By the age of 14, the least able students are quite capable and thoughtful writers in a range of forms. For instance, a lower attaining student began a description of an autumn street with effective choices of vocabulary to indicate atmosphere and mood. A high attaining boy began and ended a story (*Lost in the City*, an extremely well-managed piece in the mystery genre) with the same sentence - 'His Casio wristwatch read 9.27 when Dave woke up'. It was a skilfully achieved effect. However, there have been weaknesses in the past in preparing students effectively for Key Stage 3 tests. The department is now addressing this and has adopted a range of strategies in its development plan to improve attainment at Key Stage 3.

122. At Key Stage 4, further development is clear. Standards of achievement are generally good. By the age of 16, students' critical skills are evident in their detailed analyses of media and literary texts. Their understanding of genre, and confidence with technical terminology allow for work of considerable sophistication. This is as true for boys as for girls. A student with special needs began a word-processed description of her brother with 'He has blue-grey eyes that are kind, like a dove's': a closely observed and revealing description. The work of an able boy - the *Surrey Guardian's* report on developments in the case at the centre of *An Inspector Calls* - was assured, original and witty. Students make good use of ICT in presenting their writing, enabling them to draft and redraft efficiently.

123. Post-16 writing is characterised by critical and creative intelligence. There is a range of achievement (grades A to E) but students are able to annotate, select, argue, and justify in writing effectively and convincingly. Assignments on Shakespeare, Dickens and other A level texts show that students are thoroughly familiar with the material and also with the terminology by which they can demonstrate their critical responses to it. The same was true of the understanding of genre in language, and of the concepts of representation and audience in media studies. There is a range of choice in Sixth Form English options which, judging from standards of writing and response in lessons, promotes interest and commitment.

124. Similar qualities are evident in students' reading. The majority read aloud with good intonation and expression. All students are encouraged to read written and visual texts closely. The most able infer, deduce and interpret perceptively and intelligently. There is an emphasis on reading for enjoyment in English, which pays dividends across the curriculum. All students are clearly

enthusiastic about much of the reading they encounter. The developing emphasis on media texts within the English curriculum encourages critical attention and involvement. Reading is broadly and appropriately defined therefore. Contemporary fiction is offered throughout the curriculum, and particularly at Key Stage 3. The response to it in talk and writing is notable for its engagement. Progress is evident in terms of both challenge and response. Students are introduced over time to texts which make increasing demands of them. The least able can read for understanding and can speak and write to show what they know. The most able recognise tone, style and intention and comment on such features with considerable sophistication. Standards in reading, and in the speaking and listening arising from it, are similar to those noted in writing: satisfactory at Key Stage 3, and good in the other key stages.

125. Lessons at each key stage gave evidence of such involvement and progress. A Year 7 class reading *Scribbleboy* by Philip Ridley had produced earlier annotated illustrations of some of the characters in the book. They were now to produce more developed character sketches with the support of a writing frame showing how to use quotation to justify points of view. The teacher intervened to share good work and to provide a model of successful writing by a student in another class. She had an eye to the less able in the class and was careful to support and include them in the conduct of the lesson. It concluded with further reading in which students' enthusiasm for the story was clearly apparent. It was carefully planned and productive teaching and learning. The same was true of a Year 11 lesson on *Animal Farm*. A series of activities had people annotating Squealer's speeches (projected on to the whiteboard), comparing identical moments from the book and the film, and looking specifically at rhetorical features associated with propaganda. Students were given time and space to show what they knew and could do, but within a clear and challenging framework of focuses and deadlines. They were made to work hard. They responded with commitment and enjoyment, and showed real gains in knowledge and understanding. This was the case too in an A Level lesson in which students were reporting to each other their interpretations of key moments in *Hard Times*. They were well-prepared, insightful, and properly critical: the lesson requiring and supporting sophisticated and challenging presentations.

126. The environment in designated English rooms is conducive to achievement. The displays of students' work, key terms, level descriptors and writing frames, importantly support good teaching and learning. A substantial amount of English teaching goes on in non-specialist accommodation, however, and this is an impediment to progress. Good contributions are made to students' developing literacy skills across the curriculum. In many subjects, specialist vocabulary is emphasised. In history, business studies, art, physical education and special needs, support is given to meet the subject specific demands of reading and writing. However, in science, little emphasis has been placed on developing literacy and as a result the use of technical language is below expectation. In contrast, in history, for example, students develop good communication skills. Particularly impressive is their developing capacity for extended writing, from Year 7. The school's language and marking policies give structure and purpose to language work in many areas and clearly support students' progress and achievement.

127. Students' attitudes are generally good, as in the examples given above. Where teaching is focused, tightly organised and purposeful students, are energetic and engaged. Such qualities are also shown in involvement in extra-curricular activities. Public speaking, creative writing, theatre visits, optional homework and revision classes, and other such opportunities are well-supported and

show students achieving highly. They also show the very substantial commitment of staff over and beyond their work in the classroom. In those few instances where teachers' planning and delivery were less than assured, students' attitudes were intolerant and poor. There is a need, therefore, in order to raise standards of both work and behaviour, to spread the best teaching practices through the further development of the monitoring programme.

128. The department is very well led. The departmental handbook is a good working document in which policies and principles are clearly set out and justified. The schemes of work provide a framework for more detailed planning and ensure coverage of the National Curriculum. However, they do not always reflect the detail of methodology, differentiation and purpose which is clear from first hand observation. Student-friendly statements of attainment support self-evaluation, precise feedback, and target setting. The planning and delivery of lessons increasingly incorporate appropriate elements of the National Literacy Strategy so that students are supported in structuring and developing their reading and writing for specific and varied purposes. Knowledge of students' prior attainment guides teaching and gives a focus for addressing the individual needs of learners. The monitoring of the work of the department has begun usefully, so that the strengths of the department are known and guide deployment. Responsibility for the oversight of areas of the curriculum is clearly delegated. There is a very strong departmental ethos of collaboration, support and professionalism. The points for action identified by the last inspection have been acted on satisfactorily. The use of ICT in English is now a curricular strength. The recording of students' progress and achievement is consistent and detailed. Assessment now demonstrably informs teachers and students as to the effectiveness of their learning. All of this speaks of the clear and well-managed direction of the work of the department.

129. In order to develop standards of achievement in English, attention should be given to:
- * ensuring that English is taught in specialist rooms;
 - * reviewing the time given for the department to monitor its work and share best practice;
 - * reviewing the schemes of work to ensure that they encapsulate current good practice in methodology, differentiation and the specification of learning objectives.

MATHEMATICS

130. Attainment in mathematics in National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3, when students are aged 14, is above the national average, although it is below the average for schools with a similar intake. For the years 1997 to 1999 inclusive, attainment was well above the national average. In the 2000 tests, over three-quarters of students attained the national standard, with just over half attaining the higher grades. The results of the last five years show that, on average, boys attain higher grades than girls, as they do nationally. The inspection's findings confirm the test results. The attainment of both boys and girls is above their respective national average. Significantly, this is more so for boys than for girls, with boys achieving at a level which suggests they are about two and a half terms ahead of the national average for boys, girls about two terms ahead of the girls' average.

131. At the end of Key Stage 4, when students are aged 16, attainment is above the national average. All students are entered for the GCSE examination in mathematics. The results of the

2000 examination show a fall in the higher grades awarded. The proportion of students attaining the higher A*-C grades was 52 per cent of the entry, compared to 47 per cent nationally. Almost all students gained a grade within the A*-G range. In the 2000 examination, on average, girls attained higher grades than boys. Subject performance compares favourably with that attained in many other subjects within the school, but was disappointing compared to results of the previous two years. Inspection findings suggest that this may have been a temporary drop, partly caused by the gender imbalance in the year group, with work seen indicating significantly more than half Year 11 should achieve higher grades at GCSE.

132. The GCSE A Level results for 2000 were outstanding and well above the national average. More than three-fifths of the entry attained the higher grades A or B and all students attained a grade within the A-E range. Attainment at A Level has been consistently very good and this year's result was 20 per cent ahead of the national result for A/B grades. The inspection findings confirm the examination results. Sixth form students are high achievers in mathematics.

133. At Key Stage 3 and 4 students are arranged in teaching groups according to prior attainment, which enables them to work at their own pace and to develop confidence in their own abilities. Teaching groups are kept under close review and appropriate transfers are made throughout the year. Students make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3, but it could be better. Less rigid setting by ability, particularly in Year 7, might provide greater challenge for some students, especially those of more average ability. Better use could be made of students' actual attainment in Key Stage 2 tests, by analysing the areas of mathematics in which they achieved less well and developing programmes of study which respond more effectively to their individual strengths and weaknesses. Progress is good in Key Stage 4 and examination performance is sensibly used as a spur to improvement. Students with special educational needs benefit significantly from the arrangement of classes and are usually taught in smaller groups where, with learning support, they develop the basic skills necessary to access the full mathematics curriculum. Students in Year 7 have regular access to computers, as part of the ICT provision. This sharpens their mathematical skills and their application, for example in the preparation of graphs to illustrate information they have collected. Apart from this, students do not have access to computers in mathematics lessons and this is a significant weakness in provision.

134. By the end of Key Stage 3, most students have acquired a good range of number skills that they confidently apply to problems in shape and measure and data collection. They find the area of composite shapes by counting and by formulae. They solve simple and simultaneous equations and apply the knowledge gained to solving problems. Students know how to illustrate information by line graphs and bar charts, by pictograms and pie charts. For example, students construct a line graph and use it to convert millimetres to centimetres or pounds to dollars. They know the names of 2-D and 3-D shapes and identify them from a list of their properties. Students are able to link number and shape when describing, for example, triangular and square numbers. Students know how to fix a point by its co-ordinates and how this knowledge may be used to read maps.

135. By the end of Key Stage 4, all students have extended their knowledge of number and shape. Many are well on the way to becoming good mathematicians and nearly all are numerate. Students progress well towards the GCSE examination. Classroom displays of their work include the nets of regular 3-D shapes and graphical ways of showing averages. Students solve quadratic

equations by algebraic methods and by graph, interpret cumulative frequency curves and solve problems of distance and direction using trigonometry. Students learn about probability and games of chance. For example, they calculate the odds of selecting a jack from a pack of cards or the chances of three heads when throwing three coins simultaneously. Students know about great mathematicians of the past and how the methods of Pythagoras may be used to find angles and sides in right-angled triangles.

136. In the Sixth Form, students embark upon a study of higher mathematics by choice. By this stage, students are highly numerate and have a very good grounding in solving problems by careful application of mathematical method. For example, students learn about the complexities of geometric progression and ultimately deduce the formula. They apply it to find the grains of rice needed to cover a chessboard if each successive square has double the number of grains. In statistics, students use mathematical language well in a discussion of population parameters. They learn how to test hypotheses in the production and distribution of goods and how data can be manipulated to serve the profit motive. Students gain both knowledge and insight of mathematics and its uses.

137. Students apply their numerical skills well in other subjects. In science, students accurately measure temperature, voltage and current. In design and technology, students use their knowledge of shape and angles, and in history, students correctly place historical events on a time line. In art, students use their knowledge of symmetry and tessellating shapes when drawing patterns. In geography, students interpret tables and graphs to compare rainfall and temperature and, in Spanish, students play number games to confirm their knowledge of Spanish numerals. As a consequence, students' numerical skills are well developed.

138. Overall, the quality of teaching to GCSE standard is sound with some good features. Of all the lessons seen in Key stages 3 and 4, just less than half the teaching is good or very good; the remainder is satisfactory, although too often rather mundane. There are no significant differences between Key stages. However, A Level teaching is good or very good and better than at the time of the previous inspection. Teachers appear more confident when teaching older students and the approaches used are sometimes less appropriate with Key Stage 3 classes, which impacts on students' progress at this key stage. Strategies to combat this, could include, for example, the use of more practical activities at Key Stage 3 and closer matching of tasks to the needs of individuals within ability sets.

139. Teachers are well qualified to teach the subject and strongly emphasise the early acquisition of number skills. Most lessons begin with mental and oral work that fires the enthusiasm of the students, gains their immediate attention and prepares them for the main body of the lesson. Good question and answer techniques keep students alert and dissuade the few from drifting off task. The best teaching is well prepared, precise and sequential. Students are given good opportunities to confirm their learning. They are frequently assessed in topic tests and their results form part of a record of continuous assessment to which all students have access. Students are well managed and relationships are good with all but a tiny handful of students who have yet to accept the need for good work and behaviour. A few students from senior years have little motivation and teachers work hard to ensure that the work set is relevant. The planning of the lesson content is sound but the use of time is variable and some lessons finish early. This causes students to anticipate the end of

the lesson and for the final ten minutes little is achieved. Teachers expect the students to behave

well but expectation of work is sometimes not high enough, particularly for the higher attaining students. The range of attainment in any one class is wide and although extension activities are planned, very few were completed during the inspection week. Teachers set and mark homework regularly.

140. In the Sixth Form, teachers and students enjoy very good working relationships that are firmly based on mutual respect. The work set is challenging and rigorous. Students respond well and work hard to complete assignments. Good written work is expected and produced. Teachers encourage the students to think about the work and possible ways of solving a problem before committing pen to paper. Consequently, students produce work of consistently good quality.

141. The mathematics department is well led and managed. For several years it has produced results at all levels that are above the national average. Results at A Level are consistently very good with some outstanding individual performances. This has been achieved by the willingness of all teachers to work hard and to ensure that all students have a good grounding in the basics of mathematics. The department has noted the decline in the proportion of students attaining the highest levels at Key stages 3 and 4 and is attending to this issue in its development plan. The department proposes to set targets for individual students in the near future and to introduce elements of the National Numeracy Strategy at all levels. There is no provision for information and communications technology in the department or any immediate plans to meet the statutory requirement for students to develop computer skills in mathematics lessons. This is a serious weakness in the department's provision. Accommodation is adequate and less widely spread than at the time of the previous inspection. It is well used by the teachers, although it is not easy for them to maintain contact on a daily basis. There is a need for teachers to share good practice and for the head of department to monitor and evaluate the teaching of his colleagues more closely. The department has both the capacity and the commitment to maintain the present good standards, provided that the school is able to continue to recruit teachers of good quality, but recognises it needs to adapt in order to address the decline in Key stages 3 and 4.

SCIENCE

142. Attainment in science is above the national average at the end of Key Stage 3, but below average at the end of Key Stage 4. The standards in the Sixth Form A Level classes are well in line with the capabilities of individual students. In most year groups, attainment in Science, on entry to the school, was average. However, with the current Year seven it was above average. Students' achievement over the first three years of school has been broadly satisfactory, but in Years 10 and 11 it has recently been unsatisfactory. In the Sixth Form, however, students have achieved well.

143. By the age of 14, students' performance, as measured by their average point score in the National Tests of 2000, was slightly above average. The percentage of students gaining Level 5 or greater was above average, but the percentage gaining the higher Level 6 or greater was in line with the average in all maintained schools. The attainment of boys in 2000 was above that of girls, and this has been the case in recent years. In comparison with similar schools, designated as those with a similar number of students eligible for free school meals, the attainment overall was below average. The performance in science was below that in mathematics, but slightly better than that achieved in

English. Over the past four years, the overall attainment in science at Key Stage 3 has stayed above national average, but the extent of the difference showed a steady decline from 1996 to 1999, recovering slightly in 2000. Comparison of the average Key Stage 3 points score for students in Year 9 in 2000, with their point score at the end of Key Stage 2 in 1997, shows their progress over the three years was in line with schools with a similar intake. Assessments made by teachers of the work of students in Year 9, which included experimental skills, indicated attainment above those gained in the national tests.

144. By the age of 16, students' overall performance at GCSE in 2000 in double or single award science, was below the national average. The proportions of both boys and girls gaining grades A* - C were below average. The percentage of students gaining A* - C was well below the average of comparison with schools with students having a similar prior attainment at Key Stage 3, and also well below average in schools with a similar number of students eligible for free school meals. Comparisons over the past three years are complicated by changes in entry. Whilst in 2000, all took double science except for a small group of lower attainers, in 1999 over two-fifths took single science, and in 1998, about a fifth took three sciences and one-fifth single science. However, the proportion of higher grades A*-C has fallen from approximately 60 per cent to 42 per cent, with the greatest decline between 1999 and 2000. Overall, achievement over Key Stage 4 has been unsatisfactory.

145. In the Sixth Form, students studying biology, chemistry and physics, and also environmental science, at advanced or advanced subsidiary level, have achieved grades across the whole range from A-E, but predominantly in the middle band. Overall, the proportion of pass grades is above the national average and this standard represents good progress and achievement. In 2000, results in biology were particularly pleasing with more than half achieving grades A or B. In chemistry, the proportion of A/B grades was around the national average at 43 per cent, as was that for physics at 39 per cent. There were no higher grades for environmental science. Results in biology and physics were a considerable improvement upon the previous year.

146. In the activities seen in lessons, and from students' written work, standards reflect closely the pattern of performance in the most recent tests and examinations. For example, most students in Year 9 make careful observation of chemical reactions and record the data systematically. Only a small number of students consider the accuracy of the experiment, or compare results with predictions, based on their knowledge and understanding. Most students have a basic knowledge of essential concepts such as energy, but the detail and depth of understanding of energy transfer from one form to another is insufficient for higher grades. In Years 10 and 11, overall knowledge of essential facts and development of experimental skills are only modest even for students with above average ability. For example, most students in a top set in Year 10 have some knowledge of the behaviour of waves and light, but the detail and accuracy of reflection from curved surfaces are insufficient for the higher GCSE grades.

147. In the Sixth Form, most students studying advanced level have developed a good feel for experimental investigation, carrying out practical tasks with precision and thought. The depth of subject knowledge in biology, chemistry or physics has developed quickly from

GCSE and a good level of understanding of principles is reached. Students of environmental science, have a good knowledge of essential ideas, such as the rock cycle. A minority of students, with weak motivation, has acquired little clear understanding of advanced level implications for the environment.

148. Students with special educational needs make good progress when learning support is provided for individuals with significant difficulties. Usually, many students in the class benefit from help with understanding instructions or reading in these circumstances. On other occasions, however, progress is very dependent on the nature of the work. Group practical work is effective since reasonably good relationships provide an encouraging environment in which students help each other. Where work is more theoretical, progress of students with special educational needs is often more limited and relies on the individual attention from the teacher rather than specially developed materials or tasks.

149. Students with higher ability at Key Stage 3 or 4 make equal progress with other students. However, since the level of challenging task is often limited the progress of these students is insufficient to extend their knowledge and understanding to match their capabilities. In the Sixth Form, higher attaining students make good progress due to the high level of individual help and guidance.

150. Standards of literacy are good, and most students produce neat, well presented work. Good use is made of grammar in the description of experiments, and diagrams are usually clearly labelled. Technical vocabulary is used satisfactorily, but since there has been little emphasis on developing literacy through science, the extent of use of technical language is below expectation. Numeracy is satisfactory, with most students using number well in recording results and in using scales for measurement of, for example, temperature or current. Simple calculations give some opportunity for the development of algebra, and graphical skills are used in analysis of experimental data. Information and communication technology skills are not currently being developed through science.

151. Attitudes to science are satisfactory overall at Key stages 3 and 4, and good in the Sixth Form. Students are confident in their manner but some are inclined to be arrogant. They carry out tasks set willingly, but they are reluctant to ask questions to consolidate or extend their learning. Students show interest where the topic is stimulating, but on many occasions, students lack enthusiasm due to uninspiring teaching, or tasks poorly matched to the ability range of the group. Behaviour is essentially good in most lessons, and students have mature self-control. A minority, are difficult with weaker teachers and a significant number of students in various classes engage in low-level chatter that disrupts the progress of others. Students collaborate well on practical tasks, sharing ideas and equipment, and providing mutual help. They have regard for safety, provided there is insistence by the teacher.

152. Teaching in science is satisfactory. The provision has been affected by staffing difficulties and recruitment over the 18 months before the inspection. The position is currently satisfactory but fragile. During inspection, all but one of the lessons observed were judged to be at least satisfactory and half of all lessons seen contained good features. Teachers have a secure knowledge of science, including topics outside their specialist subject. Expectations are high, sometimes unrealistically so,

in terms of level of work and anticipated results. Teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2000 significantly overestimated the performance of students compared to national test outcomes. Practical work is used frequently to provide an important part of a balanced range of activities. Student behaviour is managed well in the majority of lessons. Planning is satisfactory in terms of providing full cover of the National Curriculum programmes of study. However, there is excessive reliance on straight extraction of coded experiments from schemes of work, some of which are dated. These do not provide sufficient guidance on matching work to students with different attainments, or to other groups such as students with special educational needs. Little consideration is given to assessment opportunities, and techniques are not specific to the particular lesson or class. Parts of the schemes are not appropriate to the needs of lower attaining sets, providing work that offers little interest, stimulation or relevance.

153. Teachers use a variety of methods, but the technique of questioning is not well established, with the result that many students are able to avoid participation, interest is not stimulated and teachers are not gaining the opportunity to assess students as to their ongoing learning. Formal assessment is carried out periodically after completion of topics or modules, and is used to identify individual underachievement. Classwork is marked regularly but without enough detail to give students information on how to improve. Little use is made of information and communication technology to enhance learning, or support the less able. Homework is set regularly and is usually a helpful extension of the classwork.

154. Learning by students in both Key stages is limited by the inadequacies of the teaching. Satisfactory learning is taking place in the early years, but later the pace and effectiveness are reduced by lack of real interest and enthusiasm. Ineffective teachers, who have now left the school, have exacerbated the problem in the past, and recruitment has been difficult. In the Sixth Form, learning takes place effectively with impressive gains in knowledge and understanding. Learning by boys and girls is not greatly different, although boys in some classes are inclined to dominate responses to questions.

155. The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory, and it has been especially difficult to maintain with continued instability of staffing. The head of department has a clear vision for the raising of standards, especially at Key Stage 4, back to their former levels. Teachers' work is monitored by direct observation and through analysis of assessments for teaching groups. Students' books are checked for regularity of marking. Regular meetings are held to share ideas. However, the rigour and frequency of the monitoring are not yet enough to identify strengths and weaknesses of teachers, or provide the necessary support.

156. Accommodation is of mixed quality. The two refurbished laboratories have excellent facilities. Other laboratories are due for similar attention, but are currently in poor condition. Display is not used to its best advantage. Health and safety requirements are met and risk assessments have been carried out. Storage facilities for chemicals and radioactive materials are satisfactory and in accordance with minimum requirements. However, chemical storerooms are quite small. Everyday resources are adequate for laboratory work, but provision of computers and data-logging equipment for student use is unsatisfactory. The available computers are out of date and data logging devices obsolete.

157. The number of teaching staff is now sufficient, and their qualifications, expertise and experience provide a good range to match the needs of the curriculum. Technical support is very good, with a high number of qualified technicians available to support the teachers. Overall funding for the department is adequate, and expenditure is monitored and controlled with the help of the senior technician.

158. Since the last inspection standards of attainment have fallen, although at Key Stage 3, they are still above average. At Key Stage 4, they have fallen significantly, to be below average. In the Sixth Form standards have remained healthy. Teaching has been of variable quality. Teachers still have high expectations, and student management is good. The use of technical terminology and development of basic skills remain insufficiently addressed. Schemes of work need careful consideration, and planning for work appropriate to the level of attainment has become inadequate. Teachers' work continues to need to be monitored with a more rigorous focus on identification of strengths and weaknesses.

ART AND DESIGN

159. Standards in art and design seen during the inspection show that students' attainment by the age of 14 is above the standard expected nationally. This is reflected in the teacher assessments of 2000, which show a significant number are achieving at above the national average. At the age of 16, the level of attainment is high. GCSE results at grades A*-C have been well above the national average for the last three years, with 84 per cent of the students gaining these grades in 2000. The achievement of boys and girls is well above the national average, and both are performing significantly better in art than in other subjects within the school. GCE A Level results at grades A-B are in line with the national average and all students entered for the exam gained a grade A-E, which is above the national average.

160. By the age of 14, students demonstrate an above average level of knowledge, skills and understanding. They understand concepts and processes and apply technical skills competently. Observational and analytical skills are very well developed. In Year 9, students produced work of a high quality when using two and three point perspective to produce designs for a fantasy city. Media are used appropriately and students demonstrated a good understanding of techniques when making slab-built containers in ceramics. The standards of the students' work, observed in lessons and the scrutiny of work at the age of 16, is well above the national average. Students achieve very high standards when interpreting whole-class themes and show a well-developed understanding of different forms of visual expression, confidently using a wide range of different forms. Their work reflects a wide range of media and ideas. For example, a student had researched the work of Rennie Mackintosh and designed and produced a stained glass window strongly reflecting the characteristics of art nouveau. In the Sixth Form, the range of ability of students is very wide with a number working at a high level. Overall standards are in line with the national average. Students work with a high degree of individuality and many show in depth analysis and exploration of ideas and styles. Work is frequently large scale and the higher attaining students' painting is of a very good quality, reflecting a high level of conceptual and personal response. A student's contextual study of a comparison of war artists reflected a good depth of analysis.

161. The quality of learning in Years 7 - 9 is good and students make good progress in lessons and over time. Students arrive in Year 7 with a wide range of attainment, which is overall in line with national standards, and by Year 9, are achieving at levels that are above average. They learn quickly because the quality of teaching is good. 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. All students achieve well in relation to their ability. Strong gains were made in ceramic handbuilding techniques by all students in a Year 8 lesson but especially by students with special educational needs, who gained sufficient skills to produce work of an equal standing to the rest of the class. Boys make particularly good progress in Year 9 where the curriculum has been designed particularly to interest and inspire them. In Years 7-9, homework is used well to consolidate analytical skills. It would be of further benefit if, with the use of sketchbooks, it were used to extend research techniques and add extra support to the independent learning of students. The work in Years 7-9 provides a firm foundation for Years 10-11 where students make rapid progress. The quality of learning at this stage is very good and the achievement of students is high. Students take much more responsibility for their own work at this level. They carry out a range of experiments before selection of final ideas, and they study past and contemporary art whilst developing their own preferred style. Higher attainers quickly take on an increased demand for individuality; for example a Year 11 student studying the work of Paul Klee produced an innovative metal weather vane inspired by a painting called *The Twittering Machine*. In the Sixth Form, students quickly build on the challenge of individual study and interpretation and their work reflects a growing depth of understanding and sophistication in concepts and in the handling of a wide range of media. The development of research and preparation skills is significant in the positive effect it has on examination results, and the use of visual notebooks strongly supports learning.

162. The overall quality of teaching is very good. It is good in Years 7-9 and very good in Years 10-11 and in the Sixth Form. Lessons are very well planned and include a wide range of enjoyable and challenging activities for all levels of attainment. In Years 7-9, teachers manage large classes very efficiently when working in a variety of media and in often cramped conditions. They have developed clear accepted procedures that result in very good use of time and resources. This ensures that students experience a range of approaches and make good progress in developing their knowledge and technical skills. In the very best lessons, staff give very clear explanations, demonstrate techniques and build in an element of humour to maintain students' interest. Most students are lively and their enthusiasm and energy are channelled constructively into learning. In discussion, teachers expand upon points that appeal to students and build on aspects that motivate and interest them. Higher attaining students respond well to challenging questioning whilst lower attaining students are given the support and encouragement to respond confidently. Specialised vocabulary is built into projects and displayed around the room, and literacy skills are well supported and positively encouraged through annotation and in the written analysis of work. Students use computers to research and extend work in Years 10-11 and in the Sixth Form, but this is less well developed in Years 7-9. Teachers have a very good command of their subject and this is reflected in the high level of knowledgeable advice and evaluation of work and plays an important role in raising standards. A major strength in the Sixth Form is the emphasis given to individual thought and learning. Students are treated as individual artists and well supported.

163. Students respond well to the effective teaching; they enjoy art and design and most are keen to learn. There is a positive working atmosphere in lessons, which supports learning and leads to very good levels of achievement. This is linked to the high standards of behaviour, expected and encouraged by the teachers within the department. In Years 10-11 and in the Sixth Form most students are well motivated and respond well to the challenges of the work presented. The wide range of extra-curricular activities initiated by the department positively encourages this. Visits to art galleries abroad and nationally build on students' understanding of art and lead to the excitement and enthusiasm of experiencing work first hand. After a visit to Tate Modern, Year 10 students wrote very good descriptive and analytical articles for the school magazine. Sixth form students were inspired by a visit to Amsterdam where they had met the artist, Dennis Hopper, at an exhibition of his work. A high degree of pride is shown with folders and visual notebooks reflecting a wide range of stimuli that had been researched and recorded in their own time. 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.

164. This is a very good and well-managed department. Staff are dedicated to improving standards, work well as a team and are fully committed to supporting school policies and practice. The department's involvement with the training of teachers brings in a range of skills in a variety of areas, which enhances the curriculum and supports learning. Effective links with feeder schools support progression from Key Stage 2. The involvement of the students in a range of projects, such as working with artists in residence, producing murals at local hospitals and primary schools and exhibiting work, is a significant factor in raising achievement. Documentation gives good guidance to staff; it details structured and progressive schemes of work. Assessment structures are sound but the department should now look to involve students in their own assessment and encourage them to take more responsibility for their own learning. Since the last inspection most issues have been addressed. However, group sizes are still over thirty, which impacts on the delivery of the curriculum. This is particularly a problem where there is no support for students with special educational needs and a three-dimensional project is being delivered. Resources need to be provided to improve the storage in the ceramics area to allow for the safe movement of students around the room. Teachers create a stimulating environment within their rooms and have improvised to make functional areas, but furniture is old and in places very scruffy. The quality of display within the classroom strongly contributes to the ethos of the subject.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

165. In the most recent GCSE results, the proportion of students gaining grades A*-G reflected the national average. However the overall proportion of students achieving the higher grades was below national average with 44 per cent of students gaining grades A*-C compared with 50 per cent nationally. Results in the different design and technology courses varied considerably, with those students taking electronic products, textiles technology and GNVQ in engineering, doing better than the national average. Standards in food technology and resistant materials were a little below those nationally, which was partly the result of difficulties in staff cover. More seriously, poor teaching in the graphic products course resulted in less than a fifth of students achieving grades A*-C, and this significantly

depressed the overall GCSE standards in the subject. As a result, students, on average, did less well in design and technology compared with their other GCSE results. In contrast, the relatively small numbers of students taking GCE Advanced level perform well in relation to their GCSE results and over the last three years, all students have been successful.

166. Standards in Key Stage 3 are in line with national average, though below those identified in the last report. The carousel system, where students experience each area in turn, takes somewhat longer to establish secure making skills in the different materials of timber, plastics, food, textiles, but most students work with confidence. For example, in a Year 8 lesson, students could cut, shape and assemble a mechanical toy and demonstrate an understanding of different forms of motion. In food technology, students know how to carry out sensory analysis and have an understanding of nutrition. Most students have better than average literacy skills and this was seen in the better planning and evaluation work of higher attaining students. Less evident, in most work, are the good graphical communication skills reported in the last inspection. Furthermore, while students develop stronger research skills through the more frequent use of homework, their understanding of the design process is less strong. In terms of overall progress in Years 7-9, students come into the school with fairly limited design and make skills and, with the benefit of an improving curriculum, most are now beginning to achieve appropriately. The relatively few students with special educational needs are identified, and a number of these are given additional classroom support to enable them to make effective gains in knowledge and skills within the mixed ability groups.

167. In lessons and work seen, overall standards in Key Stage 4 are broadly in line with national average, though there are some differences in current attainment between the five GCSE courses. Standards in electronic products are above average with many of the students demonstrating strong scientific and numerical skills which enable them to design and construct a variety of electronic devices. Attainment in food technology and resistant materials is at least in line with the national average. The higher attaining students, in particular, show competence in research and product analysis, as well as a range of practical making skills. Standards in textiles technology are below average with students demonstrating less strong design, planning and making skills, though most are doing well in relation to their prior attainment. An example of this is a student with particular special educational needs who, with support, is likely to achieve a graded result. Standards in graphic products have improved since last year, but students have not fully retrieved the lost ground that resulted from previously poor teaching, and their project work shows less developed design ideas and a limited range of graphical skills.

168. In most of the GCSE courses, students are beginning to achieve better, particularly where the teaching provision has been stable and mostly good. Even so, a significant number of students are achieving less well when compared to their other GCSE courses and the longer term progress of those following GCSE graphic products has been unsatisfactory.

169. Standards in the Sixth Form are in line with national average. Project work in Year 13 reflects strengths in research, with good use of local businesses to establish a realistic design brief. Students make effective use of information and communication technology to collate and present their evidence. Most students are achieving well in relation to their prior attainment and this good progress is also reflected by those taking the new GCE AS Level in Year 12. Those students have successfully completed their modular tests; have a good understanding of product development, and

are beginning to develop skills in product testing.

170. Students are mostly positive about design and technology, particularly when there are opportunities to be involved in practical activities and they are able to use the new information and communication technology facilities. The range of GCSE courses meets the interests of almost all students, though the phasing out of the successful GNVQ in engineering is disappointing, if understandable because of staffing difficulties over the department. Behaviour in lessons is mostly good, particularly with the steady improvement in teaching quality.

171. The effective organisation of full-time and part-time staff, together with the use of supply teachers, ensures that the overall standard of teaching is satisfactory. The greater use of more experienced and specialist teachers for Key Stage 4 and Sixth Form teaching results in the majority of that teaching being good and on occasion, very good. The design and technology team has worked together to develop more structured learning programmes and as a result, students work with clear purpose in most lessons. This good planning was typified in a GCSE food technology lesson where the teacher effectively combined the use of video with a presentation using a whiteboard and focused questioning to help students complete a product investigation and analysis. In a few lessons, where teachers have been less involved in the planning, the learning objectives were less clear and this contributed, in some instances, to a slower development of students' understanding of a design process. Strong subject knowledge is a feature of the good teaching. This was evident, for example, in GCSE electronic products lessons. As a result students were able to understand more complex systems and incorporate them into their own project designs. Most lessons are well managed though, on occasions, the teacher's inexperience and/or lack of knowledge of the students, can mean that it takes longer to settle the class. The very good teaching is characterised by confident and effective behaviour management that ensures students are on task and work with pace. This is combined with informed monitoring and support that enable students to understand what they need to do to improve. These strengths were illustrated in a Sixth Form lesson, where students had a secure understanding of product analysis and testing and knew the project assessment criteria that had to be met.

172. The head of department has demonstrated considerable resilience and good leadership in the way he has maintained and improved a satisfactory provision in spite of considerable staffing difficulties. The current full-time and part-time staff has developed as a team and work well together to improve the curriculum. This has been greatly assisted by the positive decision of the school to create a single design and technology suite by building two new food technology workrooms. The subject has sufficient technician and learning support but has suffered in recent years because of long-term absence and poor teaching by previous staff. The department has developed potentially good curriculum and assessment schemes, though these will need to be regularly reviewed and have yet to be fully and consistently implemented by the staff.

173. Progress since the last report has been unsatisfactory because the department has been unable to sustain the previously high attainment levels in Key stages 3 and 4. However, good subject leadership and improvements in staffing and accommodation are beginning to re-establish those higher standards.

GEOGRAPHY

174. Students' attainment in geography is broadly in line with the standards expected at age 14 and they achieve satisfactorily. Standards are above average by age 16 and students achieve well. GCSE and A Level examination results show a good improvement since the last inspection. The proportion of students achieving A*-C and A*-G GCSE grades have been above the national average over the past three years, although the proportion of A*-C grades fell significantly in 2000 from the very high figures of the previous two years. Students achieved above average A Level A-E results in 1998 and 1999, although there was an uncharacteristic dip in 2000 when no students gained A or B grades. More boys than girls opt for GCSE and AS/A Level geography, but there is no significant difference in attainment levels. Overall, inspection evidence confirms achievement patterns indicated by these examination results.

175. In all Key stages, the more able students apply themselves with interest and achieve well. For example, Year 7 students responded very positively to an investigation on different types of settlements, hypothesising well about the range of different services in a thinking exercise. Generally, however, in Key Stage 3, students' gains in knowledge and understanding are stronger than their ability to apply geographical skills in a new context. Average and less able students make satisfactory progress but do not always present their work well.

176. In covering a balance of human and physical geography, students show their knowledge and understanding of the environment and the concept of greenhouse effect. For example in Year 10, students distinguished well between renewable and non-renewable resources. Mapwork skills are generally above average, but for many students this is offset by weak presentation skills; for example, sketches and diagrams are not always well-labelled and tabulated. In Year 9, students showed knowledge of the different relief and regions of Italy, leading to insights on tourism. Younger students mainly work from topics in textbooks or from worksheets. Most assignments have extension activities, for example the interpretation of contours in the development of map-reading skills in Year 7. Students' coursework on rain forests, in Year 9, reflected effective work on eco-systems and the bio-diversity of plants and animals.

177. The quality of teaching is good and has improved since the last inspection. It is satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form. All teaching was at least satisfactory, including a substantial proportion of good teaching from senior and experienced staff. Classroom management is good and there are few behavioural issues. Lessons are usually planned around textbooks and supplemented by highly structured worksheets in Key stages 3 and 4. There is a tendency for teaching in Key Stage 3 to develop into a routine pattern of working, with students dependent on directed tasks rather than thinking for themselves. The range of resources for developing younger students' enquiry skills, for example through role-play exercises and games, is limited. Some students, in Key Stage 3, are immature learners who initially settle to work well but whose concentration lapses in the second half of the hour long lessons. Generally, however, students show interest, contribute willingly and work well together. Most have a clear view of what they need to do to improve their work and, in Year 11 and in the Sixth Form, students take increasing responsibility for their learning.

178. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall. They make good progress when additional support is available. For example, a small group of dyslexic students in Year 7 experienced real achievement when analysing features of a sketch map on settlement patterns. Occasionally, younger students with special educational needs are not given work matched to their level of knowledge and understanding. Overall, students' literacy and numeracy skills are sufficient to enable them to achieve satisfactorily.

179. Occasional low-level tasks result in limited writing, but GCSE coursework and fieldwork in Year 10 showed more independent research and analysis. Teachers extend students' thinking through oral work, where their effort and ideas show more secure understanding than their written work. Sixth form teaching is good and enhanced by class sizes large enough to encourage debate between students. For example, Year 13 students listened to each other and contributed well-thought insights to issues arising from a video on the impact of tourism in Kenya. Homework is built in to most work in all years and is marked regularly in line with the good school policy. Students in all Key stages experience a good range of fieldwork activities, locally for younger students and including residential opportunities further afield for GCSE and A Level candidates. Its high quality is a significant factor in students' success in public examinations.

180. Inspection evidence shows that management of the subject is satisfactory overall. Teachers work well as a team. During the head of departments' absence through illness, examination classes continue to receive specialist teaching. However, a small proportion of lessons is taught by non-specialist teachers, which has an adverse effect on students' achievement. The scheme of work is comprehensive and meets statutory requirements. It is enriched by good provision for students to develop their geographical enquiry through information and communication technology. For example, Year 10 students worked effectively in pairs on an assignment on global warming by researching information on computer software. Teachers need to develop further their ICT skills, particularly in the use of data analysis and spreadsheets. The department makes a satisfactory contribution to students' moral and social development because students discuss inequalities between countries and are encouraged to think about social and political matters.

181. The departmental handbook is admirably succinct but does not include enough information on strategies for teachers to meet the needs of all groups of students in Key Stage 3 lessons. Overall, assessment procedures and analysis are good, and are used to plan appropriate changes in the scheme of work. Development planning has improved since the last inspection and is linked to the whole-school priorities on raising attainment. Accommodation is good but is not well presented with some graffiti and untidy areas, a point identified by students in their interviews. Learning resources are adequate but lack a sufficient range to encourage a broader range of teaching styles and methods in lessons.

HISTORY

182. Standards in history overall are good, and are above expectations in the key areas of knowledge and understanding and the acquisition of historical skills. The teacher assessments made of students aged 14 in 2000 showed that the proportion achieving Level 5 or above was well above the national average for both boys and girls. The inspection confirmed that standards of students by

the age of 14 are above the expectations of similarly aged students nationally. Students enter the school at the age of 11 with standards in history that are generally in line with national expectations, and often with good communication skills. By the age of 14, both boys and girls display good levels of knowledge and understanding of a series of themes and events in British history, as well as of some aspects of Islamic civilisation and events surrounding the French Revolution. This represents good progress in learning for students of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, in relation to their prior attainment on entry to the school. Students make good progress in developing empathetic understanding when analysing different accounts of events, such as the Norman invasion of 1066 or interpretations of the reputation of significant individuals like Oliver Cromwell. Particularly impressive is the developing capacity for extended writing, shown, for example, in Year 7's extended projects on medieval castles and accounts of the origins of the French Revolution. High-level skills are demonstrated in students' ability to compare changes in life across a period such as 1750-1900, or to examine differences between the short and long-term causes of a major event, such as the First World War. The presentation of students' work is generally good.

183. The proportion of students achieving an A*-C grade in the 2000 GCSE examinations was well above the national average, and the proportion of those achieving an A*-G grade was above the national average. This was part of a rising trend over several years. The proportion of A*-C grades achieved by girls was particularly high, making history one of the most successful subjects in the school, although boys' results were also considerably above the national average. The inspection confirmed that standards of 16-year olds in knowledge and understanding and the skills of analysing and evaluating historical evidence are above the national average in both the Schools Council history option and the Modern World history option. There is a much narrower gap between the current achievement of girls and boys than was the case with the 2000 cohort of students. The standards seen represent good achievement for students of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, in relation to prior attainment at the age of 14. Students build on the skills and concepts already addressed lower down the school. For example, students following the Modern World course learn to carry out detailed analyses of complex events such as the New Deal in 1930s America, appeasement before the Second World War, and interpretations of the Cold War. Students on the Schools Council course are able to create and test a hypothesis effectively when carrying out a major project on Georgian Southend, and learn to understand elements of continuity and change when studying developments in medicine between ancient times and the contemporary world.

184. The proportion of students achieving either an A-B grade or an A-E grade was well above the national average in the 2000 A Level history examination, continuing the trend of recent years. The inspection confirmed that students on the current Year 13 course achieve a standard of knowledge and understanding and a level of historical skills which are above the course average nationally. Students succeed in interpreting a range of source material and develop their conceptual understanding of complex issues such as "Was the Norman Conquest a turning point in government?" and the role of popular protest in the English Revolution. Students in Year 12 following the new AS course similarly achieve a standard above the course average nationally. They quickly develop an appropriate vocabulary and learn a good sense of perspective when studying the rise of Fascism in Italy. Students, in Years 12 and 13 develop their confidence in debating challenging issues and increase their ability to evaluate both the reliability and usefulness of a range of

historical sources.

185. The overall quality of teaching in history is good. For students between the ages of 11 and 14, the teaching is always at least satisfactory and it is good or very good in five out of seven lessons. For students between the ages of 14 and 19 the teaching is always good or very good. The good or very good teaching is distinguished by many qualities, which apply to lessons for students of all ages. Chief amongst these qualities are the high expectations which teachers have of students, reinforced by good relationships, the use of varied resources and a range of active teaching strategies which together motivate students to give of their best. Consequently they make good progress in developing knowledge, understanding and a range of skills. For example, students in a Year 9 lesson on the aftermath of the First World War were given a briskly-paced simulation exercise requiring them to make a series of decisions about peacemaking which were challenging but which helped them appreciate the dilemma of the peacemakers. Similarly, Year 12 students were given the task of examining the relative importance of different causes when explaining the rise of Fascism. Video is used effectively to illustrate important events, and teachers use computers confidently, for example to help students analyse data on First World War casualties and to draw pertinent conclusions. Teachers additionally combine explanation and questioning, based on good levels of subject knowledge, in order to extend students' understanding. This was observed in many lessons, for example a Year 11 lesson on the background to the building of the Berlin Wall, and Year 7 lessons examining different interpretations of the Peasants' Revolt. Students display a positive attitude in the great majority of lessons, and enjoy reading aloud, debating issues and expressing their opinions. This contributes significantly to the good progress which they make in their learning. Students also make good progress in improving their basic literacy skills, partly because teachers emphasise the importance of developing an appropriate historical vocabulary.

186. On the very few occasions where aspects of teaching are less than satisfactory in otherwise satisfactory lessons, teachers miss opportunities to further extend students' understanding. For example, when examining sources of evidence, teachers occasionally focus overmuch on the differences in content and not enough on examining why they may be different. Teachers following their lesson plan are occasionally reluctant to follow up interesting and legitimate questions raised by students, which would further extend their knowledge and understanding. On the few occasions when the behaviour of a small minority in class is not good, teachers have limited strategies for dealing with this, and this does restrict the rate of learning.

187. Leadership and management in the history department are good. The department benefits from having several experienced specialist teachers who work well as a team, particularly when implementing curriculum changes such as the new Sixth Form courses. There has been good progress in developing schemes of work in which each unit has a specific learning focus. Assessment procedures are good, giving a clear and accurate picture of students' attainment and how they can improve. The level of resourcing is good: for example, each student has his or her own textbook, and the new Sixth Form courses have been well resourced. The department has exceptionally good resources for information technology, which are used as an integral and effective means of teaching and learning.

188. The good standards of attainment and teaching in history evident in the previous inspection have been maintained, and there is now more monitoring of teaching and a more co-ordinated approach to teaching approaches. Therefore, there has been satisfactory progress in history since the previous inspection, and the history department deservedly has a high profile in the school.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

189. In the 2000 GCSE examination, 50 per cent of students achieved an A*-C grade. This is slightly below the national average. All students achieved an A*-G grade and this is above the national average. This was the first year that a substantial proportion of a year group had entered, about three quarters of all students. Teacher assessment for 14-year-old students shows that an above average proportion of students achieved the expected level or better. These assessments do not reflect the findings of the inspection, where at both Key stages attainment was about average.

190. By the time students reach the age of 14, attainment is at the level expected. Students enter the school with varied previous experiences but most of them are familiar and confident users of the word processing application. By 14, most students have achieved soundly, some with more limited previous experiences have achieved well. They can access a program, enter the text in a variety of styles and fonts and know how to edit their work using the 'cut and paste' facility. In order to make their document more attractive to the reader, they place graphic images from the art gallery and alter the size to fit their publication. Students have not had the opportunity to experience a 'multi media' presentation. They understand a spreadsheet and are able to enter the data and display their findings in graph form. They are able to use the short cut symbol for mathematical calculations but few are able to use the appropriate formulae. Students have had experience using a database but are unsure how to select or filter information. Knowledge of control technology is established using computer-aided facilities in design and technology. Students use the internet well, know where to search for information and use the findings well to support their research activities for individual topics. Students' understanding of the use of information technology in its wider context is narrow; many are unable to give examples of where it could be used beyond school.

191. Students at Key Stage 4 have the benefit of regular weekly lessons and, by the time they reach the age of 16, they are achieving the level expected. Students have good knowledge of the communication element of the subject and use the word processing facility with confidence. Students use the desk-top publishing program well. This was noticeable in a topic to produce a leaflet to advertise a holiday. Here students added scanned and graphic images combined with text to produce a publication with a particular audience in mind. Individual projects for the GCSE examination are progressing using a range of technology applications. Students have knowledge of a spreadsheet for accounting purposes, are able to use the appropriate formulae. Higher attaining students are able to calculate percentages. Students understand of the use of a database; enter the data; create separate fields, and know how to filter the information. Students are developing an understanding of the use of information technology in its wider context. This was noticeable in a Year 11 class discussing the data protection act. Here students developed a good understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of information stored on a database and how, without the benefit of the act, data can be used inappropriately. Standards of attainment have been maintained since the previous inspection and work seen suggests attainment at GCSE will improve upon results

obtained in 2000, with teachers more confident with the requirements of short course GCSE than previously.

192. The attainment of students studying the A Level information technology course is above average. They have a good understanding of a range of applications and use them effectively in their individual projects to explain the use of information technology in a small business. Here students explain the benefits of using technology creating a database to suit the user by personalising menus, and also the advantages of using a spreadsheet for company accounts and the designing of a web-site. Students use their word processing skills well to describe to the user how to use these applications, the advantages of customising their own letter headings and the benefits of using of the mail-merge facility. The standards achieved have improved since the last inspection.

193. Students have a good attitude to learning and comment that they would like to continue their studies in the Sixth Form. They work sensibly and generally behave well, show an interest and help each other when sharing computers. They work independently, often working for extended periods on task without direct teacher intervention. Students in the Sixth Form have a very mature attitude to the subject, are anxious to improve and achieve well. Students with special educational needs are fully integrated into lessons and make satisfactory progress. Students at Key stages 3 and 4 are confident to discuss their work and achieve satisfactory levels.

194. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory; no unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Lessons for the discrete delivery of information technology in Year 7, and at Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form, are appropriately planned to meet the needs of the students. They build on existing knowledge, with extension work for higher attaining students. Learning in these lessons is satisfactory. Teachers have good management skills, and circulate well in lessons to keep students on track. As a result, lessons have pace and satisfactory learning. Teachers' subject knowledge is varied. In lessons where teachers have good understanding, students make good progress. However, lessons, including most in Year 7, are often taught by non-specialists who do not have the necessary expertise to extend the knowledge of the more competent students. A consequence of this, and variations in the delivery of the subject across the curriculum in Years 8 and 9, is that fewer students than expected attain above national expectations by the end of Key Stage 3. Teachers clearly explain the necessary steps on how to access a program. The lack of an interactive whiteboard or an overhead projector to demonstrate procedures effectively to a whole class means that students do not always immediately understand. The outcome of this is that teachers have to spend some time re-explaining the procedures to individuals, thus slowing the pace of the lesson and learning. The quality of teaching has been maintained since the previous inspection.

195. The head of department has very good subject knowledge, but has had responsibility for the subject for too short a period to have yet had an impact on the development of the subject and the raising of standards. He has, however, a view on future developments of the subject and would benefit from advisory support to assist with the monitoring of students'

progress and the revising of the schemes of work to meet the requirements of Curriculum 2000. The co-ordination of ICT across the curriculum is unsatisfactory. There are no established procedures to ensure delivery of the subject in Years 8 and 9 and no schemes of work to promote progress and continuity.

196. The provision for ICT across the curriculum is satisfactory, but there are strengths and weaknesses. Some good examples of word processing were seen in English, with drafting and redrafting of work. Good use was observed in history and geography with effective use of a databases, and students make effective use of the internet and CD ROM's for gathering work for their individual projects. Modern languages are in the early stages of development, but use of spreadsheets was observed. The department has recently created its own web-site. Satisfactory work was seen in design and technology, using programs to develop control technology and to design an electric printed circuit. Good use is made in art at Key Stage 4 of a photo program for image manipulation. The use of ICT to support learning in mathematics, science, religious education and music is unsatisfactory. The activities undertaken across the curriculum make a positive contribution to the development of ICT capabilities, but with gaps in the mathematical applications of spreadsheets and data bases, scientific data logging and applications in music.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

197. At both Key stages 3 and 4, standards in French and German are average, and broadly in line with the expected standard, given the attainment profile of students on entry to the school. In Spanish, standards are higher than average, particularly at Key Stage 4. In the Sixth Form, standards are average. In 2000, students were assessed by their teachers as working well above the national level at Key Stage 3, but this was not confirmed in work seen during the inspection.

198. Examination results at GCSE in 2000 were well above the national figure for those gaining A*-C grades in Spanish, but were below in French and well below in German. At A*-G, all students entered for examination gained a pass grade. This is better than the national picture. At the time of the last inspection not all students studied a language to age 16, so it is not possible to comment on the trend over time. However, the 2000 results show a considerable improvement in the number of students gaining A*-C grades in Spanish; a drop in those achieving higher grades in French, and about the same number gaining higher grades in German. Standards have been adversely affected by staffing changes, poor accommodation and unsatisfactory resources.

199. Examination results at A Level involve small numbers of students. In 2000, there was no entry for German; all students of French gained pass grades but these were generally lower than in their other subjects, and Spanish results were lower than predicted.

200. In work seen during the inspection at age 14, standards in listening are above average because most teachers make good use of target language and authentic taped material in their lessons. Speaking standards are more varied but in most classes students are keen to speak. More work needs to be done on improving pronunciation through structured drills. There are more opportunities for reading in Spanish than in the other languages, where the course books used have limited appropriate material, particularly in Year 9. Writing skills are consistently developed across

the key stage in Spanish, so that by Year 9 most higher attaining students can write about themselves in simple language, using past, present and future tenses. In German and Spanish, teachers have more varied expectations of written work and pay less attention to progression over time. More informative marking would help students understand what they need to do to improve the quality of their written work. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress towards the targets set for them, especially when they are given work which matches their ability. Higher attaining students are given opportunities to reach high standards through extension work in some lessons.

201. In work seen during the inspection at the age of 16, students are able to express themselves competently in speaking and writing, with higher attaining students demonstrating an ability to write in accurate and interesting language with obvious pleasure. The foreign language assistant plays a useful part in motivating students to listen to and speak French and adds an extra cultural dimension to the lessons in which she participates. There is an adequate range of reading material and activity, and this skill is well developed, so students are able to connect the written and spoken word. As a result, they make progress that is satisfactory in German and French and good in Spanish, whatever their ability. Students following the short GCSE course make less progress because they have fewer lessons and find it hard to cover the work in depth. Standards in literacy are good, but could be further reinforced by the display of key word posters in the classroom. Good attention is given to developing numeracy in lessons, with mental arithmetic in Spanish, the time in French and telephone numbers in German. Some work is covered in ICT, but this is still developing.

202. In work seen during the inspection at the age of 18, students cover a wide range of topics and higher attaining students show that they are able to manipulate language and write competently about abstract and topical issues. Other students can extract meaning from lengthy texts and summarise these in their own words. Good use is made of up-to-date material from the Internet, and this enhances their work.

203. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall and good or very good in half the lessons seen. It is good in the Sixth Form and best in Spanish. Lessons are not always planned to take into account the needs of individual students, including those on the special educational needs register, but they are well balanced and the range of activities covers the four attainment targets of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Teachers manage their students well and have good relationships with them. A very good lesson with Year 9 enabled students to make very good progress in their learning because it was carefully planned, with a good variety of activities in the four skills. It was conducted at a cracking pace and gave students a chance to consolidate work they had done before as well as to cover new work. Students took their work seriously, responding well to the teacher and enjoying the lesson because they were fully involved in the games and humour. In a Year 7 lesson, progress was unsatisfactory because the teacher had difficulty in controlling the class. Students continued to chat throughout the lesson, and many of the boys were inattentive except when a tape was played. In all languages, teachers use assessment at the end of each unit of work to judge the progress their students are making. This is not always linked to National Curriculum levels. Marking is completed regularly but does not give enough information about what the students know and can do and what they need to do to improve their work. However, in the Sixth Form marking is a strength. Students themselves have little awareness of the levels at which they are working.

204. The quality of the students' learning is satisfactory overall, and good in the Sixth Form. Students show interest in their work and have a positive attitude to it. They are generally motivated by the teaching they receive. As a result, behaviour in lessons is almost always good and sometimes very good. Work is well presented and carefully completed. All students are keen to take part in role-play and group work, and there is not usually a difference between the attitudes of boys and girls.

205. Management of the languages department is good. The head of department has clear plans, which are well thought out, and teachers work very well together with his guidance. This is leading to improving standards of teaching and learning. The rate of improvement, however, has been slowed by staffing problems, poor and scattered accommodation, and a lack of resources at Key Stage 3. More development needs to take place in order to support learners of different abilities, and opportunities for this should be in the schemes of work.

206. Since the last inspection, the department has improved the use of target language in the classroom, and behaviour is less of an issue at Key Stage 3. Spanish results have been drastically improved. Overall, improvement since the last inspection is good.

MUSIC

207. Teachers' assessments of 14-year-olds in 2000 show that students attained the standard expected. In the 2000 GCSE examination, 93 percent of students entered achieved grades A*-C. When compared with national results, these are well above average, though there were only 15 candidates. This was, however, a significant increase in group size on previous years. There was no significant difference in attainment between boys and girls. The standard of work seen is in line with these results.

208. By the time students reach 14, their attainment is at the level expected. Students' listening skills are well established. When listening to music, they accurately identify the instruments being played; recognise a variety of styles, and use the correct vocabulary when describing the music, showing understanding of such words as tempo, pitch and dynamics. Students have sound performing skills. They are beginning to develop an understanding of formal notation and are able to name the notes on the keyboard. Students' rhythmic skills are established and they maintain a steady pulse in group ensembles. An example of these skills was most noticeable in a Year 9 Blues topic. Here the majority of students were able to play the chord sequence, "a walking bass and a short riff". Singing is of a satisfactory standard. This was evident in group performances during a song-writing topic. Here students' singing was tuneful, maintaining pitch and intonation. Students' improvisation skills are less well developed. Gifted and talented students, in the main those who play a musical instrument, use their skills well in practical lessons and make good progress. Students' composition skills are not as well developed as their performance skills. Many start with a low level on understanding in Year 7. However, students do progress, and by the time they reach 14, they have developed a knowledge of primary chords and use these appropriately to accompany compositions that are beginning to develop a structure.

209. The attainment of 16-year old students is well above the standard expected. All the

students are confident and competent instrumentalists and perform complex pieces well. Their composition skills are well developed and students have produced compositions that have individual style, structure and creative development. Students use their knowledge well to compose for a variety of musical combinations with a good understanding of the requirements when writing for transposing instruments. Students have good knowledge of the main historical developments in music. They name the different periods of music, and comment on different styles of music and the contribution that composers made in the development of music. Attainment has improved significantly since the previous inspection.

210. The one student studying the AS Level music exam has good performance skills, and plays with confidence in a range of contrasting styles and genres on both the piano and the saxophone.

211. Students' attitudes to the subject are good and most view the subject as worthwhile. In the majority of lessons, behaviour is good and students participate well, enjoy the work and try hard. They work well both independently and in groups. The attitudes of students at Key Stage 4 are exemplary and their mature attitude to learning helps them progress well. Students with special educational needs make good progress at all Key stages. They are fully integrated into lessons and achieve appropriate targets.

212. The overall quality of teaching is good at all Key stages, and no unsatisfactory teaching was observed during the inspection. Teachers have good subject knowledge and this understanding is used well to demonstrate styles of music and promote a good level of learning. Students progress well in lessons; they are clearly informed of the objective of the lesson and what needs to be achieved by the end of the session. The outcome of this is that progress and learning in practical sessions are good. Better lessons start briskly and are well planned, with a variety of activities to build on students' understanding and with clear focused questioning during listening sessions. Learning and progress are good when teachers circulate during practical lessons and give guidance to students on how to improve their creative work and performance. Achievement is good when extra help is available. This was most noticeable in a Year 11 group. Here the additional teacher was able to work with a small group of students, helping them with their creative work while the other teacher was able to concentrate on students' performance. Consequently, the learning was good. Generally the planning of lessons is good, but there are occasions when the work for higher attaining students, those who play a musical instrument, lacks challenge and specific targets to be achieved. The quality of teaching has improved significantly since the previous inspection.

213. The subject is well led by the head of department, who has a clear vision on the future development of the subject and the need to continue to raise standards. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities. These are well supported by students and contribute well to their performance and musical development. The accommodation is unsatisfactory. Although teachers use the space for practical sessions and individual practice, there is a lack of areas for students to practise. The high noise level slows the progress of creative development. The use of ICT to develop and support learning is unsatisfactory at all Key stages. This is due to the lack of appropriate resources.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

214. Examination success is a very strong feature of the physical education curriculum. A Level examination results over the last three years have been outstanding. In 2000, all students achieved an A-E grade. 75 per cent achieved an A or B grade, which is three times above the national average. GCSE results over the last three years have also been very good. In the Year 2000, 69 per cent of students achieved a grade A*-C. This is well above the national average of 52 per cent. The achievement of girls at GCSE in 2000 was again outstanding. 82 per cent of girls achieved a higher grade A*-C compared to a national average of 51 per cent, with a third of girls achieving a grade A pass. All students achieved an A-E grade. At Key Stage 3, teacher assessment of students' attainment at the end of the academic year 1999-2000 showed 75 per cent of students working at a level in line with national expectations. Five per cent of students were working beyond the level expected nationally, of which two thirds were girls.

215. Almost all students observed at all Key stages are attaining in line with their age and ability. In all three Key stages, a significant number of students attain higher standards than expected, with only a small number of students at Key stages 3 and 4 attaining below national expectations. In the Sixth Form, no students attain below national expectations. At the end of Key Stage 3, students are particularly good at consistently applying skills accurately. This was evident in a Year 9 all-girls basketball class, when accuracy of shooting and dribbling was very good. At Key Stage 4, they are able to select and combine skills well, notable in a Year 10 trampolining lesson. In the Sixth Form, the intellectual knowledge displayed by students in two theory lessons was very good. This was emphasised in an upper sixth lesson by their in-depth knowledge of the anatomy.

216. The achievement of girls and boys with special educational needs is better than expected at Key stages 3 and 4 due to the department's well documented and implemented policy of inclusion. Examination results emphasise how the more able students attain at Key Stage 4 and 5. At Key Stage 3, the more able students achieve appropriately in line with their higher levels of ability. This was notable in a Year 9 swimming lesson, when able swimmers demonstrated very good stroke technique.

217. Teaching and learning in the department are good. All teaching observed was satisfactory or better. 75 per cent of teaching observed was good or better and 25 per cent was very good. Learning was proportionate to the quality of teaching. The high quality of teaching has a great impact on the productivity in lessons. It enhances the learning environment and promotes students' success and progress.

218. All teachers are secure in their knowledge of the subject and teaching of physical skills. Subject knowledge was apparent in all theory lessons. Subject knowledge and the teaching of basic skills were well displayed in a Year 9 boys' weight-training lesson, when these qualities enabled the boys to learn the benefits of weight training. The same lesson epitomised teachers' very good class management and teacher-student relationships. A large class worked extremely well in a confined area when learning and demonstrating weight training techniques. All teachers produce lessons of great enjoyment, which promote high levels of enthusiasm and interest amongst the students.

219. Short-term planning is variable. All short and long term planning should indicate levels of attainment, but not all does. Well-planned lessons create structured learning environments which allow for progression in learning. This, combined with students' good co-operation and behaviour, means that lesson aims are accomplished. This was best seen in a Year 8 tennis lesson, where boys progressed in their techniques of serving. Teachers have high expectations of their students. This, linked to students' enthusiasm, eagerness, and high levels of participation, generates lessons where students work hard and extend their physical capabilities. This happened, for example, in Year 7 and 8 health related fitness lessons. Teachers set challenging targets in lessons. Only in a few lessons, when direction wasn't clear, did some students come off task.

220. The department has addressed the concern, noted at the last inspection of students' ability to evaluate each other's performance. It must now consider ways of allowing the students to plan aspects of the lessons in order to develop their independent learning skills. Teachers, also, must at all times be aware of the learning needs of all students.

221. The department has sound, short and long-term assessment procedures. Teachers assess students' performance and plan accordingly. This happens within lessons. It is also apparent in the long term. The department is adopting a variety of teaching and learning styles to improve the academic performance of boys at GCSE and the overall performance of girls throughout Key stages 3 and 4. In the long term, all students are assessed at the end of each unit. This information is collated at the end of each year and reported to parents. The department has taken the step to introduce upper, middle and lower attainment grades within the national attainment levels to indicate better evidence of student progression.

222. The curriculum is broad and balanced at all Key stages and meets statutory requirements. At Key Stage 4 all students can gain accreditation. This can be achieved either through a full GCSE course or a combination of a short GCSE course and/or a Junior Sports Leadership Award. Dance modules at all Key stages enrich the curriculum, but the lack of a separate dance course at Key Stage 4 is surprising, given the strength of the arts in the school. Assessment of the curriculum has affected its long term planning. Modules of table tennis and trampolining have been introduced at Year 9 to aid the progression into Key Stage 4. The department promotes the development of literacy skills by projecting key words around the physical education environment and by providing high quality visual displays. The idea of word walls for gymnastics and trampolining is commendable. The department must introduce information and communication technology into its schemes of work in accordance with Curriculum 2000.

223. A wide range of extra-curricular activities is on offer to all students. They are well attended and appreciated by students and parents alike. Many students go on to gain local, area and national representative honours.

224. Leadership of the department is good. Departmental documentation is very comprehensive, portraying a clear vision for the future. Staff work very well together. They are well deployed and well qualified; good role models who give willingly of their time. Accommodation is good. Resources are satisfactory. The department is worthy of its academic and sporting achievement and displays the acumen and capacity to move forward.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

225. Students' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above the expectations of the Local Agreed Syllabus. Most have a good understanding of the life and teaching of Jesus and appreciate the religious significance of the main events of the Christian calendar. Although they have learnt about Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism, their understanding is not reinforced throughout the three years, and by the age 14, they have forgotten some aspects. In other areas of religious education, such as those that focus on moral and social issues, attainment is far higher than that normally seen.

226. As a result of good teaching, Key Stage 3 students achieve well in lessons. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen and it was very good in 38 per cent of lessons and good in one lesson in four. Teachers carefully revise previous learning, and effectively use questions and answers to test understanding. Students learn easily as the result of the systematic delivery of new facts and ideas, each linked to what has just been learnt. Effective classroom management ensures that the majority of students participate. All benefit from well led discussions that reinforce learning, including those with special needs. There were meaningful comments by one class on the plight of prisoners of conscience. Much of the Year 7 project work on local Churches was impressive, reflecting the students' involvement and ability to undertake independent research. Students benefit from links with local churches that enable them to meet the clergy at pre-arranged times to ask questions and to examine the interiors of the churches.

227. Displays highlight the students' good attainment, for example, the composition of front-page newspaper articles on the death of Martin Luther King and a reporter's account of miracles in Galilee. They were required to use their imaginations to explore the concept of Jesus as the Messiah by creating a super human to solve today's problems. Key words and vocabulary are on classroom walls, reinforcing their literacy skills well. There was some very interesting poetry on *Looking for God* that showed a mature approach to questions about a divine presence. The work on display represents the full range of students' abilities, and the work of those with special needs shows good progress.

228. In 2000, all but a few students were entered for the GCSE Religious Studies paper. Results were above national averages for the higher grades A*-C, although fewer obtained the highest A* grade. These results are slightly better than their performances in other subjects and are representative of the schools' performance over a number of years, although there was a significant dip in results in 1999. The work seen at the school during the week of inspection mirrors these standards.

229. Students cover the GCSE syllabus well and high quality assignment work confirms good research skills and the ability to apply knowledge of Christian teaching to answer a variety of questions. However, a scrutiny of work in their books shows that there is too little continuous reinforcement of the main ideas and scriptural references. This lack of a strong focus on key learning points was also seen in some classroom teaching. As a result, teaching is satisfactory overall, although one in four lessons was good and the same proportion was very good. For example, the aims of the lesson were not always shared with the students. In one class, students who are taking a short GCSE course are taught with those who are taking the full course, and whilst

the teaching was satisfactory, there was not a good focus on the learning needs of each group.

230. Good or very good learning occurred in half of the lessons, reflecting the quality of the teaching. In these classes good questioning extends horizons, as when the Christian viewpoint about world poverty and pollution was considered. Relationships and trust between staff and students are good. Teachers establish an atmosphere within which students feel free to express views and feelings, often on sensitive subjects, such as the causes of suicide. At times, the quality of discussions is outstanding. They are very well led by teachers who not only have very good knowledge of their subject, but also a degree of passion for issues relating to the sanctity of life or human rights. Such lessons make a significant contribution to social and moral education.

231. Students' attitudes are generally good throughout the school. They listen and respond well and they are keen to succeed, often producing well researched projects and assignments. They respond to the good teaching and produce work that indicates thought and effort. On the odd occasion, these high standards fell and a few boys whose attitudes were unsatisfactory called out and disrupted the attention of others. The department is aware of this and staff are working hard to implement strategies to curb such behaviour.

232. Sixth form students study one unit of religious education per year as part of their general studies programme. This is insufficient to meet statutory requirements and students are denied the opportunity to study a range of topics such as morality and ethics or humanism and ecology. This is particularly of concern given the very good work that younger students often produce when considering moral and social issues and their positive reactions to such discussions. A Level courses have been successfully taught in the past and predictions of student uptake suggest that religious education courses will be offered from September 2001.

233. The department is run on a most professional basis. A commendable feature is the willingness to review current practice and establish targets that will raise standards. For example, it is revising schemes of work to incorporate new ideas and more detailed references as to how to meet the learning needs of students of all abilities. The department knows that it should improve its use of ICT and has already taken action to do so. The assessment of students' work at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory but not good. It is not measured against levels which define in detail what should have been learnt and which give guidance about the next level of achievement. The department is awaiting local guidance about this. Staff freely give of their time, whether it be to assist new teachers or to give extra lessons to students.

234. Since the last inspection the department has maintained the teaching standards, despite staffing difficulties. An established team is now in place. The head of department has successfully ensured that high quality discussion work occurs in all classes. Most importantly, the department has accepted the need for change and growth and is using a system of departmental review to achieve well considered objectives. Attainment has improved and a new short GCSE course has been effectively introduced. Good improvement has occurred since the last inspection.

VOCATIONAL COURSES

235. Only three students took the GNVQ Intermediate course in 2000. Although all passed,

there were no merits or distinctions, which had not been the case in previous years when results had been better. All those who took the GNVQ advanced course passed, with a third of the students achieving a merit and nearly sixty per cent a distinction. Analysis of results indicated that the students achieved well in relation to their prior attainment. These were good results. Similar results had been obtained in 1998 although the 1999 results were lower. Standards seen in the current vocational courses indicate a good level of attainment, although currently there are only courses at advanced level. Teaching was good in two thirds of the lessons and always satisfactory.

236. The small size of the Year 12 business studies vocational A Level group allows very good one to one teaching, although, at times, the students would benefit from the stimulus that a larger group can often provide. Although results are difficult to predict for this new course, the work seen during the week indicates that good progress has been made. All appear set to pass and the work of about 40 per cent appears to be of a high quality. For example, their assignments into marketing made good use of their knowledge of the Boston Matrix. They have a secure overview of business activity that enabled them to consider the links between various aspects of business behaviour, such as considerations of cash flow when looking at marketing plans. They benefited from the teacher's persistent comments about the importance of a range of research sources and some had made good use of the internet.

237. Some of the Year 13 advanced GNVQ class found it difficult to understand financial ratios although they worked hard at doing so, helped by the teacher who was good at emphasising the importance of considering the figures in a wider business context. A scrutiny of the students' files, and an interview with them, showed that the syllabus was covered in detail. They are able to link one aspect of business behaviour with another. Some aspects had been particularly well taught, such as government intervention in markets, and students showed a clear understanding of micro economic aspects such as price elasticity. However, some students were not so good at in depth analysis and evaluation. This course has enabled students from a range of academic backgrounds to make good progress and prepare themselves well for university or employment.

238. All students comment on how they benefit from their teachers' encyclopaedic subject knowledge, their enthusiasm for their subject and their willingness to help. They were adamant that the course had made them good independent learners who could research well. Their work supported this view.

239. The GNVQ business studies head of department shows a commendable willingness to accept change and consider the development of new courses such as the business ICT option unit for Year 12 students. His professionalism, as demonstrated by involvement in external moderation, is a bonus to the school as students and other staff gain from the knowledge acquired from such activities. The department stresses the importance of work-related activities and promotes a range of activities designed to ensure that the world of work is effectively used a resource. Assignments are linked into students' work experience and their part time jobs. They study breweries and glass factories in Prague. The department has played a major role in developing school and community links. There is a need to ensure that the deadlines for the finishing of assignments for the three teachers who deliver the course do not clash. Other aspects of the course, such as assessment and moderation, are well managed.

BUSINESS STUDIES

240. Business studies teachers have worked hard to ensure that the quality of teaching has not been affected by staffing problems and were gratified by the 2000 results. Standards at Key Stage 4 were well above the national averages. 70 per cent of the students entered for GCSE business studies obtained the higher A* - C grades and all obtained a pass grade. Students were good at obtaining grade A, with double the number of successful candidates when compared to national figures. The school was less effective in achieving A* passes, the highest level. Students did much better in business studies than they did in nearly all their other subjects. These good results were generally mirrored in the work seen during the week of the inspection and reflect an upward trend in attainment. Although both boys and girls did better than those in other schools, girls were relatively more successful.

241. Teaching in 57 per cent of the classes is at least good, and is very good in twenty nine per cent. Each member of the department was seen teaching a good lesson. This has a direct impact on attainment, as does the quality of the teacher input into learning, as was evidenced by a scrutiny of the students' work in their books and folders. For example, teachers consistently highlight key words and concepts and regularly test that these have been understood and memorised. The majority of the students try hard, preparing their work thoroughly and presenting it well as the high quality of their assignments shows. Very good planning for the delivery of the subject helps students reach high standards. Each unit has an element of formal teaching, which is recorded by the student and forms a good basis for learning. It is augmented by completion of case studies that require the newly gained knowledge to be applied in a new context, thereby reinforcing understanding. Students make good progress over time and this is confirmed by departmental records. By the time they have finished the course, they understand how a business functions and the significance of its external links.

242. Students make good or better progress in the majority of lessons. This is a result of good teaching and students' positive attitudes. They respond well to the teachers' very good subject knowledge, which maintains interest through frequent use of up to date references. For example, Year 11 students increased their understanding of how British Airways operates as a result of the teacher's very good summary of why the GO subsidiary was launched. Expectations for good behaviour and academic attainment are high, sometimes reinforced by the use of sharp humour to maintain standards. Teachers are good at using questions to test earlier learning and to extend understanding. One class, for example, benefited as the teacher used a revision of Maslow's *Hierarchy of Human Needs* as a basis for exploring further theories. Teachers are good at using some very effective revision strategies such as dissecting questions to pinpoint central issues. They offer clear explanations which students easily understand. Difficult ideas are explained in a number of ways so that all, including those with special needs, can understand. For example, one Year 10 class benefited from worked examples and exemplar graphs to help them understand how business size is measured. The odd unsatisfactory lesson occurred when a number of boys with poor attitudes to learning behaved inappropriately. Teachers are already investigating a number of strategies to ensure that the needs of all students are met.

243. The department offers an A and AS Level option in the Sixth Form. The results in 2000 were very good. All candidates passed, and 52 per cent obtained an A or B grade compared to a

national average of 30 per cent. These figures are representative of those achieved during the past few years. It is a popular and successful subject, and analysis shows that the vast majority of students do better than their GCSE results would indicate. This is the result of good teaching and student commitment. Students give well-prepared presentations that illustrate their understanding and demonstrate good research skills. Good use was made of primary and secondary sources as a basis for decisions about the appropriate marketing mix. Good prompts by the teacher enabled the students to consider additional factors such as marketing segments. Staff are effective in using their detailed knowledge of the students to highlight aspects of business behaviour, as when one student was asked to explain his experiences in a sports shop. Students continually benefit from teachers' very good subject knowledge and the use of newspaper articles to stimulate interest, as, for example, in an article about equal opportunities in the National Health Service. Teachers and students work as partners in the learning experience.

244. A scrutiny of the students' files confirmed the high quality of teaching and learning. Students were well taught. Formal input is combined with on going testing in a variety of ways. These range from producing balance sheets to the completion of case studies that verify understanding. This approach results in an immediate assessment of learning and the prompt rectification of mistakes, thereby promoting progress. As at Key Stage 4, literacy skills are well supported with, for instance, good guidance on report writing and how to present balanced arguments.

245. The department is well run and has some very strong features. These include the structured organisation of the delivery of the courses and the systematic monitoring of teaching and learning standards. Objectives to improve student attainment are carefully set, for example, in greater use of the Internet by both staff and students. The department is aware of the need to upgrade the schemes of work so that they are meaningful to new, possibly inexperienced staff. Much more detail is required, as well as references to opportunities to develop literacy, numeracy and key skills provision in the Sixth Form. The assessment of students' work is good. It is systematic and students know what they are required to do to be successful and improve. Teachers attend a good range of training courses in order to up date knowledge. Accommodation is poor. There is no central resource area and many of the rooms are unsatisfactory, leading off each other or being separated from another class by flimsy dividers.

246. Teachers give freely of their time in an sustained effort to improve the students' understanding. For example, they organise a range of activities that includes visits to Fords to study production methods and to Prague to look at industry and preparations for entry into the European Community. Teachers work hard, often out of normal school hours, to help students gain better results. They run revision classes in the Easter holidays and give extra lessons to help students improve their grades.

247. Business studies has improved since the last inspection. Results have got better and the number of students taking business studies has risen. New courses have been successfully introduced. The imminent restructuring of the whole area of business studies and economics under one faculty can only improve the use of scarce resources and address overlaps in curriculum delivery.

DRAMA

248. GCSE results in drama in 2000 were well above the national average. Within school comparison showed that students taking drama achieved better than in the average of their other subjects. At A Level, students taking theatre studies achieved in line with national course expectations.

249. These generally strong results were reflected in the standards of teaching and learning observed during the inspection. Standards of teaching were seen to be good at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4 and at A Level. Overall, of the lessons observed, 14 per cent were excellent, 43 per cent very good, 29 per cent good, and 14 per cent satisfactory. Teachers' knowledge of their subject is secure and comprehensive. At each Key stage, lessons are planned with great care in order to make explicit the learning that is to take place and the means by which it is to be evaluated. Within those clear structures, teachers operate flexibly so that opportunities for creativity and development are optimised.

250. These features lead to very good learning. Students show themselves to be progressively familiar with, and confident in, the conventions of drama. They respond to the well-understood cycle of creation, performance and evaluation with increasing expertise and perception. They are co-operative, they speak and listen with attention, courtesy and purpose, and over time, because of teachers' high expectations and skilled direction, become impressively autonomous learners.

251. Examples from each key stage gave evidence of these successful processes in operation. Year 7 students, working on a script relating to the theme of the Pied Piper, were brought, through skilful teaching and intervention, to show an ability to use space effectively, to create and refine dramatic tension, to work co-operatively, and to use a text as focus for interpretation and performance. The group was initially volatile, but by the end of the lesson impressively focused, and justifiably pleased with the standard of their work. At Key Stage 4, a GCSE class were improvising around previously arranged storylines. The objectives of the session were given at the beginning: to consider and show emotion in naturalistic and stylised ways. Remarkable work ensued. Students improvised scenes in which a wedding dress and a ring from a broken relationship were sold. Attainment was demonstrably high, including that of students on the special needs register. Students were willing to take risks, experiment, and support each other in the practice and refinement of dramatic conventions which they understood and appreciated. At A Level, students showed high achievement and developed subject knowledge. Rehearsals of performance projects indicated strong abilities to block a scene, to create dialogue, to use mime and movement, to understand the use of lighting and sound to contribute to dramatic effect, and much more. The teacher intervened as a critical observer, not to direct but to sharpen students' attention to the assessment criteria by which their work would eventually be judged. It was highly effective teaching and learning.

252. The theory, as well as the practice, of drama is given close and well-supported attention. Drama diaries and written assignments develop literacy skills explicitly through the use of writing frames and level descriptors. The student handbooks for Key Stage 4 and A Level support and exemplify knowledge of drama concepts and terminology. There is good

evidence in students' writing of increasingly confident use of those key terms. Teachers give detailed and well-focused feedback to students. Their full and supportive commentaries on written work make clear how to make progress. They read as interested and practical dialogues with students and are exemplary examples of marking.

253. Not surprisingly, students' response to drama is highly favourable. Attitudes are good at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4 and post-16. Teachers are trusted and held in affection. Curricular and extra-curricular opportunities are keenly taken up. Indeed the extra-curricular contributions of drama to opportunities for learning are outstanding. Schools plays, theatre visits, the drama club, theatre-in education events: such provision is indicative of the commitment of staff and of the enthusiastic take-up of students.

254. The department is very well led. Departmental documentation is clear, comprehensive and principled. The schemes of work give a secure indication of the content of the curriculum and the methodologies by which learning will be taken forward. Assessment criteria and procedures are transparent for staff and students. Students' progress is effectively tracked and supported. The departmental plan is consistent with the general aims of the school to raise achievement, and the development of literacy within the drama curriculum is an example of that planning in action.

255. Accommodation for drama is satisfactory compared to provision in other schools but nevertheless requires upgrading and extension. More specialist space is necessary in order properly to support examination requirements for rehearsal space and access to technical facilities. Drama is already a very successful curriculum area in terms of results and its contribution to students' cultural and personal development. Considerable benefit would accrue from facilities which more securely support achievement in the subject.

ECONOMICS, LAW, PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGY

256. In recent years, GCSE economics results have been consistently above national average with almost all students achieving a graded result with, on average, 75 per cent of students gaining grades A*-C compared with 59 per cent nationally. At A Level, standards are above average with all students gaining passes compared with 87 per cent nationally and half achieving a grade A or B compared with a third of students nationally. Within the school, students in Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form tend to perform a little better in economics when compared with their other examination results.

257. In GCSE lessons and work seen, students demonstrate levels of understanding well above national average with the higher attaining students able to use graphical techniques confidently to illustrate supply and demand relationships. In a Year 10 lesson, most students could appreciate the economic and social consequences of changes in different forms of taxation.

258. Standards in the A Level and new AS Level courses are above national average. Students have a good understanding of the main theories and concepts and use them appropriately in their analyses of economic problems. This was well illustrated in a Year 13 lesson where students were able to discuss the implications of different economic strategies on third world development.

259. Economics is taught by committed and enthusiastic specialists, who maintain consistently good or better teaching. In one very good Sixth Form lesson, the teacher provided well-informed coverage of the key learning points and used carefully structured questions that required the students to apply their knowledge and so confirm and consolidate their understanding. The excellent GCSE teaching combined considerable humour with exceptional explanatory skills to engage the interest of students and challenge them intellectually in what was a fast-paced lesson.

260. A small number of A and AS Level lessons in law, psychology and sociology were observed during the inspection. Psychology is taught by two enthusiasts from the science department. Good results have been achieved in the first two years of entry. In 2000, all students achieved a grade, half at grades A or B. Sociology is taught by three senior members of staff who also teach personal and social education and life skills. Results have varied between years, the subject sometimes attracting a number of the less academic of the Sixth Form students. Results were good in 1998, with over half obtaining the higher grades A or B. In 1999, the number of higher grades reduced but most passed as in the previous year. In 2000, however, only two-thirds of the group passed, with a further reduction in the proportion of higher grades. The current Year 13 is the first year of entry for law.

261. Across the six lessons seen in the three subjects, teaching was very good in a third of lessons, good in half and satisfactory in the remaining lesson. The quality of students' learning followed a similar pattern. Standards observed were in line with those expected for the course and good in Year 13 law. Teachers have good subject knowledge, work hard to engage students' interest and provide appropriate activities. Teachers provide good expositions and are skilful in questioning individuals to elicit their understanding. However, in some lessons, too much is provided by teachers rather than actively engaging students in researching for themselves and presenting their findings to their fellow students. AS Level sociology students were working on coursework projects. Many had chosen interesting tasks and were carrying out appropriate research. They were articulate in explaining their choice of task and displayed good understanding of the research methods they should adopt to test their hypotheses.