

# INSPECTION REPORT

**Pent Valley Foundation School**

Folkestone

LEA area: Kent

Unique reference number: 118930

Headteacher: Mrs. G E Porteous

Reporting inspector: Mr. I Benson  
2739

Dates of inspection: 14<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> February 2000

Inspection number: 188362

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Secondary Non-selective / Modern
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 – 19 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr. J Barber
Date of previous inspection:	May 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mr I Benson	<i>Registered inspector</i>		The school's results and achievements; How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed?
Mrs MJ Kerry	<i>Lay inspector</i>		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development; How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with its parents?
Mr J Laver	<i>Team inspector</i>	History.	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
Mrs M Rees	<i>Team inspector</i>	English; Equal opportunities.	
Mr R Portsmouth	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics.	
Dr D Benstock	<i>Team inspector</i>	Science.	
Ms J Goodman	<i>Team inspector</i>	Art.	
Mrs L Kauffman	<i>Team inspector</i>	Design and technology.	
Mr M Merchant	<i>Team inspector</i>	Geography.	
Mrs M Scheer	<i>Team inspector</i>	Information technology.	
Mr G Williams	<i>Team inspector</i>	Modern foreign languages.	
Mr S Johnson	<i>Team inspector</i>	Music.	
Ms J Boulton	<i>Team inspector</i>	Physical education.	
Mr R Wilkins	<i>Team inspector</i>	Religious education.	
Mrs K Cannon	<i>Team inspector</i>	Special educational needs and special educational needs units.	
Mrs A Bridger	<i>Team inspector</i>	Vocational education.	

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

This over-subscribed, mixed, 11-18 Foundation school has 1,119 pupils on roll; 150 are in the Sixth Form. Over 98 per cent of all pupils are white. There are 392 pupils on the special educational needs register: An above average number (59) have statements and 37 pupils with dyslexia, physical disabilities and visual impairment have provision in the special needs units. The school is located in an area where some other schools admit pupils on the basis of high prior attainment: in spite of 15 per cent of pupils in Years 7 to 9 being admitted to this school by selection tests, attainment on entry is below that expected for similar aged pupils nationally. One fifth of pupils are eligible for free school meals, in line with the national average. The school draws pupils from the immediate area that includes a mixture of urban and rural housing.

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

This is an improving and increasingly effective school. Standards are rising in Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the Sixth Form, when compared with national standards and those for similar schools. The teaching is of good quality as is the school's leadership and management. The school provides good value for money.

### **WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL**

- Attainment is above average at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4, when compared with similar schools, and is above national standards in GNVQ Advanced courses.
- Teaching across the curriculum is good and enables pupils to make good progress.
- The school's governors, headteacher and senior managers provide good leadership.
- Pupils are well managed and supported in lessons and through the tutorial system.
- Pupils are enthusiastic; attitudes, relationships and behaviour are good and are well supported by the provision for their personal development and by the positive ethos of the school.
- The provision for pupils with special needs is very good.
- Very good financial planning ensures that the school's resources are very well used.
- The school has improved consistently since the last inspection.

## WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Attainment is generally below national averages at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4, especially in mathematics, and at GCE Advanced and Advanced Supplementary level.
- Assessment and performance data is not fully used across the whole school to inform curriculum planning and target setting.
- Teaching is less in good in Key Stage 3 and in geography.
- There is insufficient monitoring of the quality of teaching and its impact on learning and standards.
- The poor deployment of some non-specialist teachers has a negative impact on attainment and progress.
- The school does not meet certain statutory requirements. It does not provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. The full National Curriculum Programmes of Study in geography is not provided at Key Stage 3. The time allocated for religious education at Key Stage 4 is insufficient.

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

## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in May 1996. Changes that have been made are a positive contribution to school improvement. Standards have improved in relation to national averages and in comparison with similar schools, in Key Stage 4, notably in modern languages. Standards have also improved in GNVQ Advanced courses. The management team has been restructured to reflect the need to support all pupils in their attainment and progress, as well as in their personal development. Behaviour and discipline has improved significantly. The quality of teaching has also improved. There is now a curriculum statement whose application has resulted in better breadth and balance and a rich provision for pupils in the Sixth Form, although there are still some weaknesses at Key Stages 3 and 4. Homework is now of better quality, but the school has not yet provided parents with a timetable. There is now better use of assessment data to develop individual target setting for pupils, although this has not yet spread across all year groups within the school. The quality of the accommodation has been improved with by the completion of three further major capital projects for the teaching of humanities, English and modern languages. In-door accommodation for physical education is still unsatisfactory and the school has still to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils to support their spiritual development.



## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 14, 16 and 18 year olds based on national averages in Key Stage3 tests, and average point scores in GCSE and A-Level/AS-Level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				<b>Key</b> <i>well above average</i> <i>A</i> <i>above average</i> <i>B</i> <i>average</i> <i>C</i> <i>below average</i> <i>D</i> <i>well below average</i> <i>E</i> <i>very low</i> <i>E*</i>
	all schools			similar schools	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
Key Stage 3 tests	D	D	C	B	
GCSE examinations	E	E	D	B	
A-Levels/AS-Levels	E*	E	E*	N/A	

At the end of Key Stage 3, results in the National Curriculum tests in English and science are in line with the national average and above that for similar schools. Results in mathematics are below average but in line with those for similar schools. At the end of Key Stage 4, the proportion gaining five or more A\*-C grades is well below average but in line with that of similar schools. The proportion gaining five or more, as well as 1 or more, A\*-G grades is well above the national average and very high in relation to similar schools, that is to say in the highest five per cent of schools nationally. Sixth form results at GCE Advanced Level are well below average and place the school in the lowest five per cent nationally. However, in GNVQ examinations, results are well above course averages. Levels of attainment in Key Stage 4 are rising in line with the national trend, but in Key Stage 3 and in the GNVQ courses in the Sixth Form improvement is exceeding expectations. In 1999 the GCSE results matched the school's targets, and while those for 2000 and 2001 are ambitious, the school is confident of success. It is evident in much of the work seen that pupils have a high commitment to learning, and show appropriate levels of knowledge and understanding. The weakest area of their work on entry is in literacy and pupils make progress, although, even in Key Stage 4, some average and lower-attaining pupils find it difficult to express their ideas accurately.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils of all ages display enthusiasm for the school and for their work.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is good in classrooms, where pupils are attentive and well motivated. Around the school pupils act courteously and responsibly.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships between staff and pupils are good. All members of the school community show particular concern for the rights of others, and the genuine desire to make the school an inclusive community.
Attendance	Attendance in the main school is good.

Pupils across both Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the Sixth Form display enthusiasm for school and for their work and have good relationships with their peers and staff. They show good understanding of the feelings and needs of others, creating a very inclusive community where the rights of all are respected. For the great majority of the time, pupils' behaviour in class is good. They sustain motivation, sometimes even when teaching is unsatisfactory. Attendance for pupils of statutory school age is good and unauthorised absence is well below the national average.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	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 teaching is good. Of the 151 lessons observed teaching was satisfactory or better in 92 per cent of them, very good or excellent in 20 per cent and unsatisfactory or occasionally poor in 8 per cent. The teaching in English and mathematics is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and is good in science. In Key Stage 4, teaching quality is good in the three core subjects. Teaching in other subjects is good in art, design and technology, information technology, modern languages, vocational subjects and for those with special needs: it is satisfactory in music and religious education; but it is unsatisfactory in geography and physical education. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. Where the teaching is good or better, pupils are well challenged, their learning and progress is good. In lesson where teaching is weaker, planning does not always identify what pupils should know, understand and be able to do by the end of the lesson and, in some lessons, pupils are not always able to participate in the lesson. Occasionally tasks are insufficiently challenging to enable progress to be made. Learning is generally good. Pupils are well motivated, maintain good levels of concentration, respond well to challenge and the opportunity to participate in the lesson and enjoy good relationships with their peers and teachers. In lessons where teaching is less challenging pupils learn and make progress but have insufficient opportunities to be independent learners.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	There is a wide range of learning experiences available to pupils in each key stage and in the Sixth Form. The taught curriculum is broader and better balanced than at the last inspection. Learning is, however, enriched by visits and exchanges as well as by a range of drama, musical and sporting activities. Statutory requirements for geography and religious education are not fully met.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The provision for these pupils is very good. Their learning in mainstream classes is well supported and, within the special needs units, the staff and resources are well targeted to meet individual needs.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good provision is made within and beyond the curriculum to support pupil's moral and social development. The provision for pupils' spiritual development is unsatisfactory and lacks the support of a daily act of collective worship. Support for pupils' cultural development is satisfactory.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The academic tutorial system is becoming a strong mechanism for monitoring and supporting pupils' progress.

The school has a productive partnership with parents. Parents feel they can contact the school with their concerns but a formal reply is not always sent reporting the outcome. Arrangements for health and safety and child protection are good. The curriculum is enriched in Key Stage 3 by drama and personal and social education, and in Key Stage 4 there is good provision for sex and health education, very good quality careers education and provision for work experience. In the Sixth Form there is a good range of GCE Advanced Level and GNVQ courses as well as opportunities for physical education and religious education conferences. Tutorial and monitoring processes for GNVQ pupils are effective but current pastoral arrangements are inconsistent across the Sixth Form. Statutory requirements for geography at Key Stage 3 are not fully met and religious education lacks sufficient time in Key Stage 4 to meet the objectives of the Agreed Syllabus. The governing body does not make adequate provision for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The governing body, together with the headteacher and senior management team, provide good leadership for the school and a clear educational direction to its work.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Through the work of its well-organised committees, the governors fulfil many of their responsibilities. They have still to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils, a full National Curriculum Programme of Study for geography at Key Stage 3 and sufficient time for religious education at Key Stage 4.
The school's evaluation of its performance	There is a well-defined quality assurance process that enables the school to evaluate its own effectiveness. The process has led to improvements in the quality of education provided since the last inspection.
The strategic use of resources	The school is an efficiently run organisation with very good financial management and well-planned strategic use of resources.

The reorganisation of the senior management team has resulted in a more rigorous and purposeful approach to its work. However, some key tutors are still moving into their new role and curriculum managers are only now beginning to monitor standards and quality more systematically. There is satisfactory provision for staffing, accommodation and learning resources. The school diligently applies the principles of best value across the range of its decisions.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standards – the school is seen as expecting and enabling pupils to do their best.</li> <li>• Excellent progress in the special needs unit.</li> <li>• Good pastoral support to build self-esteem is widely seen to be a strength.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standards in information technology.</li> <li>• Consistency of support from pastoral system where there is a lack of information on progress, including at Year 7 and 11 target setting meetings.</li> <li>• Disruptive behaviour especially in unsettled groups.</li> <li>• Lack of feedback from school on concerns and complaints.</li> <li>• Lack of homework timetable – agreed by all to be a gap which should be filled.</li> <li>• Prevalence of bullying and steps taken to deal with it.</li> </ul>

Inspection evidence shows that in many lessons teachers do have high expectations of pupils. Bullying does exist spasmodically in school but steps are taken to create a climate where pupils can relate their concerns, where problems are identified and effective measures are put in place. The school is not currently supplying a homework timetable and this, together with the inconsistency in monitoring homework planners by some form tutors, means that the arrangements for homework are not effective. There is no evidence of poor behaviour in unsettled groups. There is some unsatisfactory behaviour, but not in the groups reported by parents. The progress of pupils with special needs is a real strength of the school. In the last four years the school has developed a view of the whole child: it is increasingly effective in mentoring and academic tutoring with good quality personal support from all staff. Significant effort is expended to address complaints, but the feedback to parents is not always direct to them, meaning that there is a gap in effective communication of the outcomes of concerns raised. Across the school standards in information technology are above average.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

1. Pupils enter the school with levels of attainment in English, mathematics and science and other subjects that are generally below average. In spite of 15 per cent of pupils in the current Years 7 to 9 being admitted through selection tests, the attainment on entry of those in Year 7 shows that about two-fifths of them have levels of attainment that are average or above. Other tests, that are administered soon after entry to Year 7, show that the majority of pupils have levels of attainment that are below average, and some are well below, including in reading and spelling.

2. They make satisfactory progress in their learning as they move through Key Stage 3, consolidating and building on prior learning, improving their standards of literacy in particular, and further developing their number and information technology skills. In the end of Key Stage 3, National Curriculum tests in 1999, attainment in English and science was broadly in line with the national average but below in mathematics. In relation to similar schools, however, attainment was above the average both overall and in relation to English and science, and was in line with the average in mathematics. In other curriculum areas teachers' assessments at the end of the key stage shows that attainment is well above the national average in history and information technology, above average in design and technology, in line with the average in modern languages and well below average in geography. In art and physical education attainment is in line with the national expectation but in music it is below. Attainment in religious education is in line with the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus. First hand inspection evidence, including discussions with pupils, analysis of their work and lesson observation, broadly confirms this view of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3, except in relation to history. In this subject attainment is judged to be below average especially in historical knowledge and understanding, historical enquiry and the ability of pupils to communicate historical information accurately.

3. Pupils make good progress as they move through Key Stage 4. Although results in the 1999 GCSE examinations were below average, they have been improving over the past four years and now compare favourably with those for similar schools. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more A\*-C grades is well below the national average but the proportion gaining five or more and 1 or more A\*-G grades is very high when compared with the national average and that for similar schools. The average points score for pupils in each GCSE subject is just below average but above the average for similar schools. In terms of individual subjects, results in the 1999 GCSE examinations for pupils gaining A\*-C grades were generally below the national average, except in information technology and double award science that were above the average, and in English, geography and music that were well below average. However, in relation to national averages for similar schools, the results in mathematics, art, information technology and modern languages were above the average, while history and music are in line and other subjects were below average. In religious education attainment at the end of the key stage is below the expectations of the local Agreed Syllabus. In modern languages, a department that is under new leadership since the last inspection, the proportion of pupils gaining grades in the A\*-C range has more than doubled since 1998. The relative performance of boys and girls is similar to the national picture,

except in design and technology subjects where girls' results were very much higher than those of the boys. Taking account of discussions with pupils, inspection of their work and lessons observation, first hand inspection evidence broadly supports the evidence outlined by external examination results.

4. Pupils entering the Sixth Form make good progress. Because only a small number of pupils are entered at GCE Advanced and Advanced Supplementary level for each subject, and many for not more than a total of two, it is not possible to make valid comparison of their grades with course averages. However, overall, those taking GCE Advanced level courses achieve results that are well below course averages, with very few pupils gaining the highest grades. The success rate of those studying on GNVQ courses is very much better and has been improving consistently since the last inspection. Results in 1999 at GNVQ Advanced level show that over 90 per cent of pupils gained full awards and at GNVQ Intermediate level 75 per cent also gained full accreditation. First hand inspection evidence confirms this picture of Sixth Form pupils' attainment. They are making good progress and achieving well, especially in GNVQ Advanced courses.

5. All pupils with special education needs, including those in the unit, make good progress and are achieving levels that are appropriate to their prior learning, especially in the development and application of basic skills.

6. There is currently no whole school approach to extending the learning of able and gifted pupils and subject areas have adopted their own strategies. The highest attaining pupils in some subjects, for example in mathematics, science and information technology tackle challenging and differentiated learning tasks. In a Year 9 top set mathematics lesson, a subject-specific computer programme was used to consolidate knowledge, understanding and application of concepts such as highest common factors, lowest common multiples and square roots, with the highest attaining pupils benefiting from the highly challenging extension tasks. In physical education, two Key Stage 4 girls have, through the level of demand and challenge offered to all, gained county representative status in their own sports.

7. Pupils make good progress in developing basic literacy skills that enable them to have clear access to the curriculum. On entry to the school, pupils' attainment in writing is below average while the standard of their listening, speaking and reading skills are close to the average. Pupils make good progress and increase in confidence in both Key Stages 3 and 4 in speaking but their responses are often brief. In some lessons, for example in science, history and drama, contributions to lessons are more extensive. Most pupils listen effectively and those with difficulty in reading and writing achieve as well as their peers. Many pupils in Year 7 have reading skills appropriate to their age. They read aloud competently and often with meaning. In Key Stage 3 pupils choose and read books appropriate to their age, although non-fiction texts are often more demanding and usually reflect one of their specialist interests.

8. The standard of pupils' written work is clearly below average on entry to the school. During both Key Stages 3 and 4, pupils make satisfactory progress in developing accuracy and the ability to write for various audiences. Pupils' written work, however, often reflects the non-standard grammar of their speech; spelling and punctuation mistakes are also very common. By Key Stage 4 their completed work includes some extensive prose in short stories, imaginative descriptions and poems, and some evidence of the ability to use formal language for correspondence. Well-formed handwriting is rare, but most pupils write quite

fluently and legibly. The accuracy and presentation of some work is enhanced by pupils' use of computers. In the Sixth Form, pupils' work shows that they can meet the requirements of the course in composing essays and writing analytically about their studies. Across the school, there is good work being done by some teachers to improve pupils' literacy by displaying key words and correcting errors. Special needs teachers and support assistants give focused attention to literacy and helpful computer programmes are effectively used.

9. There is no evidence that a lack of number skills is affecting access to any area of the curriculum. However, at present, there is no whole school policy on numerical skills across the curriculum, neither has there been an audit of the skills required. Pupils do make progress in this area as they move through the school. Numerical skills are reinforced in mathematics lessons with regular practice in mental arithmetic. The use of a range of graphical skills was seen in science where pupils could plot points and draw linear graphs with confidence. Spreadsheets, and the associated numerical data, were effectively used at all levels in information technology courses and measurements were accurate in design technology. There was competent use of data handling skills in GNVQ courses.

10. Overall, standards have improved over the past four years. Given the fact that the intake of the school is skewed towards the average and below average attaining pupils, standards in relation to similar schools as well as value added data, show that pupils are achieving well. Teaching quality has improved since the last inspection and its impact on standards and learning are apparent in a number of subjects, especially modern languages. Following the last inspection effective steps were taken to develop the use of the data being gathered about pupils, to monitor their attainment and progress and to help them improve standards through mentoring and target-setting arrangements. This process is beginning to have an impact on standards, especially in Years 7 and 11, as well as contributing to raising pupils' self-esteem and their commitment to their work. However data needs to be used more extensively with all pupils.

11. The school has set very challenging targets for the next two years, with every expectation that they will be achieved. The key tutors and their teams are increasing in confidence and effectiveness as the mentoring and target-setting arrangements move incrementally through the school. These arrangements, in partnership with improvements in the quality and monitoring of assessment are proving powerful tools for raising standards in, for example, science, art and modern languages.



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

12. Pupils in all key stages display enthusiasm for school and their work, and have good relationships with their peers and staff. They show particular awareness of the range of special needs and impairments within the pupil population, making the school a very inclusive community where the rights of all are respected.

13. In over three quarters of lessons across the key stages, pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good or better. This is a considerable improvement from the last inspection when attitudes were good or better in fewer than half of the lessons.

14. In the Sixth Form pupils are involved in their work, discussing ideas and listening attentively to staff and to each other. Relationships between pupils are friendly and courteous. They are articulate in response to questions, but rather less ready to volunteer their own opinions in, for example, subjects such as science.

15. In Key Stage 4, pupils are again articulate and confident in the discussion of their work. They work well collaboratively, especially in science and modern languages. They show interest across the range of subjects and are keen to develop new skills and knowledge. Where teaching is particularly lively, they respond with equal enthusiasm. The same characteristics are evident in Key Stage 3. Pupils show maturity in discussing ideas, in personal and social education, for instance. They sustain motivation, sometimes even where teaching is unsatisfactory.

16. As in the Sixth Form, pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 tend to be reticent in voicing their own opinions. On occasions, their behaviour can become noisy or restless, with a loss of concentration. Often, but not invariably, this is linked to weaker teaching. For the great majority of the time, however, their behaviour in class is good.

17. Around the school pupils behave well, showing consideration in congested corridors. There was no evidence of the boisterous and inconsiderate behaviour mentioned in the last report. At break and lunchtimes, there is good-humoured conversation in progress. Very good relationships are evident between pupils and staff, and with the student officer, who provides valuable informal support to pupils during non-lesson time. There is a marked degree of trust and confidence in adults, and pupils will confide their problems to them readily.

18. Pupils show a good understanding of relationships and the feelings and needs of others. In personal and social education lessons, there were striking instances of pupils showing sensitivity, empathy and respect for others. In one lesson, pupils felt able to pray together for a fellow pupil about to undergo an operation, and to hold a sensitive and thoughtful discussion about what it means to have a disability. There was clear understanding of the rights of all members of a community.

19. All pupils have confidence to talk about the fact that bullying does exist on occasions, as it does in all schools. They feel that generally the school deals with the perpetrators and matters are resolved. Although there are instances of bullying, it is not endemic or unduly prevalent.

20. The number of exclusions is average. The governors discipline committee is extremely rigorous in its review of pupils moving towards exclusion. There are increasing moves towards positive intervention at an early stage to reduce the risk of exclusion. Records of both fixed period and permanent exclusions have a very good level of detail, and clearly demonstrate the reasons for exclusion.

21. Attendance for pupils of statutory school age is good compared to national figures. Unauthorised absence is well below the national average. In the Sixth Form, the current lack of coherent tutorial arrangements does not support good attendance. Signing-in arrangements, and the procedures for organising private study time, are too informal to ensure that all pupils attend consistently well. The appointment of a head of Sixth Form for next September, which has already been made, should improve the situation.

22. There is still some evidence of lack of punctuality to lessons and registrations, although this is less widespread than at the time of the last report. Overall, punctuality is satisfactory, but better at the start of the school day than to lessons.

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

23. The overall quality of the teaching is good, although it is better in Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form than in Key Stage 3. Of the 151 lessons observed teaching was satisfactory or better in 92 per cent of them. Teaching is good, very good or excellent in 64 per cent of lessons, satisfactory in 28 per cent and unsatisfactory, or poor, in 8 per cent. Most of the unsatisfactory teaching, as well as the one lesson where teaching was poor, occurred in Key Stage 3, especially in Year 8.

24. In mathematics, science, information technology, modern languages, GNVQ courses and personal and social education the majority of the teaching is good, very good or occasionally excellent and there is none that is unsatisfactory or poor. In English, design and technology, history, art, music, physical education and religious education most of the teaching is satisfactory or better, although there is some that is unsatisfactory. However, in geography over one-third of the teaching is unsatisfactory or poor.

25. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection and currently there is a very strong link between the quality of teaching and the impact that it has on pupils' learning.

26. Where teaching is good, very good or excellent, lessons are well structured, teachers' expectations are high, work is well matched to pupils' attainment and there is an appropriate sequence of teaching and learning activities. The good pace of the learning maintains pupils' interest and provides motivation for them to further develop their intellectual, creative or physical skills. For example, in a Year 9 English lesson, where teaching was well planned, pupils studying *Macbeth* benefited from the enthusiasm the teacher had for the topic and the level of challenge provided by the language of the text. This enabled pupils to make good progress and to develop their creative interest in the play and its characters. Similar instances were seen, for example in mathematics, science, art and physical education.

27. Many teachers have good subject knowledge, are clear about what they want pupils to achieve in lessons and provide stimulus and challenge, as well as carefully designed tasks and resources that will enable them to learn successfully. For instance, in a very well planned Year 10 art lesson, the pupils used a well-defined project brief to produce a relief painting in the style of an artist of their own choice. Pupils responded to the demands of the task, used a wide range of research sources to explore their understanding of the artist's work. Progress was rapid and analytical and appraisal skills and their knowledge about the work of a variety of artists were all further developed. Other occasions when such good quality learning was seen occurred in some lessons in mathematics, history, information technology and GNVQ courses.

28. However, in some lessons when teaching is less demanding, pupils become passive learners and are offered few opportunities to manage their own work or to contribute to the lesson. While pupils do make progress in such lessons, it is less rapid than in those where pupils are both challenged and encouraged to respond to, for example, open-ended questions and tasks.

29. In many lessons the needs of all learners are being met. Pupils are consistently challenged through the effective use of a variety of teaching methods and whole-class question and answer sessions, as well as clearly defined and, often, differentiated tasks. The use of a good range of resources, support staff and time had a positive impact on pupils' learning. Also in such lessons, pupils are well managed, enjoy good relationships with their teachers and respond well to praise and encouragement, including good feedback on the quality of their work. This was certainly the case in a number of lessons in science, technology, information technology and physical education. In a very well planned Year 13 biology lesson, pupils explored the effect of enzymes on an apple. They were able to use a variety of methods to explore the clearly defined task. All were very well motivated, made outstanding progress and were well supported and challenged during their work by an enthusiastic and well-informed teacher. Throughout the lesson the spirit of investigation persisted as pupils developed some elegant responses to their hypotheses. Their positive attitude to work was well supported by good feedback during the practical session.

30. In many lessons teachers provide high levels of support to all pupils, especially through the quality of their oral and written feedback in class and homework marking. Much of the homework is integral to the lesson and extends understanding of the topic being studied. Many teachers employ a positive and consistent approach to the management of behaviour, having established high standards and class conventions to enable good quality learning to take place. Teachers generally enjoy good relationships with their pupils and ensure, at the end of lessons, that learning objectives have been achieved.

31. Even where teaching is satisfactory, there are some weaknesses in the practice. In all these lessons pupils do learn and make progress but at a slower rate than would be expected if work were better planned, teaching provided consistent challenge and intellectual stimulation and tasks were more carefully designed to meet the variety of learning needs within the class. Occasionally, for example in some Key Stage 3 English and science lessons, teachers had insufficiently high expectations of their pupils and the outcomes of marking and assessment were not systematically used to inform the next stage of teaching and learning. While pupils concentrate well and maintain positive attitudes in such lessons, their efforts are not well enough focused by the teaching to be sufficiently well rewarded.

32. In some lessons, including those where teaching is unsatisfactory or poor, planning is insufficiently detailed. For example, the lesson plan often fails to identify what pupils should know, understand and be able to do by the end of the lesson, is unclear about the range of strategies to be used to explore the learning and the levels of expectation and challenge to be made. In some cases pupils have few opportunities to extend their knowledge and understanding or to develop personal and study skills through organising their own work, undertaking research tasks or working with others in exploring the lesson topic. In one Year 8 religious education lesson, for example, pupils initially responded well to looking at evidence for the existence of Jesus compared with that for Julius Caesar. But as pupils became frustrated by the lack of challenge and the quality of in-depth explanations from a non-specialist teacher, both attainment and progress were affected. While behaviour in this lesson was not poor, it lacked some of the co-operative spirit in which many classes are conducted. In addition to religious education, other examples were seen occasionally in a minority of lessons in English, design and technology, geography, history, art, music and physical education.

33. It was apparent that the higher the quality of the teaching, then the greater was its impact on pupils' learning. This included the rate at which pupils make progress and the high commitment they have to raising their levels of attainment. It was certainly the case in many well-taught lessons in English, science, mathematics, technology, modern languages and physical education. For example in a Year 9 food technology lesson, pupils responded well to the excellent teaching. They made rapid progress in developing knowledge, understanding and skills as well as in their own personal development. This was supported by and the regular written and oral feedback from the teacher. Pupils were so clearly focused on their work and their attitudes were so positive that they had no opportunity to misbehave or to lose concentration.

34. Pupils with special education needs are well taught and make good progress in their learning. They are well supported by the learning support staff, both in mainstream classes and in withdrawal activities. For instance, in a bottom set Year 11 science lesson, pupils with special education needs made good progress in understanding some complex ideas relating to genetics and the nature versus nurture argument to account for the differences between humans. Differentiated resources and well-defined tasks are often used. Pupils' good progress in learning is supported by appropriately targeted teaching.

35. Generally, basic skills are taught satisfactorily. In many lessons, lists of key words were displayed and used throughout by pupils with increasing confidence. Number was well used beyond the mathematics lessons and was integral to pupils' learning in, for example, the analysis of data in geography, producing graphs in science and counting in modern foreign languages as well as using the chi-square tests in GCE Advanced level science. There is less evidence of the teaching of information technology skills within subjects, although increasingly pupils are developing the use of computers in, for example, art to scan images.

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

36. The school's curriculum is broad and balanced in Key Stage 3. All pupils study the statutory National Curriculum subjects, religious education and also drama as an additional subject. They all have lessons in information technology, study all aspects of design technology, and experience a range of art activities including pottery. However, the geography curriculum does not meet statutory requirements, since poor departmental planning limits the range of topics and skills covered from the Key Stage 3 National Curriculum Programmes of Study. The current humanities structure in Year 7 does not allow for a coherent approach to the teaching of history, geography and religious education. The organisation of these subjects on the timetable, coupled with the use of thirty-minute lessons and the deployment of humanities staff teaching outside their specialist areas, restrict continuity of learning and the range of teaching strategies used. This provides an unsatisfactory learning experience for pupils.

37. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is broad and balanced for many pupils, although the limited provision for religious education does not meet statutory requirements, and physical education receives a time allocation that is below the national average. In addition to core subjects, such as English, mathematics and science, pupils can choose from a range of optional subjects, although groups are timetabled only if numbers are viable. A minority of pupils does not experience a balanced curriculum, because, in spite of the individual guidance that pupils receive, they do not all opt for a humanities or a creative arts subject. Plans are in hand to modify the curriculum in the next academic year to allow for a greater choice of options in Key Stage 4.

38. The Sixth Form curriculum is broad and balanced. Pupils are able to study a range of subjects at GCE Advanced and Advanced Supplementary Level, can opt for vocational GNVQ courses, or can select a combination of all three options. However, the time allocation for GNVQ courses is below the national average. Pupils' learning opportunities are extended by regular Sixth Form religious education conferences and the opportunity to take part in physical education, but the programme lacks any further core provision for general studies.

39. The school provides equality of opportunity and access to the curriculum for all pupils. The provision for special educational needs across the curriculum is good. There are a substantial number of well-qualified assistants ensuring that these pupils receive help in many lessons and so make good progress in their learning. The school also makes good provision for pupils with disabilities. For example there is wheelchair access, complemented by two lifts, to all areas of the school, and there are facilities to help visually impaired pupils with their learning.

40. All pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 receive good provision in personal, moral and social education, which is taught in discrete lessons. There is, however, no timetabled programme in the Sixth Form. Visiting speakers contribute effectively to the personal and social education programme. Recent issues discussed have included tolerance towards, and caring for, those with disabilities. Issues of sex, drug misuse and health education are effectively provided for within the mainstream school curriculum. Outside agencies such as the police also make a valuable contribution to this programme. A successful work programme is provided for a small number of disaffected pupils in Key Stage 4, for whom the standard curriculum is

deemed inappropriate. Local business people mentor some of these pupils and eight recently took part in a ten-week course sponsored by the county's fire brigade.

41. School governors are attached to particular subjects in order to assist in the monitoring of the curriculum. Pupils' learning experiences in the taught curriculum are enriched by an effective programme of visits, exchanges, sporting fixtures, games and other activities. During the inspection, for example, girls attended district hockey tournaments and some Key Stage 3 pupils took part in an exchange visit to Barcelona. In addition, the modern languages faculty also organises popular visits to France and French Canada. Lunchtime and after-school clubs are well attended. Pupils talk willingly about the enjoyment they gain from participating in these activities. They also welcome the opportunity to widen their experience in the world beyond the school. As they move up through Key Stages 3 and 4 pupils experience a well-conceived careers education programme and are able to make good use of the careers library and other facilities provided. Pupils in Year 10 benefit from a well-organised work experience programme, which occupies two-weeks in the summer term. The school arranges placements with local employers. Sixth form pupils studying on GNVQ courses enjoy their more regular opportunities to take part in shorter periods of work experience.

42. Pupils also benefit from a good range of links with other institutions and from involvement with the wider community. Those who join the school in Year 7 will have already benefited from links with some of the partner primary schools. Incoming pupils get the chance to visit the school beforehand. Children from local primary schools make regular use of the school's facilities. Higher up the school there are links with other schools and colleges. These links affect not just the curriculum but provide good opportunities for staff development. For example, a student teacher in physical education teaches both at Pent Valley and at another local school, and the physical education departments of both schools co-operate in providing suitable guidance.

43. The school makes satisfactory provision for supporting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, but provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory. There are occasions when spiritual issues demand attention, such as when pupils experience a sense of wonder or meaningful reflection, for example when creating poetry or observing shape, form and colour in art. However, opportunities to capitalise on this are sometimes limited or missed. For example, an assembly focussing on the thought for the week provided no opportunity for pupils to reflect on the demanding and thought-provoking content. The school's 'Thought for the week' is discussed in some tutor periods, and pupils respond positively. For example, the theme of time as a valuable commodity was sensitively addressed in a Year 7 tutor group, but in some others the chosen themes are not discussed at all. Frequently there is no act of collective worship for all pupils and thus the school does not meet statutory requirements.

44. The school's provision for moral education is good. Pupils are taught to distinguish clearly the principles of right from wrong, and many teachers provide good role models. On a day-to-day level, teachers use a variety of strategies to reinforce the importance of understanding right and wrong as well as to recognise and celebrate good behaviour. Moral issues are frequently discussed, as when pupils in Year 9 history lessons discussed the issue of conscientious objection when studying the First World War. Pupils' moral development also benefits from the school's approach to equal opportunities, especially in the inclusiveness of their school community. In addition there is a youth action group that considers school-wide issues and contributes to thinking on problem solving in relation to theft, smoking and anti-social behaviour.

45. The school's provision for social education is good. Pupils work collaboratively and constructively in lessons. For example Year 9 girls, working in pairs, showed considerable maturity in devising ways of getting through an obstacle course in a physical education lesson. Pupils following the Junior Sports leader Award exercise responsibility effectively. Older pupils respond well to the opportunity to contribute to, as well as benefit from, the social development of others by acting as buddies to younger pupils as a preventative measure against bullying. The personal and social education programme covers a wide range of topics including relationships, the rights and duties of growing up, health issues, environmental responsibility and parenthood. There is a school council, although its major areas of concern focus on facilities provided for pupils.

46. The school's provision for cultural enrichment is satisfactory. Pupils are given opportunities to widen their cultural horizons in various ways. In English there are opportunities for pupils to study classic literature, including Chaucer, Shakespeare and Dickens. Dance, which is taught in Key Stage 3, enriches pupils' understanding of their own culture and that of others. Pupils study both western and non-western art and often view examples of both on their visits to galleries. A significant element of this area of work is the contribution of the European dimension to pupils' cultural understanding, through language work, visits, exchanges and links with the organisation responsible for the Channel Tunnel. The learning experiences offered by the European dimension of the curriculum was noted in the last inspection report as a real strength of the school and will, in future, be further developed by the European Links Co-ordinator. However, the emphasis that the school gives to extending pupils' multicultural awareness is limited. There are occasional examples of pupils considering the contribution made by other cultures, but these opportunities are not extensive. There is no overall co-ordinated approach to the provision of spiritual, moral, social and cultural education within the school.

47. In some areas of the curriculum there have been improvements in provision since the last inspection while in others there is little evidence of development. The breadth of the curriculum and the contribution of extra-curricular activities have been maintained. Provision for personal and social education has improved. A greater range of courses is now on offer. The provision of information technology has improved. However, because of the use of one-hour lessons there are still some imbalances in time provision for some subjects at Key Stage 3 and, through poor planning and inadequate schemes of work, geography does not now meet statutory requirements. Multicultural awareness is still relatively under developed, and the school still does not meet statutory requirements in relation to providing a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

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

48. The school has put an academic tutoring system in place that enables key staff to monitor the progress of the whole child and to involve parents as partners in children's progress. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. There is effective support and guidance for pupils in the main school, but current tutorial arrangements for the Sixth Form are not adequate.

49. The school has a health and safety policy that is adopted by individual departments. The policy is properly carried out by staff and outside contractors as well as in departments where pupils are given clear instructions on the safe use of equipment. In its review of the policy, the health and safety committee has concentrated on fire procedures, and currently on risk assessment. The effect of this work can be seen in teachers' planning and departmental procedures.

50. There are comprehensive health and safety records and training has been well organised to meet staff needs. There is a good awareness of health and safety by premises staff. The school checks the health and safety arrangements on work experience placements, and supports pupils' awareness by funding the health and safety at work certificate for GNVQ students. The school has secure practices in place to ensure the health and safety of staff and pupils.

51. Procedures for child protection are good, and there is a climate of trust and confidence in which pupils can report concerns to staff. There has been whole school training, and there are proper arrangements for attendance at case conferences. All of the staff is well aware what to do should a pupil disclose or report a concern to them.

52. The monitoring of attendance within tutor groups in the main school is good. There is productive contact with the education welfare service to support the work of the school with non-attenders. Tutorial arrangements in the Sixth Form do not support good attendance sufficiently, although individual staff members do undertake monitoring within their subject areas.

53. Key tutors are able to monitor behaviour very effectively through detailed records such as tracking sheets, or faculty returns, which can target individuals, groups or identify particular lessons where behaviour is not acceptable. This precision means that discussions between pupils and tutors can be well informed. There is good access to a wide range of information about pupils on the school's database.

54. The use of extended work experience for disaffected Key Stage 4 pupils, and the intended work on earlier intervention, is very well devised and planned. It is already having a good degree of success, even though it is in its early stages.

55. Measures to prevent bullying are highly successful, allowing pupils to speak about their experiences, in the confidence that the school's response will be sensitive and effective. The detail collected from confidential questionnaires is very useful in allowing supportive measures, such as buddy systems, to be correctly targeted.



56. Procedures for assessment within departments are satisfactory. There is good practice in some departments, such as physical education, where the consistent marking of tests, useful comments and target setting make pupils aware of their own progress. In the science department data is well used. In GNVQ assessment is well used to inform future work, affecting the order in which modules are studied, and to guide option choices.

57. For pupils with special educational needs, learning targets are well linked to annual reviews and transition plans. There is regular revision of targets and pupils are properly included in the evaluation process.

58. The current marking policy makes reference to attainment and the arrangements for target setting include the evaluation of effort, attainment and success against broad generic learning criteria. This provides a comprehensive picture of the pupil. The marking of work within departments, whilst satisfactory, still shows variability in regularity and in the use of comments to help pupils improve.

59. The role of the key tutor is well designed to allow monitoring of the whole child, with different aspects of attendance being monitored by the key tutor and the student officer. The key tutor role has not yet reached its full potential, due in the main to changes of staffing roles caused by budgetary constraints. Some key tutors have large numbers of pupils to monitor and large teams of form tutors to manage. This means that the use of registration time by form tutors is very variable in quality, with some pupils receiving very good support and others far less.

60. The target-setting meeting is the major mechanism for bringing the different elements of the tutoring system together, and this meeting also is increasingly effective. Contributions to educational support and guidance from other areas, such as careers, are of good quality, except that option guidance does not promote sufficiently a broad curriculum for all pupils.

61. Current arrangements in the Sixth Form for support and guidance are not satisfactory. An appointment has been made which will improve the situation. Although there has been some monitoring of Sixth Form students, this has had to rely on the efforts of subject staff, and senior staff who have many other duties in addition to that of the Sixth Form.

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

62. Parents are satisfied with the quality of education that the school provides and perceive some very positive strength in the provision it makes. The partnership with parents operates to good effect, and is increasingly directed towards real involvement of parents in learning. This represents good progress since the last inspection.

63. Parents praise the fact that the school expects a high level of commitment from pupils. They appreciate the support that comes from the genuine interest staff members have in pupils' personal development and academic progress. This concern is expressed through an increasingly effective system of tutoring which cares for the whole child.

64. Parents express concerns about the information that they receive relating to children's progress, about their ability to monitor homework and about the feedback received after an incident within school has been dealt with. Inspection evidence supports both the major strengths and the concerns that parents have noted. The new arrangements for reporting, the intended provision of a homework timetable, and consistent reporting of actions direct to parents, rather than via the child, should address these concerns.

65. The newly introduced target-setting meetings are a potentially powerful means of involving parents more fully in their children's learning, and increasing their understanding of how they can best help pupils at home. Because the system is newly in place, it has not yet had an impact across all year groups. For those pupils involved so far, the high rate of attendance by parents has been a very encouraging development.

66. The range of data collected is a good basis for a target setting discussion. As yet, the way this information is communicated by form tutors, and their ability to respond in depth to subject-based questions posed by parents, is more effective in some instances than others. Annual reviews for pupils with special educational needs are well informed by parental contributions, and targets are formulated to address specific learning needs in addition to the generic targets.

67. The new format of annual reports is a significant improvement. Once this has reached all year groups, parents will have a good picture of their child's progress. The quality of comments from subject departments is too variable at present, with some evaluations being very sharp and focused, with good indications how to improve, and some merely re-iterating information contained within generic targets.

68. The quality of documents provided for parents is good, with attention given to presenting information in a readily accessible way. The home-school agreement, which the school had in place well before this was a requirement, helps parents to be clear in general terms about what they need to do to help children learn. The lack of a homework timetable means that it is difficult for parents to know what homework to expect, and so support the school by monitoring what their children are doing. The inconsistency of monitoring planners by some form tutors also contributes to the situation whereby joint home-school organisation of homework is not sufficiently effective.

69. Staff members throughout the school have a high level of contact with parents. All involved with the school, including the governing body, try very hard to work with parents where, for example, there is a risk of exclusion. Much time is given to trying to find solutions when there are concerns. Sometimes these efforts are not fully appreciated by parents, especially when they have not had direct feedback on what actions have been taken.

## HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

70. The school benefits from good quality leadership and management. The astute headteacher has highly developed strategic planning skills. Supported by a cohesive and energetic senior team, she has enabled significant steps to be taken since the last inspection in order to transform the school's vision and values into well-understood and consistently implemented policies and practices. The thrust of the changes mean that the school does not just value high achievement, it now actively promotes it.

71. For example, the three deputy headteachers now have direct responsibility for raising standards and ensuring quality across a key stage and in the Sixth Form. Each deputy headteacher is well supported in this work by a team of key and lead tutors. Many members of these newly appointed teams are increasing in effectiveness as they move into role. Not only do they monitor academic attainment and progress but also the personal development of all pupils. The monitoring role is closely linked to target setting and the mentoring of pupils in the drive to raise standards.

72. The school now makes very good use of performance data, including baseline assessments, the results of end of key stage assessments and other external examination results, as well as information relating to attendance, behaviour and pupils' achievements both in and beyond the school. This analysis is geared towards target setting and supporting the work of a revised mentoring system, particularly in Years 7 and 11. There is now a rolling programme for introducing target setting across all year groups. Key tutors work in partnership with tutor teams and their head of faculty colleagues.

73. The headteacher and her senior managers work extremely well as a team. They have a very positive influence on those they manage and promote very effectively the school's values and ethos. Through their quality assurance role, members of the senior management team regularly monitor the quality of teaching and learning in subject areas. This process has encouraged many, but not all, middle managers to begin to monitor more systematically the standards being achieved and the quality of work in their subject. The monitoring by both senior and middle managers has helped to improve standards and the quality of teaching across the school, although there are still inconsistencies in both standards and teaching in, for example, geography, history, music and religious education.

74. The work of all managers is supported by a well-conceived development plan that is closely linked to a highly effective staff development and life-long learning programme. Together, the implementation of the clearly defined priorities and targets in the development plan and staff development process contribute both to raising standards and to school improvement.

75. There are good systems in place for recruitment, induction, appraisal and staff development. Recruitment in the area is very difficult and thus, the school uses its extensive experience of providing support for student teachers and those that are newly qualified in providing an effective programme for those recently appointed to the staff. The success of these programmes, which include core and role-specific activities, ensures that all staff are aware of the aims, values and ethos the school has established and the systems available to support them as they take up their role.

76. A common system for the appraisal of teaching and support staff includes many activities that focus on the professional role of the staff member. These have been highly effective in focussing on classroom practice for teachers and in piloting the identification of competencies for support staff as part of both the appraisal and staff development processes. The effectiveness of this approach to staff development is recognised in the school's *Investors In People* status

77. Priorities for staff development are clearly identified through the whole school and faculty development planning process. The priorities identified in these plans are supported in a coherent programme of life-long learning opportunities for both teaching and support staff teams. The impact of the programme is monitored. The achievements of staff in gaining certification, diplomas and degrees are celebrated along with those of pupils at an annual festival of achievement.

78. The governing body is effective and is successful in fulfilling many of its responsibilities. The chairman offers good leadership to his colleagues and, through his skilful management of meetings, has enabled all colleagues to contribute to the governing body's work. A system of committees, with clear terms of reference, is effective in undertaking much of the governing body's detailed work. The governing body fulfils many of its statutory duties but still does not provide: a daily act of collective worship for all pupils; sufficient time for the teaching of religious education at Key Stage 4; the full National Curriculum Programmes of Study in geography at Key Stage 3.

79. Governors monitor the school's work, both through their committees and the full governing body meetings. They are aware of the strengths and weaknesses in practice and work closely with the headteacher and her senior team in seeking effective solutions. In addition many members visit faculty areas regularly, observe lessons and provide feedback to their colleagues. The significant investment in the restructuring of the senior and middle management teams and its impact on raising standards is well understood by governors who are carefully monitoring the effectiveness and impact of the new management structure.

80. Financial planning and management securely underpins the development and work of the school. The systems are sufficiently robust and responsive to deal effectively with uncertainty and the constraints introduced by budget reductions. The governors are very well involved in strategic financial decisions through the resources committee. They have a good understanding of the issues facing the school. The involvement of staff governors helps all within the school to acquire a realistic picture of the choices to be made. Resources are well targeted towards development priorities. There is a clear link between budgeting and development, in the staff appointments to be made for next year, for example.

81. The management of reducing levels of resources has been good. Difficult decisions have been taken and future plans are very well targeted to areas of greatest need. Good use of budgetary delegation to teaching and support staff means that clear rationales have to exist before money is allocated, and budget-holders are encouraged to take responsibility for obtaining the best value for money from their resources.

82. Financial control is very good. The most recent management letter contained minor issues that have been addressed. The school has sensibly chosen to retain the role of responsible officer and the regular use of a full audit. Both of these decisions will ensure protection for financial staff and confidence for governors that monies are being properly accounted for. Financial systems make extensive use of cost centres, so that control of costs is good and savings are sought when expenditure is reviewed.

83. There are rigorous procedures for accounting for specific grants, which cover detailed expenditure such as supply cover. Designated funds are effectively directed towards targets, including the two major grants received by the school this year for disaffected pupils and information communication technology.

84. There are satisfactory levels of staffing, accommodation and learning resources. There are appropriate staffing levels among teaching and support staff to meet the current needs of the curriculum. Great care is taken to ensure that the level of staff needed is regularly reviewed. However, while there is an appropriate match between most teaching staff and their responsibilities the deployment of others is unsatisfactory. This is especially apparent in areas where, because of financial and organisational constraints, some teach outside of their specialist areas, such as in geography, history, religious education and art.

85. The team of support staff is appropriately qualified and well deployed, including the site and maintenance staff, technicians and those who work with pupils who have special education needs. The team of reception and clerical staff manage competing priorities with great skill, provide good support for their colleagues and ensure effective management of the school.

86. The accommodation is a complex assortment of buildings that represent many different phases in the school's history. The accommodation has many positive features and enables the curriculum to be taught effectively in all subjects with the exception of physical education. The new modern foreign languages, art and humanities suites provide very good accommodation with resource centres and departmental offices. Science, drama and information technology areas have good accommodation. However, although they are used on occasions by local partner primary schools, accommodation and resources to support individualised learning programmes are insufficiently utilised to promote and monitor pupils' progress in the development of basic literacy and numeracy skills.

87. All parts of the building are accessible to pupils with physical disabilities. For example, in science there are some adjustable benches; two lifts allow access to upper floors and coloured triangles in corridors act as a guide to those pupils with visual impairment. This very good provision is a positive strength of the school. The library, dining hall and toilet facilities are small for the numbers in the school. Some Sixth Form GNVQ and social accommodation is separately housed some distance from the main school. This old temporary building is cold, offers few information technology facilities and limits the range of teaching and learning activities available. Pupils who work in this block are, however,

achieving in spite of its shortcomings. The science, food technology, English, modern languages and humanities areas have new accommodation since the previous inspection. Physical education accommodation, however, remains poor. The gymnasium, hall and fields are small and inadequate for the size of teaching groups. These facilities have an adverse effect on the standards pupils achieve, the progress they make and the learning opportunities available to them.

88. Most curriculum areas are well supplied with resources and appropriate equipment and tools to support learning. Those learning resources made available centrally are also plentiful and of good quality. There has been a significant increase in the quantity and quality of books available in the library, with some good specialist collections held in curriculum areas. Pupils' learning is well supported by the wide range of both audio and visual equipment, an electronic whiteboard and an increasing range of other information technology hardware and subject-specific software available in the four computer suites and in the library.

89. The school's planning and decision-making take very good account of the principles of best value. The principle of comparison is applied to raising achievement by using national and county benchmarks, as referenced in the school's quality assurance framework. Governors have been well consulted in the process of setting challenging targets.

90. There is effective Sixth Form provision funded from within the income pupils bring, even though some groups are small. The successful building of a Sixth Form in a short space of time demonstrates that the school is meeting a real need. The school also challenges itself to make innovative provision, such as the work with disaffected pupils, funding this by successful bidding.

91. During its time as a grant maintained school, financial managers, with the support of the in-house premises team, built up considerable expertise in comparing costs for internal or external supplies and in seeking best value through competitive tendering. These skills in comparison and competition continue to serve the school well.

92. There has been consultation with parents over the current home-school agreement. There was already a similar document in place prior to this being a requirement. The views of prospective pupils and parents are sought through discussion of Sixth Form courses prior to admission. Pupils are also consulted through, for example, surveys that assess the impact of bullying and give a measure of pupils' experience of the steps taken on this matter by the school. There is also a school council, although its main concerns are with facilities, and its function is not widely understood by pupils.

93. The school is effective in providing a good quality education for its pupils. It has been successful in raising standards, and performs well when compared to similar schools. The Sixth Form provision is cost effective, and the school is an efficiently run organisation with very good financial management and well-planned strategic use of resources. The school gives good value for money, and this is an improvement since the last inspection.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

94. In order to improve further the school's effectiveness the governing body, in partnership with the headteacher and all staff, should establish priorities to both raise standards and meet statutory requirements.

### **Raise standards of attainment**

95. Overall standards at end of Key Stages 3 and Key Stage 4 and in GCE Advanced Level subjects are improving but they are still below national averages. The school needs to commit all of its energy and skill so that this situation improves further, especially in mathematics. In order to do this the school should:

- make more effective use of the range of performance data available to focus sharply on improving both pupils' attainment and progress by ensuring that:
  - \* assessment and other performance data is used across the curriculum to establish early benchmarks so that pupils' attainment and progress can be monitored and tracked from their time of entry and throughout their time at the school;  
(*Paragraphs: 1, 2, 3, 6, 65, 72*)
  - \* the information can inform the target-setting programme for individual pupils, subject areas and the school as a whole.  
(*Paragraph: 10, 11, 65, 66, 99*)
- improve the quality of the monitoring of the impact of teaching across the school to ensure that:
  - \* all subjects have accurate and comprehensive records of pupils' attainment and progress;  
(*Paragraphs: 56, 58, 159, 174*)
  - \* staff are well deployed within curriculum areas, including those who are non-specialists;  
(*Paragraphs: 32, 73, 155, 171, 230, 231*)
  - \* literacy, numeracy and information technology are effectively integrated into learning for all pupils;  
(*Paragraphs: 7, 8, 9, 35, 109, 136, 161, 193*)
  - \* in addition to senior managers, faculty and subject heads regularly monitor the work of their areas and evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning on raising standards.  
(*Paragraph: 73*)

- improve the quality of the less good teaching, especially at Key Stage 3 and in geography, by ensuring that:
  - \* the existing good practice is widely disseminated across the curriculum;  
(Paragraphs: 23, 24, 26)
  - \* teachers have high expectations of their pupils' attainment, progress and behaviour;  
(Paragraph: 28, 31, 132)
  - \* lesson planning clearly identifies what pupils should know, understand and be able to do by the end of the lesson and the strategies, tasks and resources needed to achieve this;  
(Paragraphs: 28, 31, 32, 114, 144, 161)
  - \* a range of teaching methods are used to provide appropriate pace and stimulus to pupils' learning;  
(Paragraph: 28, 31, 124, 165, 186, 208, 219)
  - \* pupils are active participants in their learning and are provided with appropriate and challenging tasks to explore the lesson topic;  
(Paragraphs: 28, 31, 32, 166, 230)
  - \* marking helps pupils to improve the standard and quality of their work and that the outcomes of assessment inform future lesson planning;  
(Paragraphs: 31, 56, 126, 140, 156, 159, 168, 174)
  - \* the specialist knowledge of staff is well deployed in high quality planning of teaching and learning.  
(Paragraphs: 31, 32, 167, 223, 230)
  
- review curriculum provision to ensure that:
  - \* appropriate provision is made and statutory requirements are met at Key Stages 3 and 4;  
(Paragraphs: 36, 47, 78, 169, 170, 227)
  - \* pupils are able to achieve appropriate levels of attainment in both religious education and physical education at Key Stage 4 and on GNVQ courses in the Sixth Form.  
(Paragraphs: 37, 87, 221, 240)

### **Meet statutory requirements by:**

- \* ensuring that the National Curriculum Programmes of Study and key skills in geography are taught at Key Stage 3;  
(Paragraphs: 36, 78, 169, 170)
- \* improving provision for religious education at Key Stage 4; providing a daily act of collective worship for all pupils registered at the school.  
(Paragraph: 37, 43, 78, 227)



## THE SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS UNITS

96. The school's provision for special educational needs fully meets statutory requirements and is very good. At the previous inspection this provision was regarded as one of the strengths of the school. Special needs staff had a strong sense of purpose and their quality of work was good, with good levels of commitment from learning support assistants. These standards have been maintained, and have improved with the addition of an excellent visual impairment unit and the introduction of individualised computer programmes for literacy and numeracy. The standard and quality of teaching is good and is reflected in the good gains made in learning by the pupils with special needs. The success of the school's provision for the pupils with special educational needs lies in the good management of its inclusion policy, and during lessons it is sometimes difficult to identify those pupils with specific needs.

97. The standards of achievement by the pupils with learning difficulties are good overall. Although no pupils are disapplied from the National Curriculum, one third of all those on roll are identified under the Code of Practice as having a wide range of special educational needs. In a number of cases special examination arrangements are made for the pupils with specific difficulties, such as dyslexia, where a scribe assists the pupils with handwriting. From a low baseline on admission, the pupils' make good gains in their overall literacy and numeracy skills. At the end of Key Stage 3, their work shows improved handwriting skills and increasing confidence in developing levels of reading comprehension. Teachers' records show improving reading and spelling skills, and by the end of the Year 9, most pupils reach levels close to their chronological ages. The pupils' numeracy skills develop from basic number work to the ability to measure accurately, draw or annotate shapes and area and to develop an understanding of fractions. Their literacy and numeracy skills are further developed through withdrawal sessions for individualised literacy and numeracy computer programmes. Year 9 pupils have regular general study periods, where they receive extra support in specific areas of academic weakness.

98. In Key Stage 4, the pupils follow courses for either the GCSE or for Certificates of Achievement in a range of subject areas. They make good gains overall in their examination assignments and are well supported through personal study periods for small-group or individual tuition. Handwriting styles develop with joined and well-formed letters, and their volume of work increases. In Year 11, the pupils write accurately in modern languages and, although there is a reluctance to speak, they show a good understanding of the spoken word, responding well to comments and instructions in the target language. The pupils' use their study periods to develop their knowledge and understanding through extra tuition and personal research. Throughout the key stage, their work volume increases and there is evidence of independent writing, with improved fluency and spelling skills in science, mathematics and English. The overall quality of their presentation skills reflects their desire to do well and they take pride in their work. A number of the pupils with special needs continue their education into the Sixth Form and make good gains in coursework leading to GNVQ accreditation in leisure and tourism. Some pupils express the hope of continuing to further and higher education.

99. The quality of teaching across the range of special needs provision is good overall, as is the quality of support given by learning support assistants. Teaching is satisfactory in nine-tenths of lessons. In over three-quarters lessons teaching is good or very good. Only one unsatisfactory lesson was seen when the level of support given to the pupils was ineffective. Teachers have high expectations and this is reflected in the good response and attitudes which the pupils' show towards their learning. Lesson planning and preparation is good overall, and the teachers have a good knowledge of their pupils' needs. However, the pupils' individual education plans are not used as working documents and their personal targets are not always clearly defined. This impacts on the pupils learning, particularly in the case of higher achieving pupils, where some lessons provide insufficient challenge.

100. The high standard of teaching and in-class support enables the pupils with special needs to gain full access to the curriculum. For example, pupils with dyslexia make good gains in their written work. They use laptop computers to improve the speed of their writing and recording skills. Classroom assistants provide extra support in ensuring that the pupils' understand and complete set tasks within the given time. The teachers' attention to those pupils with visual impairment is excellent, with several staff able to use Braille. Where commercially produced large-print textbooks are unavailable, standard format books, such as Shakespearean plays or science textbooks, are converted into spoken texts and Braille pictures. In addition, the special needs team prepare large print copies of texts. Good support is given in practical work, for example, in design and technology, when technicians ensure that magnifiers and large computer screens are ready for use. Voice activated computer programmes further enhance the pupils' access to the curriculum by allowing them to produce and edit their own work. The teachers' good classroom management facilitates learning for the pupils with physical disabilities, through good attention to class seating arrangements and, in science, through specially designed desks, height adjustable to accommodate wheelchairs. These enable less mobile pupils to conduct their own experiments and investigations. The pupils with poor basic skills receive daily attention either through the use of computer programmes, which monitor and assess their progress, or through one-to-one literacy support. However, the use of these programmes is insufficiently developed, and opportunities for promoting independent learning are lost.

101. A significant strength of teaching is the match of the exceptionally well-qualified staff to specific learning areas. For example, all staff responsible for special educational needs have qualifications in teaching and supporting dyslexic pupils. A number of staff have further qualifications and experience in supporting pupils with physical difficulties, autism, or emotional and behaviour difficulties, and several members of staff have Braille qualifications. One teacher is also a qualified physiotherapist. In addition to this, ongoing staff training includes courses on literacy and numeracy, plus the teaching of modern languages and science to pupils with special needs. Future training is planned for similar work in other subject areas. The teachers and support staff efficiently record the pupils' attainment and progress, and daily briefings and bulletin sheets for special needs staff, ensure that changes to the pupils' needs are met on a daily basis. End of year reports to parents are clear in explaining what a pupil knows and understands, and the parents of pupils with special needs believe their children make good progress.

102. The special needs co-ordinator oversees all aspects of special needs within the school, and provides excellent leadership to her highly committed and hard-working team. Documentation is clear and well planned, with future needs highlighted and prioritised. A register of the pupils with special educational needs and their personal targets is kept as a 'working document'. However, there is no register of higher achieving pupils, which is reflected in those lessons where there is insufficient challenge. There are good links with partner primary schools, and staff liaison arrangements for future Year 7 pupils' are very good. The system of target setting, currently being linked to a whole school approach, is good, however, in practice, many pupils' individual targets lack clarity of definition, and are not measurable.

103. The governor with responsibility for special needs makes a clear and comprehensive annual report to parents. Long term monitoring, recording and assessment of the pupils' achievements, together with Annual Review and Transition Plans are excellently managed. The accommodation for the physically disabled pupils is very good, with lifts and ramps ensuring accessibility to every part of the school. A good size medical room incorporates a toilet for the disabled pupils. In addition to a centralised office, the department has a separate dyslexic unit and computer suite for withdrawal and small group sessions. The visually impaired unit is very well equipped including voice activated computers and Braille printers. Departmental resources are good overall, but excellent in the visually impaired unit. Overall the provision for special needs is very good, and is a beacon of good practice.

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	152
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	74

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

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1	19	44	28	7	1	0

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

### *Information about the school's pupils*

#### **Pupils on the school's roll**

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth Form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	970	149
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	211	0

#### **Special educational needs**

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth Form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	54	5
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	367	43

#### **English as an additional language**

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

#### **Pupil mobility in the last school year**

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	32
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	31

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.4
National comparative data	7.4

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	1.1

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	88	99	178

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level five and above	Boys	50	49	52
	Girls	79	59	49
	Total	129	108	101
Percentage of pupils at NC Level five or above	School	72 (54)	61 (53)	57 (51)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	18 (18)	24 (18)	13 (15)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level five and above	Boys	44	51	51
	Girls	69	65	53
	Total	113	116	104
Percentage of pupils at NC Level five or above	School	63 (57)	65 (49)	58 (60)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	17 (21)	26 (22)	11 (21)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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

*Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4*

Number of 1 five year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	<b>Year</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Total</b>
	1999	89	70	159

<b>GCSE results</b>		<b>five or more grades A* to C</b>	<b>five or more grades A*-G</b>	<b>1 or more grades A*-G</b>
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	20	82	89
	Girls	19	70	70
	Total	39	152	159
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	27 (20)	96 (89)	100 (100)
	National	46.3 (44.6)	90.7 (89.8)	95.7 (95.2)

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

<b>GCSE results</b>		<b>GCSE point score</b>
Average point score per pupil	School	33 (27.4)
	National	37.8 (36.8)

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

<b>Vocational qualifications</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>% success rate</b>
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	N/A
	National	N/A

*Attainment at the end of the Sixth Form*

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-Level or AS-Level examinations	<b>Year</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Total</b>
	1999	17	17	34

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-Levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-Levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	4	8.3	6.2 (6.9)	4.3	4.3	4.3 (3.6)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (17.6)	2.7	2.8	2.8 (2.8)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or Units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	27	100
	National	N/A	N/A

*Ethnic background of pupils*

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	4
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	2
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	2
White	1,109
Any other minority ethnic group	0

*Exclusions in the last school year*

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	19	4
Other minority ethnic groups	1	0

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

### *Teachers and classes*

#### **Qualified teachers and classes:**

##### **Y7 – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	65.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.7

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

#### **Education support staff:**

##### **Y7 – Y13**

Total number of education support staff	26
Total aggregate hours worked per week	668.5

#### **Deployment of teachers:**

##### **Y7 – Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	81.5
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#### **Average teaching group size:**

##### **Y7 – Y13**

Key Stage 2	N/A
Key Stage 3	25.5
Key Stage 4	22.4

### *Financial information*

Financial year	1998-1999
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	£
Total income	3063770.00
Total expenditure	3050590.00
Expenditure per pupil	2812.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	81709.00
Balance carried forward to next year	94889.00



*Results of the survey of parents and carers*

**Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	1119
Number of questionnaires returned	168

**Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	39	50	7	2	2
My child is making good progress in school.	39	50	5	2	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	28	51	11	3	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	24	41	22	9	4
The teaching is good.	29	57	5	2	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	29	36	27	7	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	44	40	9	5	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	54	37	4	2	3
The school works closely with parents.	26	40	23	7	4
The school is well led and managed.	28	49	4	6	13
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	27	54	11	4	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	39	42	11	2	6

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

### **ENGLISH**

104. Since the school was last inspected, standards in English have improved in Key Stage 3; pupils' reading is better and the end of key stage test results have risen in each of the last four years. In 1999 the proportion of pupils who gained at least the expected National Curriculum Level 5 equalled the national average, and was well above the average for similar schools. The school's rate of improvement in these results has been much better than the national trend.

105. A range of evidence suggests that pupils enter the school with attainment levels in English that are below average. Writing is clearly below average; speaking, listening and reading skills are closer to the average but are still below it. Levels higher than those expected for pupils' age are not often evident in pupils' test or examination results, although girls consistently do better than the boys. In the 1999 end of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests, a few pupils gained Level 6 or above. In recent GCSE English and English literature results A or B grades rarely occur, and in 1999 the proportion of A\*-C grades was well below the national average, although nearly 40 per cent of pupils gained grade D. Small groups of pupils following the GCE Advanced Level courses, only just getting under way at the time of the last inspection, have usually attained middle grades which support their applications for higher education, and which represent good achievement. In comparison with English, GCSE and GCE Advanced Level results achieved by pupils taking drama courses have generally shown a higher proportion of grades A - C, closer to the national average.

106. As part of its aim to raise standards of attainment generally and literacy in particular, the school has initiated several strategies, including a cross-curricular focus on developing pupils' vocabulary and improving their writing in all the subjects they study. The English department has introduced more challenging material into its curriculum for Key Stage 3, offers a weekly 'booster session' after school, and is targeting especially those pupils in Years 10 and 11 whose work is on the borderline between C and D grades. Further development of schemes of work, the fuller use of assessment results in lesson plans, and the use of computers for word processing are planned. The full impact of all this recent and current work has yet to be apparent, except in the improved attainment of pupils in reading and at the end of Key Stage 3, and in their improved access to subject-specific vocabulary across the curriculum.

107. Lessons seen during the inspection broadly reflect the fact that pupils' attainment in writing is below average when they come to the school, and that their speaking, listening and reading skills are closer to the average. Attainment was broadly as expected for pupils' age in about half the lessons observed, and below average in the rest. Instances of higher attainment were evident in pupils' Key Stage 4 course work and occasionally in the quality of reading aloud and in class discussion of literature.

108. In Key Stages 3 and 4, pupils usually speak clearly and confidently in reply to questions, but their independent contributions are usually brief. Not many opportunities were seen for pupils to make prepared presentations, and, when this was observed, the Year 8 pupils concerned often relied on prompts from the teacher. In drama lessons, more extended speech was evident, as pupils planned group tasks, negotiated their roles, and presented their work. In most lessons, most pupils listen effectively and respond appropriately in speech and writing. Pupils who have difficulties in reading and writing often achieve as well as the rest of their year group, and sometimes better, in this aspect of their work. Especially in Years 9, 10 and 11, pupils make effective use of class discussion in developing their responses to literature.

109. The majority of pupils in Year 7 have reading skills that are appropriate for their age. They read aloud competently and understand what they read. In Years 7 and 8 pupils' choices of books for their own reading are mostly appropriate for their age; sometimes, they read more demanding non-fiction texts on subjects in which they have a particular interest, and questioning shows that they can understand and remember facts they had learnt from these. In Year 9 pupils studying 'Macbeth' showed good recall of the facts, and could discuss the main events and characters of the play with some insight. They read the text aloud perseveringly, and a few pupils could bring a character to life with appropriately expressive reading. The ability to read and discuss literature with understanding is further developed in Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form. Pupils' oral and written discussion of texts set for examinations often shows good recall of important points, the ability to select quotations to support an argument, and understanding of deeper meanings.

110. The aspect of English in which pupils' work is clearly below average, and which affects their level of attainment across the curriculum, is writing. During Key Stages 3 and 4, pupils make sound progress in developing accuracy and variety of written expression, and some of those identified as having special needs make good progress with support from teachers and learning assistants. A number of pupils in the higher sets develop helpful note-taking skills. Very often, however, pupils' written work reflects the non-standard grammar of their speech; spelling and punctuation mistakes are also very common. These problems are most apparent when pupils are observed in the process of writing; correction of errors and editing, sometimes by using a computer, result in more accurate finished versions. Pupils' completed writing includes some appropriately extensive prose in short stories and discussions, some imaginative descriptions and poems, and some evidence of the ability to use formal language for correspondence. Well-shaped handwriting is rare, but most pupils write quite fluently and legibly. The accuracy and presentation of some work is enhanced by pupils' use of computers. In the Sixth Form, pupils' work shows that they can meet the requirements of the course in composing essays and writing analytically about their set texts.

111. Across the school, there is good work being done by some teachers to improve pupils' literacy by displaying key words and correcting errors. Special needs teachers and support assistants give focused attention to literacy and helpful computer programmes are effectively used.

112. The overall quality of teaching is good. English and drama lessons are satisfactorily or well taught most of the time; observations during the inspection resulted in just under three-fifths of the lessons being described as good, and just under half as satisfactory, with one instance of unsatisfactory teaching in a Sixth Form lesson. The most consistently good quality teaching was seen in Key Stage 4.

113. In the best lessons seen, there was evidence of teachers taking account of what pupils could already do, and of ways to develop knowledge, understanding and skills. Purposeful, structured lessons led pupils through a range of appropriately demanding activities. Pupils were encouraged by short-term deadlines, and were given the opportunity to complete a satisfying oral or written task during the lesson. Homework was often appropriately set during these lessons. In Year 8 work on the '*Titanic*', for instance, varied and interesting tasks kept pupils motivated. A short, clear exposition was followed by paired discussion and planning with well-targeted support for each pupil. Pupils presented what they had achieved in front of their class, helped when necessary by the teacher's questions, and this both exemplified and stretched their capabilities. Elsewhere, Year 10 pupils were helped to attain well in creative writing through the use of a well thought out approach based on the teachers' own example. Other good features of the teaching seen were some teachers' own very evident skills in reading aloud and in giving good models of speech, effective communication, and how to puzzle out the meaning of a poem. In most good lessons, criteria were shared with pupils, either explicitly or through feed-back, so that they knew not only what the task was but also how they could achieve a good result, and therefore worked more purposefully. In some lessons, teachers encouraged pupils to reflect on spiritual, moral and social issues arising from literature, including matters of life and death, and comparative degrees of evil. This both promoted pupils personal development and deepened their response to the material being read.

114. Less successful aspects of teaching were observed in some lessons, which were more concerned with covering ground than in developing pupils' understanding or skills. Occasionally, with groups preparing for examinations, the lesson resembled a lecture with pupils sometimes taking notes. Sometimes the pace of a lesson became rather pedestrian in the last ten minutes or so, and pupils' motivation flagged. Although teachers manage pupils well, some lessons in Year 8 lost pace, as the teacher had to refocus the attention of the class.

115. Pupils' attitudes to their work are nearly always helpful to their learning, although in English lessons they rarely take the initiative, for instance by asking searching questions, or by seeking out references without being prompted. Classes behave well, especially in Years 9, 10 and 11 where they show good motivation, work hard and make the effort to think about what they are doing in both English and drama lessons. They get down to writing willingly and persevere to produce an appropriate amount in the time available. When they have the opportunity, as they often do in drama, they work well in pairs and groups, enjoying opportunities for oral work, although some capable older pupils choose to be rather quiet in lessons. At all stages, pupils comply readily with teacher's requests and instructions, and working relationships in the English classrooms and drama studio are good.

116. The department is well managed and receives good support from the senior management team, including the monitoring of teaching through lesson observation. Appropriate issues are addressed in the development plan based on the results of analysing pupils' coursework and examination results. The school's work in English and drama is well accommodated. Teaching and learning in the subjects also benefits from some helpful and well-located resources, and from opportunities for staff development.

117. Since the last inspection, the English department has reviewed its curriculum and book stock and has introduced more demanding texts for study in Years 7 and 8. This is helping to raise pupils' attainment in these year groups.

## **MATHEMATICS**

118. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is slightly below the national average. There are fewer higher-attaining pupils than would be expected. The pupils' results in the 1999 national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 were below national averages for all schools but they were broadly in line with those of similar schools. The attainment of girls is greater than that of boys, the difference being larger than that nationally. The attainment of pupils in the current Year 9 is close to the national averages, due to changes in the course material used through Key Stage 3. The attainment of pupils on entry was such that there was an absence of the higher grades at Key Stage 2. This lack of higher levels being reached was also a feature in the 1999 National Curriculum end of Key Stage 3 test results.

119. The pupils' results in the 1999 GCSE examinations for grades A\*-C were below the national averages. When compared with similar schools the results were above the national average and show a good rate of improvement over time. Boys achieved higher results than girls. However, the attainment seen in the current Year 11 pupils was close to national averages.

120. Pupils' results in the 1999 GCE Advanced Level examinations were well below the national averages and showed a decline from previous levels. There was such a small level of entry that national comparisons are not valid. Current GCE Advanced Level work is encouraging, but because pupils have not covered sufficient work at GCSE higher level the course is often extended to three years.

121. The trend in attainment over time shows an improvement at a rate that is greater than that nationally. There is an increase in the attainment seen in lessons because of a new textbook being used instead of the previous individualised scheme. This change of textbook has improved pace and rigour in Key Stage 3 for pupils at all levels of attainment. This has only just started to have an impact on Key Stage 4, but observations indicate that the change is raising standards of achievement and that a significant number of pupils will be entered for the higher level when the current Year 10 are entered for GCSE mathematics examinations.

122. There is no evidence that pupils' lack of numeracy skills is affecting their access to any area of the curriculum. Numerical skills are reinforced in mathematics lessons with regular practice in mental arithmetic and often reinforced by their application in other subject areas, for example, through the use of graphical skills in science. Numerical data was effectively used at all levels in the information technology course and measurements were accurate in design technology. There was competent use of data handling skills in the GNVQ course at Level 3.

123. Progress through both key stages and in the Sixth Form is good. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and by following the National Curriculum there is effective planning and progression through both key stages. All National Curriculum Attainment Targets are covered and investigations covering Attainment Target 1 have been built into the scheme of work. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 7 could plot points on rectangular axes; this is developed in Year 8 to drawing straight-line graphs. In Year 9 the algebraic background to these graphs is developed and linear equations are solved. During Years 10 and 11 this work is extended to more complex linear equations and to quadratic graphs and equations. Lower attaining pupils consolidate their numerical knowledge in Year 7 and relate this to the perimeter and area of rectangles and triangles. This work on shape and space is developed in Year 8 and transformations of plane shapes are considered. In Year 9 this is extended to polygons and tessellations. In Years 10 and 11 lower attaining pupils study congruence and similarity, this two-dimensional work is extended to three-dimensional shapes and the perimeter and circumference of the circle is developed. Pupils in the Sixth Form extend the skills they acquired at GCSE Level, but most are handicapped by not having covered sufficient work at GCSE higher level, knowledge of which is assumed at GCE Advanced level, and often have to extend their course for an extra year.

124. Teaching was at least satisfactory in all lessons seen and in two thirds of lessons it was good or better. The best lessons started well, had a clear focus which was explained to the pupils, proceeded at a brisk pace and contained work that stimulated and interested the pupils by being relevant to their experience. Teaching was mainly didactic with little variation in style. When offered a range of learning experiences pupils responded well and became active participants in their lessons. There are few teaching aids in regular use, for example, the department has two overhead projectors, but the screens are not mounted in the correct manner to enable full use to be made of them. There is a computer suite with a range of programs in use to support learning, but there are no computers in the classroom for pupils to use as part of a lesson.

125. All teachers had good subject knowledge and understanding, enabling them to plan and teach lessons that captured the imagination of the pupils. Teachers' planning ensured that the well-structured lessons were taught in manageable sections in a clear, precise manner and were related to the experience of the pupils. This resulted in good standards of discipline and control as pupils were suitably challenged throughout lessons. In several lessons discipline was initially established by the use of a short exercise that reinforced numeracy or reviewed a recent topic, the main focus of the lesson was then explained. There was a good balance

between teacher exposition, discussion and practice. Pupils with special educational needs were very well supported during lessons and made good progress. Good management of time sustained the concentration and interest of classes. The questioning of pupils by experienced members of staff was generally open but not so with those with less experience. Where used open questioning developed logical thought and encouraged an enquiring mind. Teachers' expectations of their pupils were high but not unrealistic. This gave a sound degree of challenge to lessons and was encouraging as the pupils recognised that the targets for the lesson were achievable.

126. The department has a range of practical equipment that is used when appropriate to support learning. Teachers' marking was inconsistent; there were encouraging comments in students' exercise books but little advice on how to improve. There is a departmental scheme to record centrally marks of tests and coursework, which are used to monitor progress, and this is used efficiently. There is a range of resources available to support learning and to enable the subject to be taught effectively. Teaching is well supported by the scheme of work that is subject to continual review and improvement.

127. The department is well managed by an experienced and well-respected teacher. There is a development plan in place that is structured to improve results. There is an efficient assessment scheme in operation, which enables pupils' progress to be monitored, and for targets to be set for pupils to improve. There are sufficient resources available to allow the subject to be taught effectively and these are readily available. The department is housed in an adjacent suite of rooms that has encouraged a sense of unity within the area. The classrooms in use are of a size that hinders a range of teaching and learning strategies. Poor curtaining in these rooms also hinders learning; in bright sunlight pupils are uncomfortable and the standard of work suffers.

128. There have been several improvements since the last inspection. The resources used to teach at Key Stage 3 have changed from an individualised scheme to a textbook based scheme. This has brought about improvements in the standard of work achieved by pupils. The effect of this is beginning to show in the rise in results. All issues raised in the last report have been addressed. There is the capacity for this hard working department to build upon the improvements in recent years and be rewarded by the subsequent improvement in examination results.

## **SCIENCE**

129. When pupils enter the school, their attainment in science is below national average and there is considerable variation in prior knowledge and experimental skill. At the end of Key Stage 3, results in the 1999 National Curriculum tests show that the average level has risen to be close to the national average and well above average when compared with similar modern schools. Although the percentage of pupils gaining Level 5, or greater, is in line with national average, the proportion of higher Level 6 is below average. There is no significant

difference in the achievement of boys and girls, and this standard has been maintained over the past three years. Work seen in school mirrors the test results. The majority of pupils in Year 9 have a secure knowledge of basic scientific principles. At least half of the pupils, studying Attainment Target 1, experimental and investigative science, make careful observations, consider accuracy and draw conclusions based on the results. Approximately one-fifth of the pupils have the depth of knowledge to adopt a sufficiently analytical approach to their experiments, needed for higher grades. Progress over Key Stage 3 has been good.

130. At the end of Key Stage 4, in the GCSE examinations in 1999, the average point score overall in science was below national average but it was above that for modern schools. Particularly good results were obtained in double-award combined science where the percentage of pupils gaining A\*-C was significantly above the national average for that examination. In 1999 there was a noticeable deficit of highest grades in the separate sciences, although the previous year was much better. There has been an upward trend in the overall average grade over the past three years. Boys performed significantly better than girls in 1999, which is opposite to the position nationally. A small group of lower-attaining pupils has successfully followed an award for a Certificate of Achievement. The standard of work observed of pupils in Year 11, reflects the examination results. Whilst most pupils have a satisfactory understanding of, for example, chemical reactions, only a small number can analyse the behaviour of compounds to predict reaction products.

131. Pupils with special educational needs reach the standards of other pupils of similar ability, especially where the level of learning support is effective. However, higher-attaining pupils are not reaching the grades commensurate with their relative prior attainment. Overall, the progress of pupils over Key Stage 4 has been satisfactory.

132. In the Sixth Form pupils have achieved a good range of grades at GCE Advanced Level and progress is good. Although the number of candidates is too small to make statistically valid comparisons, grades are in line with those achieved in other maintained schools. Many pupils have, commendably, reached a good standard in GCE Advanced Level biology, chemistry and physics after studying initially for single award combined science at GCSE. A small number of pupils are achieving well in the GNVQ health and social care course.

133. Good standards of behaviour and personal development are found in science. Pupils collaborate well with staff and each other. They listen closely to instructions, and are diligent with their work. They show respect for apparatus, and due regard for safety. Good relationships contribute significantly to good progress made. Although most pupils respond willingly to class discussions, many are reluctant to participate, and do not seek to extend or clarify their understanding.

134. Teaching overall in the department is good and there is none that is unsatisfactory. The quality of teaching is very good in over a third of lessons, good in over half and satisfactory in the remainder. Teachers have a secure knowledge and understanding of their subject, and expectations of pupils' learning are high. Work is planned satisfactorily and objectives made clear so that the pace of learning is brisk. However, insufficient provision is made to match work, within the ability set, to the attainment of pupils, especially those of higher ability. Pupils are managed well, and good relationships are established. A variety of techniques and teaching methods, including frequent practical work, is used for all groups and this ensures sustained concentration and interest. Assessment is regular and good and is used well to track



the progress of pupils. Further work is being established on the use of assessment data for example in setting targets and predicting future performance in relation to prior attainment. Teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999, closely matched the National Curriculum test results showing the procedures are reliable. Marking of the work of pupils is regular and includes grading, but it does not sufficiently guide them in how to improve their level of work. Insufficient attention is given to correction of basic errors of literacy.

135. The department leadership is strong, and good use is made of staff expertise in the arrangement for the deployment of teaching and setting of pupils for learning. The technical support team, who are well qualified and efficient, are used particularly effectively to support practical work. Curriculum planning and priorities for development are clear, and all of the staff contributed to the process. Schemes of work are appropriate, and ensure full coverage of the National Curriculum. Good support is given to newly qualified staff both formally, and informally. Monitoring of the work of the department is undertaken but monitoring of the quality of teaching through structured class observation, is not yet sufficiently focussed to provide clear accountable evaluation of teachers' strengths and weaknesses. Good systems for monitoring departmental expenditure are in place and all requirements for health and safety are efficiently checked.

136. Resources in the department are good, except for the level of information and communication technology. All laboratories have at least one modern computer, some members of the staff have portable models and the school has networked suites. However, the facilities are not fully exploited in teaching. Pupils have modern textbooks and the small library is well stocked with science reference books. Accommodation is good, with modern well-equipped laboratories, preparation rooms and offices. Display is effectively used to enhance the environment. Some areas are particularly well adapted for disabled pupil access.

137. Since the time of the last inspection, standards in science particularly in Key Stage 3 have steadily improved. Assessment procedures, previously identified as being irregular, are now systematic and used increasingly for planning and evaluation. Marking, previously also identified as weak, still remains unsatisfactory. Management structures in the department are now effective, although further work is still required on monitoring of teaching. Information and communication technology still remains insufficiently utilised within the curriculum.

## **ART**

138. On entry to the school in Year 7 pupils' attainment is below the expectation for pupils of a similar age nationally. At the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is in line with national average standards. Many pupils use line and pattern fluently and produce confident and impressive three-dimensional work, for example, heads based on Picasso portraits, which are constructed from papier mache and card. However, when working in two dimensions, pupils are more comfortable using flat shape than developing qualities of form and space. Although they approach colour mixing with confidence, pupils' painting technique needs to be

developed. There are limited examples of the use of information technology in art lessons. Where pupils have studied aspects of the work of artists, development of relevant skills is evident in their own work. At the end of Key Stage 4, although the proportion of pupils gaining GCSE grades A\* - C was just below the national average in 1999, it was just above in 1998 and in these two years had improved in comparison with results for 1996 and 1997. All pupils gained grades in the A\*-G range in 1999, above the course average.

139. In Key Stage 4, pupils work confidently in a range of materials and produce work that is developed from a variety of sources, including the work of artists. Sketchbooks are used constructively for collecting and recording information and for developing ideas. At the end of the Sixth Form, GCE Advanced Level passes at grades A-B were above course averages in 1999 and showed an improvement on the previous year, when they were below average. Results for 1998 and 1999 improved on those for 1996 and there were no entries in 1997. In 1999, all second year GNVQ Advanced students gained accreditation. In the Sixth Form, pupils produce confident large-scale tonal work and use information technology to manipulate images. Pupils' knowledge and awareness of artists' work has a visible impact on their own pieces of artwork. Three-dimensional work is strong, arresting and exuberant.

140. The overall quality of teaching is good. Teaching quality in about two-thirds of the lessons is good or very good, in a quarter it is satisfactory and in one lesson it was unsatisfactory. In Key Stage 3 teachers' planning helps pupils to begin to develop their use of line and tone and encourages them to work in a range of materials. The use of sketchbooks needs to become more central to pupils' activities, so that they are encouraged to research, collect and experiment. Schemes of work contain some good examples of the integration of both attainment targets, for example, projects based on cubism, mediaeval shields and the work of Klimt. However, planning to ensure this degree of integration needs to be consistently applied in schemes of work throughout Key Stage 3.

141. In Key Stage 4 pupils are given the opportunity to work in a range of two and three-dimensional materials including batik, papier mache and card and they are encouraged to keep sketchbooks. Lessons are well planned to enable all pupils to progress at their own pace. Pupils are encouraged to consider the qualities of artists' work by using them to make selections for starting points for practical work, for example, in a Year 10 project to produce large-scale relief paintings. Teachers' questioning encourages pupils to analyse their thoughts about their own work and the work of artists. In both Key Stages 3 and 4, discussions about completed homework between teachers and pupils identify strengths and weaknesses, although more written comments would help pupils to remember areas for improvement. The department provides opportunities for work in a wide range of materials, but, although there are good facilities, there is currently little opportunity for the inclusion of photography in coursework. Such an opportunity would be a particular advantage in the Sixth Form.

142. Lessons have good pace and keep pupils involved. However, lesson planning needs to ensure that pupils adopt a rigorous approach to developing underpinning skills in painting and that they understand the use of form and space in two-dimensional composition. In the Sixth Form, the teaching in all of the lessons observed was good. Teachers make good use of visual resources and demonstrations. Pupils are encouraged to meet deadlines by making

action plans, which they review and modify. They are offered frequent help and advice and are encouraged to experiment. A wide range of materials is made available and contextual studies are embedded in practical work. In some lessons, however, a wider range of examples could be used to develop more open-ended tasks.

143. Assessment procedures in the department feed into whole school systems and testing data is used to inform target setting. Nevertheless, all pupils need to have more opportunity for self-assessment.

144. All pupils are enthusiastic about their work and respond to the department's good working ethos. They maintain concentration and develop positive relationships with each other and with teachers. They are prepared to answer questions and to discuss their work. Students enjoy the independence offered by Sixth Form courses.

145. The department offers a programme of visits to galleries and involvement in a range of community projects and work experience, including the Charivari Community Carnival and work in primary schools. These opportunities make a considerable contribution to the personal, social and cultural development of pupils and students.

146. The faculty system brings the arts departments together to collaborate in the organisation of specific events. There is good teamwork in the art department and the head of department offers support to non-specialist teachers. Since the last inspection, assessment in Key Stage 3 is based on National Curriculum targets. Painting in Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form shows evidence of confident use of technique but there is room for improvement in this at Key Stage 3, particularly for higher-attaining pupils. Sketchbooks need to be used more constructively in Key Stage 3.

147. The department is successful in attracting increasing numbers of pupils. The amount and quality of three-dimensional work produced is a distinctive feature of the department, whose work is a valuable asset to the school in promoting its quality of education in the community.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

148. Pupils enter the school with levels of attainment that are below those expected for pupils of a similar age nationally. Teacher assessment at then of Key Stage 3 indicates that attainment in design and technology for the majority of pupils is in line with national averages. Inspection evidence indicated that some of the assessed grading is generous, especially as lower attaining pupils have difficulties with the design aspect of the subject. However, in Year 7 this has been rectified.

149. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is below national averages across the range of materials studied. GCSE results in food technology are better than in resistant materials and girls' results are twice as good as boys. This is because the requirements to research and evaluate are tackled better by the girls. Although the trend in attainment since the last inspection is erratic, the 1999 examination results are an improvement on previous years, and included 'A' grades for the first time for four years. In 1999, pupils' average points score in design and technology was below that attained in other subjects.

150. Lower attaining pupils, including those with special education needs, progress well in design and technology. They have good skills in making products but struggle when rationalising design. The effective involvement of learning support staff enables pupils to cope with their designing. When there is no support assistant available the pupils find the work too challenging. This problem has been dealt with in Year 7, by introducing a design framework that guides all pupils clearly through the design and make process.

151. Pupils' learning in Key Stage 3 is good. Careful attention is given to the correct use and spelling of technical terms, as well as to the production of accurately written research and evaluation reports. Lesson planning integrates numeracy strategies successfully into pupils design work. For example, Year 7 pupils worked accurately, and to scale, when applying numeracy skills to designing, making and improving the final quality of their 'mouse cars'.

152. Limited curriculum time at Key Stage 3 has an impact on time for designing. Planning now provides pupils with tasks that enable them to develop design skills and others that ensure design skills are applied to the making of products. These new design activities are carefully planned and exciting ideas challenge pupils as they work with greater confidence towards their final design solutions. Some higher-attaining pupils are restricted in the development of their capability. They have little understanding of the level of knowledge and skills needed to raise the standard of their work.

153. In Key Stage 4, pupils are more motivated in their work. All teachers have moved away from step by step instructions through processes and tasks. In food technology pupils benefit from the enthusiasm and flair evident within the teaching. Pupils in this area have become independent learners, and this has had a major impact on the standards they achieve. They make effective use of the computer and a range of resources to record and analyse their findings and to consolidate their knowledge and understanding. Homework, in the form of research, is influencing pupils' commitment to the subject. Outcomes show the value of the homework research tasks, which are broadening pupils' knowledge and understanding of other designers' work. In engineering, pupils produce precision tools. They all work at their own rate, which allows for the higher attaining pupils to develop effectively alongside those who have designing problems. Pupils make good use of professional engineering drawings and flow plans in Year 10 to pave the way for their Year 11 problem solving tasks. In resistant materials however pupils have attainment levels that are below average. This manifests itself clearly in their work and examination outcomes. They lack the desire to be accurate and produce a quality product.

154. Pupils are keen and approach design and technology with enthusiasm. Their behaviour is good. Discussion with pupils showed that they enjoyed designing and making and generally had a pride in their final outcomes. Pupils respect each other's work and regular discussions benefit their progress.

155. The quality of teaching is good and has improved since the last inspection. In over four-fifths of the lessons teaching was at least good and in over a quarter it was very good and occasionally excellent. Teaching was unsatisfactory in one lesson. Generally the subject knowledge of teachers and learning support assistants is good, except where teachers work outside of their specialist technology area. Currently only food technology is making appropriate use of computers. There is a clear lack of the use of computer control in work on resistant materials and this prevents computer aided design and manufacture from enhancing pupils' learning. Planning frameworks are good and consistently used. Pupil management is good and self-discipline is encouraged. The most successful lessons are taught with passion and flair. In these lessons teachers work with rigorous time scales and pupils drive themselves to achieve their best work. The very positive atmosphere in these classes contributes to the raising of standards.

156. Assessment is variable from very detailed feedback to almost superficial ticks and lack of monitoring by the head of faculty is preventing good practice, including in assessment, from being shared. The introduction of self-assessment is having a positive affect on all pupils.

157. Management of the department is innovative, with the introduction of elements such as the creativity in science and technology award and the piloting problem solving modules in a technology research project. The team works well together but it is difficult to maintain staff cohesiveness, as movement to other promoted posts is frequent. Monitoring of the work of the department, through assessment and teaching observation, is limited but most teachers make a critical analysis of each lesson and sharing the outcomes of this with colleagues has a positive impact on improving teaching quality. Most teachers have extra responsibilities in addition to their subject, which constrains the provision of extra-curricular activities. Accommodation for design and technology has improved but there are still difficulties with dust extraction in the resistant materials area and ventilation in the yet-to-be-completed food rooms.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

158. Discussions with Year 7 pupils and a scrutiny of their work shows that their prior knowledge of geography on entry to the school is very varied. Only a few can use six figure grid references and have an awareness of environmental issues. Generally their sense of place is poor.

159. Most pupils make unsatisfactory progress through Key Stage 3 and by the age of 14 years, attainment is below the national average. In 1999, teachers' assessments showed that the proportion of pupils gaining National Curriculum Level 5 or above was in line with the national average, whilst those reaching Level 6 or above was well below the average. However, this assessment is based on too narrow an evidence base for it to be a reliable measure. Only a few pupils in Year 9 have a good sense of place and good knowledge and understanding of natural processes including, for instance, the water cycle. Higher attaining

pupils are beginning to recognise and explain relationships, for instance the influence of deforestation on the natural environment. However, the knowledge base of many pupils remains poor and they have under developed skills of interpreting and evaluating information.

160. Pupils with special education needs make good progress in Key Stage 3 where teachers are sensitive to their needs and good in-class support is provided. These pupils would benefit further, however, from the development of teaching and learning materials that are more closely related to their needs.

161. Most pupils continue to make unsatisfactory progress in Key Stage 4. By the end of this key stage, the attainment of all pupils is below the national average for both all maintained and similar schools. In 1999, when no girls were entered for GCSE, the proportion gaining grades A\*-C was below national averages, representing a slight improvement over time but a significant improvement over the 1998 results. The average points score at GCSE has improved only slightly, and at a slower rate than nationally in the period 1997 to 1999. At the end of Key Stage 4, only a minority of pupils has a good knowledge of geographic terms and can apply them to new situations. Higher-attaining pupils are often able to describe and explain relationships between the human and physical environment, for instance the response to natural hazards in less economically developed countries. Lower-attaining pupils, however, need more practice to attain these skills and would benefit from more use of information technology to aid their understanding. Some higher-attaining pupils do not have well-developed skills of interpreting and analysing information and making reasoned judgements. The attainment of all pupils in Key Stage 4 is impeded by their very low knowledge and understanding of basic knowledge and concepts in the subject.

162. Many pupils begin their study of geography in the Sixth Form with a modest GCSE background and find the challenges of studying at this level great. Through skilful teaching, however, most make good progress and attainment at GCE Advanced Level for pupils gaining grades in the A-E range has been above course averages for the last three years. In each of the years 1997 to 1999, all pupils attained at least a grade E but none have gained the higher A-B grades.

163. Most GCE Advanced Level pupils are able to interpret geographic information presented graphically and Year 13 students have a good knowledge and understanding of processes and patterns, for instance the changing nature of migration in the British Isles, and are confident at searching for and sharing information. Some are able to offer sophisticated explanations for geographic processes, such as urban – rural change. However, the very low knowledge base of some pupils, particularly in Year 12, prevents them from developing an understanding or appreciation of many concepts in the subject, especially in relation to physical processes. Attainment in the Sixth Form would greatly benefit from the experience of planned, residential fieldwork.

164. The attitude to learning of many pupils in nearly half of all lessons at Key Stage 3 is unsatisfactory, although at Key Stage 4 it is good and in the Sixth Form, very good. In the majority of lessons, pupils are attentive, courteous and ready to take part in the lesson. Here, pupils show a real enjoyment of the subject and are keen to ask and answer questions and relationships are good. However, many pupils are poor listeners and become inattentive when teacher talk is over long. In many lessons in Key Stage 3, when pupils lose interest in the lesson, they quickly become inattentive and sometimes disruptive, particularly when they are exposed to teaching that does not challenge or stimulate them.

165. Overall, the quality of teaching is unsatisfactory. The quality of teaching is satisfactory in a quarter of lessons, good in over a tenth and very good in a quarter. However, in over a third of lessons teaching was either unsatisfactory or poor. All teachers have sufficient, and many have a very good, knowledge and understanding of geography, but this is not always transmitted to pupils through lively and stimulating explanations and skilful question and answer. The best lessons are well planned with a good range of interesting activities that are well matched to the ability of the pupils. In some lessons, however, teacher talk is over long and high-attaining pupils are not always stretched through searching question and answer and extension work to class activities, particularly in Key Stage 3.

166. Class management is very good in most lessons, but in a significant number, some teachers find difficulty in ensuring that pupils listen and carry out tasks as directed, and the learning of others in the group is interrupted. In the best lessons, there is a calm orderly atmosphere, and teachers make good use of the wide range of resources available to them. In Key Stage 3, however, the short, 30 minute lessons and the over use of simple and unchallenging text book exercises and worksheets contribute to under-attainment.

167. Teachers' planning is variable. In too many classes, teachers do not make clear what they expect the pupils to have learned by the end of the lesson, nor do they use a range of activities to ensure that these objectives are met. Too much teaching is pitched at the middle of the group, with little thought to how high-attaining pupils can be extended and slower learners supported. The use of information technology in both Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the Sixth Form is underdeveloped, as is the use of pair and group work and teaching which encourages pupils to search for information and make presentations to the class. The department would benefit from developing more interesting and imaginative ways of encouraging pupils to learn. Attainment would be further improved if the department were able to use more information technology and greater variety in its teaching, particularly in its use of fieldwork.

168. Pupils' work is not always regularly and accurately marked, particularly in Key Stage 3, and there is an absence of clear advice to pupils as to how they can improve. Target setting has been introduced into Key Stage 4, but it has yet to have an effect on raising the standards of the higher-attaining pupils both in Year 11 and in the Sixth Form. The monitoring of pupils' work against well defined targets, and the intervention by the department where there is under achievement, is underdeveloped.

169. Curriculum planning is poor. The department is breaching the requirement to teach the Key Stage 3 National Curriculum statutory order. Schemes of work contain no reference to the areas of the Programmes of Study: they include both out of date and irrelevant material and topics that are now covered at Key Stage 2. There is an imbalance between the study of more and less-economically developed countries, and under-development of the study of natural processes, of hazards such as volcanoes and earthquakes and of environmental management.

170. Assessment in Key Stage 3 is inaccurate and unreliable. Statutory teacher assessment is based on too narrow an evidence base, is not sufficiently well related to the National Curriculum Level descriptors and is not moderated by the department to ensure consistency.

171. The department has been ineffectively led and managed, although a new head of the humanities faculty is instigating change. Until his appointment, the subject lacked a clear sense of direction and purpose and there has been an absence of a shared commitment to the raising of standards. Team working has been poorly developed and there is little sharing of good practice in the department. Although there are sufficient numbers of teachers to deliver the curriculum, their deployment is unsatisfactory. Too many specialist geographers teach outside their subject area, with a subsequent loss to the department of their enthusiasm and expertise that are needed to motivate the alienated Key Stage 3 pupils.

172. The department has made insufficient progress at raising standards since the last inspection. The new head of faculty, however has a clear agenda for improvement and, with the support of senior managers, is well placed raise standards in the subject.

## **HISTORY**

173. Pupils enter the school with levels of attainment that are below the national expectation for pupils of a similar age, in all the key areas. These areas include chronological understanding; knowledge and understanding of main events and themes; historical enquiry; the ability to analyse evidence; and the ability to communicate information effectively, particularly in writing.

174. Standards of attainment in history are below the national average at the end of Key Stage 3 in the key areas of historical knowledge and understanding, historical enquiry and the ability to communicate information accurately. Recent teacher assessments show a high proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 or above by the end of Key Stage 3, but these assessments have been overgenerous. By the end of Year 9, there is a significant minority of pupils whose attainment is in line with the national average. However, standards are improving.



175. Standards of attainment in Key Stage 4 are below the national average, especially in knowledge and understanding and in the skills of source analysis and evaluation. This judgement is confirmed by the 1999 GCSE results. These showed that the proportion of pupils achieving A\*-G grades was close to the national average. However, the proportion of A\*-C grades was below the national average overall, although it was closer to the national average for boys. These results are in line with those of similar schools nationally, and contribute to an upward trend in attainment since 1996.

176. Standards of attainment in the Sixth Form are below the course average in the key areas of knowledge and understanding and in an awareness of the concepts of causation and consequence and change and continuity. This judgement is confirmed by the most recent GCE Advanced Level results, which show a proportion of A-B grades well below the course average.

177. Pupils in Key Stage 3 increase their knowledge and understanding of some of the key events and features of everyday life in British history from Roman through to twentieth century times. They learn the reasons for, and consequences of, events such as the death of Becket, the changes brought about by the Reformation, and the English Civil War. Pupils are less effective in linking events, although, by the end of Year 9, many pupils show a growing awareness of the different economic, social and political factors at work in the changing structure of British life. Pupils show an increasing awareness of the role of individuals such as Josephine Butler and Charles Darwin in changing attitudes. Higher attaining pupils in particular begin to make links between the causes and consequences of events.

178. Pupils in Key Stage 4 learn about local history, particularly through their GCSE coursework on Dover Castle, although many pupils are more secure in giving descriptions rather than showing evidence of analytical skills or a wider contextual awareness. When studying the American West in depth, most pupils develop a good empathetic understanding of the different views of settlers and plains Indians towards issues such as land ownership. In their study of the history of medicine, pupils begin to appreciate the links between developments across time, and higher-attaining pupils show an appreciation of the role of individuals like William Harvey and Alexander Fleming in medical advances. Most pupils show an increasing facility in the skills of source analysis and evaluation, going beyond comprehension into considering the relative reliability and usefulness of various pieces of evidence.

179. Pupils in the Sixth Form increase their knowledge and understanding of some of the key events and issues in Tudor history and the history of Nazi Germany. They show a growing appreciation of different interpretations when studying issues such as developments in Tudor government, and the reasons for Hitler's takeover of power. They are less secure when considering the wider significance of events or issues such as the impact of the Nazi takeover on social developments in 1930s Germany.

180. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in their learning at both Key Stages 3 and 4, particularly when they receive specialist support.

181. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory. In well over two-fifths of lessons teaching is good and occasionally very good and in a similar proportion it is satisfactory. However, in one lesson teaching was unsatisfactory. The highest quality teaching was seen at Key Stage 4 where in a third of the lessons it was satisfactory, in another third it was good and in the rest it was very good.

182. Where teaching is good it is characterised by several features. Teachers set out their objectives clearly at the start of lessons and then before the end evaluate with pupils their progress towards achieving them, as seen for example in lessons on recruitment into the army and issues of conscientious objection in the First World War. This helps to give pupils, particularly lower-attaining ones, a sense of progress and achievement.

183. Teachers have good relationships with pupils, which motivates them to give of their best and results in positive attitudes towards learning in most lessons. Teachers set time limits to tasks, maintain good discipline, and monitor the progress of all pupils, all of which helps to maintain a purposeful working atmosphere. Praise is used constructively to motivate pupils.

184. Learning support assistants are used in several lessons in Key Stages 3 and 4 to assist pupils with special educational needs in their learning, and this is particularly effective in Key Stage 4 lessons when studying developments in medicine.

185. Teachers give due emphasis to reinforcing the learning of key historical terms, for example 'martyr', when studying sixteenth and seventeenth century history. In Key Stage 4 and Post 16 lessons, there is a good emphasis on study and examination skills, which gives the pupils confidence and improves their standard of attainment, particularly in analysing and evaluating sources of evidence. This was seen for example in lessons on developments in nineteenth century public health.

186. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, or aspects of teaching are less than satisfactory, it is due to one of the following factors or a combination of them. Although most classes are arranged in sets according to prior attainment, there is still a wide range of learning needs within some classes, and occasionally teachers adopt an insufficient range of teaching strategies or resources to cater particularly for the higher attaining pupils. Sometimes in Key Stage 3 lessons objectives are not made clear to pupils, or low-level tasks such as copying or drawing are set, tasks which do not challenge pupils and restrict their learning opportunities. In a small minority of classes classroom management strategies are inadequate to ensure the effective discipline of de-motivated pupils, and this restricts the progress in learning of the whole class.

187. The teacher in charge of history is relatively new in post and is doing an effective job in raising standards and developing the provision of history generally. For example, a programme of assessments related to specific National Curriculum expectations is being developed, with more specific targets for pupils. The level and quality of resources is good

and helps to motivate pupils. Curriculum time for Key Stage 3 is limited. Standards of attainment are adversely affected by the humanities structure in Year 7 that limits continuity of provision and leads to some teaching by non-specialist staff. Also detrimental is the fact that thirty-minute lessons provide an unsatisfactory learning experience, however skilful the teaching.

188. Since the last inspection the overall quality of teaching and leadership in history has improved, and in consequence standards of attainment in history have risen in all key stages. However, the limitations of curriculum time at Key Stage 3 and the unsatisfactory timetable structure continue to make in-depth study of all aspects of the Key Stage 3 curriculum impossible and continue to retard the progress in learning of some pupils.

## **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

189. Standards of attainment in this cross-curricular subject are in line with national expectations when pupils enter Year 7, although their use and knowledge of modelling is weaker than in other strands of the National Curriculum Programmes of Study.

190. At the end of Key Stage 3, the overall attainment of pupils is above average for their age in all elements of information technology. By the end of Year 9 most pupils are competent users of information technology. Standards of attainment are above the national average at the end of Key Stage 4. All pupils follow either the full GCSE information systems course or the GCSE short course. Most pupils are confident and independent users of the range of software and other computer resources available to them. GCE Advanced level results in 1999 were below course averages and less good than the previous year. Sixth-form pupils on GNVQ courses apply their information technology skills effectively and achieve standards in line with course requirements.

191. By the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 pupils have a knowledge and understanding of the skills needed and experience of the use of information technology in many areas of the curriculum. They have a mature understanding of the subject and how to use it to support learning and for their own purposes.

192. The quality of teaching is good. Teaching is very good in about one eighth of lessons, good in three-quarters and satisfactory in the remaining eighth. Teachers have confident subject knowledge and teach enthusiastically. Where this is strongest, it is characterised by high expectations, challenging activities and tasks, a brisk pace, good management of time and good management of pupil behaviour. Good quality teaching positively motivates the pupils. They settle to work quickly, maintain a high level of concentration and participate by readily responding to questions. Where the teaching is less successful there is an over reliance on the course notebooks, without monitoring understanding or the level of concentration. The majority of pupils make good gains in knowledge and skills of information technology, for example Year 9 pupils recognising and correcting inappropriate formatting in spreadsheets.

193. Since the last inspection provision for information technology has improved. There has been an increase in the number of staff who are now teaching the discrete information technology courses and who are rapidly gaining confidence in the more advanced computer techniques. Attainment in Key Stages 3 and 4 has improved and more teachers in other subject areas are developing basic information technology skills and beginning to plan and use it in their subject areas, for instance in English, mathematics, art, humanities, music and special education needs, particularly with the visual impairment equipment. Homework is still rarely set.

194. In lessons pupils are well behaved, motivated and hard working. They listen carefully, concentrate and persevere. They are co-operative and share equipment responsibly. They enjoy working independently on a variety of tasks and explore different techniques of presentation, as their skills and knowledge develop. They are willing to investigate the features of hardware or software to solve a problem and learn from their mistakes. When tasks are not challenging or relevant, pupils still maintain concentration and good behaviour.

195. In information technology the technical support is very experienced, which ensures that the resources are well maintained and suitably deployed. The department is well managed and involves staff and pupils in community projects such as group training with partner primary schools. Governors and the senior management team actively support information technology and its implementation across the curriculum.

196. In cross-curricular information technology there are some pockets of good practice and, judging by the New Opportunities Fund training session, it is about to increase rapidly. Nevertheless there is still a certain level of resistance among some staff. The integrated learning system is carefully planned and used with pupils who have special education needs, but its use could be further developed for a wider range of pupils.

197. Priorities for improving are the greater implementation of cross-curricular information technology provision, the increased use of homework - not computer dependant - and the need to modify the teacher's role when pupils are using workbooks.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

198. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 1999 show pupil attainment that compares well with the national average. The GCSE results in 1999 are better than the average for similar schools, and show a significant improvement on previous years. The GCE Advanced level results are satisfactory. Inspection evidence based on lesson observation and scrutiny of written work shows that pupils' attainment is broadly in line with the national average at both Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the Sixth Form. There are no significant variations in the standards reached by boys and girls.

199. Pupils' progress in modern languages is at least satisfactory, and often good. In Year 7 they quickly learn the basic vocabulary and grammatical structures of French or Spanish, and begin to use the foreign language in speech and in writing. In Years 8 and 9, many pupils develop greater accuracy and fluency in their oral work, and learn to communicate effectively with each other in pairs using, for example, role-play or question and answer conversations.

200. In a minority of lessons, pupils do not progress consistently beyond the stage of repeating single words and phrases, and their pronunciation is unclear. Written work is mostly well presented, and reaches a satisfactory level of accuracy. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in the oral and written aspects of the language, particularly in those lessons attended by learning support assistants.

201. In Key Stage 4, all pupils follow the GCSE course, and learn to understand the more complex forms of the foreign language. In a small number of cases, their competence in using the language actively does not match their listening and understanding skills. Written work is accurate, but there are relatively few instances of writing which is creative or imaginative, even in Year 11. Reading for pleasure is not well established. Sixth form pupils make generally good progress in understanding the more advanced language structures, but their articulation is sometimes hesitant and uncertain.

202. The quality of teaching is generally good. Just under a quarter of the teaching is very good and a similar proportion is satisfactory. The remainder of the teaching is good and there is none that is unsatisfactory or poor. All teachers are qualified specialists with good subject knowledge. They plan their lessons carefully, and use a range of classroom activities to sustain interest and reinforce learning. For instance, a Year 11 top set French class responded with enthusiasm to very well planned work on verb tenses. Through a variety of activities pupils refined their skills and built on prior learning to ensure accuracy in their pronunciation and consolidation of their newly acquired knowledge. Pupils at all levels of attainment are given opportunities to progress. Teaching is conducted predominantly in the foreign language. In the majority of cases, this secures good oral responses from the pupils who become aware of their ability to communicate in French or Spanish. In a Year 9 Spanish lesson, pupils developed in confidence and broadened their vocabulary for a topic on shopping through the use of well defined oral and written activities. A minority of lessons are too strongly directed by the teacher and, consequently, there are limited opportunities for the pupils to make real progress. In some cases the work is insufficiently challenging. Information technology has yet to make an impact on teaching and learning. There is, overall, a marked enthusiasm for the subject, which teachers share with their pupils. The teaching is supported and enriched by a foreign language assistant. Homework is set regularly, but there is scope to develop the marking procedures to further improve the pupils' progress.

203. All pupils study French or Spanish in Key Stages 3 and 4, although no pupil can study both languages. The overall time allocation and the size of teaching groups are satisfactory. Assessment procedures are being developed which will enable the progress of each pupil to be closely monitored.

204. The department is efficiently managed. Accommodation and learning resources are good, and a positive learning environment has been created. There is a well-established and successful programme of visits to France, Spain and Canada, which reinforces the work done in school.

205. Since the last inspection there have been significant improvements in attainment, in teaching and learning, in curriculum planning, and in management. A number of strengths can now be seen in the department's practices and procedures, and there is a clear potential to enhance further the standards achieved in both foreign languages.

## MUSIC

206. Pupils' attainment in music on entry to the school is below that expected for pupils of a similar age nationally, especially in composing and performing. During the Key Stage 3, pupils make satisfactory progress and attempt to bridge the gap between their attainment of entry and national expectations. Standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 are below national expectations. The pupils are able to control keyboards, choosing voices, styles and rhythms to suit composition and performance projects. Their compositions often show good ideas with a variety of approach. For example, in a Year 9 class, a pupil composed and performed an exciting extemporisation over a chord sequence played by other members of his group. However, performance skills are generally underdeveloped by the end of the key stage with little use of fingering techniques on the keyboards and insecure rhythmic sense. Standards of singing are below average and notation skills are weak. Pupils receiving instrumental lessons achieve average standards of performance in relation to the time they have been learning.

207. GCSE results in music over the past three years have been below the national average. Those in 1999 did not reflect the improvement that has taken place nationally, so that they were well below the national average. However the number of entries was too small for statistical comparisons to be valid. In Key Stage 4, standards of attainment are below national averages. Pupils in Year 10 perform and compose using keyboards and percussion instruments. Although compositions reflect an understanding of how mood can be evoked and show some interesting ideas, at this stage of the course they are rather basic and lacking in sophistication. The use of technical vocabulary and notation skills is very limited. The Year 10 music class has a high proportion of pupils with special educational needs and, taking this into account, the achievement at Key Stage 4 is close to national averages.

208. The quality of teaching in both key stages is satisfactory. In over nine tenths of lessons the teaching was satisfactory or good, although in one lesson it was unsatisfactory. The teachers have a sound knowledge and understanding of the subject and lessons are well planned with a good balance of activities, both in individual lessons and in the curriculum as a whole. There is good use of a variety of resources in the teaching. Teachers' expectations of the pupils are generally appropriate, although sometimes pitched at a single level rather than matched to the differing ability levels within the group. The pace of lessons is often slow and there are sometimes difficulties in the management of pupils. Where the tasks given are well matched to the differing ability levels within the class, control is more effective. Assessment is carried out systematically but is not sufficiently used to inform the planning of subsequent teaching. Although homework is used effectively in Key Stage 4 to support teaching, it is not used adequately in Key Stage 3.

209. The quality of pupils' learning is good in Key Stage 4. Starting from a low base line, pupils' performances show gains in confidence and in the ability to hold independent parts. Their compositions build well on previous work in Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 3, the quality of learning is satisfactory overall. While the composition work shows good progression and gains in complexity from year group to year group, performance skills are less developed over the key stage. Notation skills show little progression, with Year 9 pupils still over reliant on letter names and not relating them to the staff. Instrumental pupils make good progress, following a carefully structured course. Behaviour is generally satisfactory, although in Key Stage 3 it is varied, with some examples of lack of concentration and occasional rudeness. This most often occurs during whole class teaching when the pace is slow and the work less well matched to the pupils. During group work, concentration is usually good, particularly when the work is appropriate to the ability levels of the pupils. The relationships of the pupils are good; they collaborate well in groups and pairs, sharing instruments happily, with some taking leadership roles and helping others. They listen well to each other's performances, showing courtesy and respect. No significant differences were observed in the progress of groups of pupils on the basis of gender or prior attainment.

210. The school has addressed most of the concerns noted at the last inspection. The quality of teaching has been improved; more activities have been introduced into the lessons, pupils have access to a wider variety of instruments and there are more opportunities for singing and corporate music making. However, the use of information technology is still very limited and the pace of many lessons is still slow. Although the main accommodation is good, the lack of separate teaching spaces for group work still exists.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

211. When pupils enter Year 7 their attainment in the subject is in line with national expectations. However, their knowledge and understanding is of a higher standard in relation to swimming and gymnastics than in rugby, netball and health related fitness.

212. At the end of Key Stage 3 pupils' attainment is in line with national expectations. Boys in Year 9 play rugby with speed and stamina and have an understanding of health and fitness. Girls in netball and basketball attain standards below those expected nationally. Their footwork is inconsistent and few passes reach the targeted player because of their inability to find space. However, when the girls are challenged in the problem solving activities they attain standards above those found nationally. They have good cooperative and team skills. Boys and girls in Year 7 have good stroke technique in swimming and they plan imaginative sequences in gymnastics. Teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 for 1999 show that the majority of pupils reach average standards, similar to those observed during the inspection.

213. In the GCSE examinations, results over time show a rising trend. In 1997 the proportion of pupils gaining grades in the A\*-C range very was well below national averages. But, in 1999 standards had risen so that results are now below national averages but with a fourfold increase in the proportion of pupils gaining A\*-C grades. Pupils in the GCSE groups reach standards that are below the national average. A few pupils are achieving above these levels in their theory work, but the majority have a limited technical vocabulary and do not fully understand the working of the body systems. Files are mostly well presented and well organised and pupils attain higher standards in their practical activities than in the theory section of the examination course.

214. At the end of Key Stage 4 pupils are attaining average standards in most activities. Most boys and girls can perform the basic bounces on the trampoline and a few have more advanced skills. Those pupils working for their Junior Sports Leaders Award vary in their attainment levels. Overall a standard above national expectations is achieved. Pupils are able to coach small groups in a safe and confident manner.

215. The attainment of the majority of pupils in Years 12 and 13 on the GCE Advanced Level course is below the course average. Their knowledge of the development of leisure time lacks depth and understanding. However, three of the group are attaining above this level. They have, for example, a well-developed knowledge of anatomy and physiology.

216. The attainment of some individual pupils and teams is very good. They play football, basketball, hockey, netball, rugby and athletics at district, regional and county level and two girls represent national teams. Two disabled pupils have achieved successes in regional competitions.

217. While teaching is good or very good in the majority of lessons, the overall quality is unsatisfactory. Teaching is good or very good in over two-thirds of lessons and the remainder is equally divided between being satisfactory or unsatisfactory. Teaching at Key Stage 3 is mostly good and very good while that at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form is mainly satisfactory. There is a small amount of unsatisfactory teaching at both Key Stages 3 and 4. Pupils' learning is good and very good in two thirds of lessons and in one sixth of lessons pupils make insufficient progress. Teachers share the lesson objectives with the pupils at the start of the lesson and finish with a short summation. This reviews and reinforces learning and is especially useful for the less able pupils. Rigorous attention is given to the monitoring of pupils' GCSE files. Teachers take time to discuss with individual pupils their progress and targets for improvement. As a result of careful monitoring, pupils in the GCSE groups make good progress in relation to their prior attainment. Teachers use their assessment and registration chart well. Their records are comprehensive, informative and an effective system that monitors the progress of every pupil.

218. The department has carefully considered the division of teaching groups. Often classes are taught in sets and gender groups. This helps all pupils to make good progress. When the range of attainment in the whole class group demands more flexibility and whole group teaching, the class is divided into smaller groups according to prior attainment, allowing all



pupils to make progress. Pupils with special education needs, including those with physical impairment, are appropriately integrated in lessons and there is an enthusiastic support assistant who works very effectively to ensure their good progress. Relationships between pupils and their teachers are based on mutual respect. Pupils are prepared to listen and try hard to achieve new targets set by their teachers.

219. In a small number of lessons the management of pupils is not firm enough to ensure that all pupils maintain concentration and stay on task. Most lessons provide a short warm up. This is not extended sufficiently to encompass knowledge of muscles and body systems and in turn does not provide a base for the theoretical aspects of the GCSE examination. Teaching does not always give sufficient independent learning opportunities to pupils and in a few lessons teaching is too didactic. More consistent use of additional sources of reference, for example activity cards, such as those used in gymnastics, would be beneficial.

220. Pupils are interested and enthusiastic in their lessons. They behave well. At times, the girls become over-enthusiastic and noisy in activities, but when well managed they work well together in small groups and pairs. The interest pupils have in the subject is shown by the numbers who opt to study GCSE and GCE Advanced Level and who attend the wide range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils are given very good opportunities for personal development in the optional Junior Sports Leaders Award course in Key Stage 4 and Community Sports Leaders Award course in the Sixth Form. Both these courses are good initiatives and promote leadership and independent learning skills.

221. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is broad. It includes swimming, gymnastics, dance, games, athletics, and problem solving activities. There is insufficient curriculum time at Key Stage 4 for pupils to improve standards. However, the use of optional accredited courses, such as GCSE and Junior Sports Leaders Award, enhance the learning experience pupils are offered. Pupils in the Sixth Form are able to participate in a variety of physical activities and study the Community Sports Leaders Award course and GCE Advanced Level. This provides a broad and balanced Sixth Form curriculum.

222. The gymnasium is small and the hall long and narrow. Both facilities are old and cramped and when teaching badminton and basketball not all of the group are able to participate. The fields on site are no more than a series of grids and a small practice pitch. There is no dedicated teaching room for theory teaching. This makes it difficult to establish a positive learning environment, restricts the use of display and can limit the range of teaching strategies to ensure the good progress of all pupils.

223. Nine teachers work in the department. There is a good balance of experience and youth but four specialist members of the department have other responsibilities elsewhere in the school. This makes the department rather fragmented and necessitates the use of more teachers. The leadership of the department is sound. Teaching is monitored and good support has been given to the newest teacher. The team is continually up-dating its procedures, for assessment and recording, for example, and all are committed to improving standards.

224. Since the previous inspection standards of attainment have been maintained in Years 7 - 11. Pupils have been given more opportunities to use their own initiative with the introduction of the leadership courses. The department has gained the Sportsmark award and improvements have been made in curriculum breadth, for example, through the introduction of dance, problem solving activities and GCE Advanced Level. There has been no improvement in the poor in-door accommodation.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

225. On entry to the school, the attainment of the majority of pupils is below the expectations of the county's Agreed Syllabus. Through Key Stage 3 most pupils make good progress. Consequently, by the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' attainments are broadly in line with the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus for their age. They have an appropriate knowledge and understanding of the richness and diversity of religion, of the place of Christianity and other principal religions in the country, and of the ways in which religious beliefs influence the lives of those who hold them. They also have a sound understanding of religious language, ideas and symbols. Their skills in applying religious insights to their own experience, and to that of others are, however, less well developed.

226. At the end of Key Stage 4, however, pupils' standards of attainment are below the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus for their age. Although the majority attain appropriately in individual lessons, progress is not maintained over the key stage as a whole. At its conclusion, pupils' knowledge, and particularly their understanding, is lacking in depth. This is a consequence of the inadequate time allocated to teaching the subject in Years 10 and 11, and of weaknesses in the schemes of work.

227. For example, pupils had four lessons in which to pursue a project on a world religion of their choice, which they had previously studied in Key Stage 3. By the end, they had consolidated and extended their prior knowledge of some of its distinctive practices and beliefs. Their understanding of how, and of why those customs and beliefs are important to its members, however, had not been materially advanced from their studies in the previous key stage. Lack of time had placed a low ceiling on their levels of attainment. Pupils also explore a wide range of moral issues, such as those surrounding conflict and reconciliation, death and bereavement, and human rights. They can recognise the characteristics of moral questions, and make a personal response to them. They are again prevented, by lack of time, from exploring religious insights into these issues in appropriate depth. Their understanding of them is consequently superficial.

228. Overall, the quality of teaching was satisfactory and in one lesson it was unsatisfactory. Where teaching is strongest, teachers know clearly what they wish their pupils to learn, and plan their lessons effectively to achieve their aims. They engage and hold their pupils' interests through a variety of interesting and challenging activities and tasks, and encourage them to develop both skills of independent learning and inquiry, and of collaborative working.

229. When pupils' interests are caught, and they are sufficiently challenged, they take pride in their work, give fully of their abilities and efforts, and make good progress. Year 7 pupils responded with enthusiasm to a project on designing and modelling their own personal place of worship. They made good progress in understanding the central characteristics of worship, and gained insights into the spiritual dimension of life. Year 10 pupils were highly motivated when using the Internet for research into world religions, and made gains in background knowledge. Year 11 pupils, working collaboratively, showed sensitivity and maturity in exploring moral issues arising from substance abuse, and made good progress in understanding the effects of different drugs.

230. Where teaching is less strong, teachers have an inadequate knowledge of the subject. Consequently, they are unable to frame a clear aim that gets to the heart of what they wish to teach, and lessons lack a clear focus. There is an attempt to cover too much material, and sight is lost of what is of central importance. In some instances, commercial worksheets are not well matched to the differing needs of pupils. Such lessons do not engage or maintain pupils' interest, or extend their understanding. For example, in a Year 8 lesson on Christian belief and the Apostles' Creed, pupils made some gains in knowledge, but did not grasp the concepts and ideas explored. They did not sustain concentration, and a minority showed a reluctance to listen with respect to the views and opinions of others in discussion.

231. Difficulties in recruitment mean that there has not been a specialist teacher in charge of the subject since 1998. As a result, there has been a lack of vision about the educational direction the subject should take, and a hiatus in planning. Schemes of work are unsatisfactory. They do not provide an adequate basis for ensuring that pupils receive their entitlement in the subject and make good progress over time. Ten non-specialist teachers work in the department but they have not received appropriate in-service training for the task. All are committed and hard working, and some are qualified by experience and have done much to support their colleagues. Collectively, however, they lack the subject expertise to raise standards further without specialist leadership and guidance. The school recognises the issues, and is moving to appoint a specialist teacher to take responsibility for the subject at the earliest opportunity.

232. Provision has, however, improved since the previous inspection. The time allocated for teaching the subject in Key Stage 3 has increased and standards of attainment have been raised. The time allocated in Key Stage 4 has increased, although insufficiently so for pupils to meet the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus. There are firm plans to make appropriate provision in the next academic year, with the introduction of weekly lessons. Although standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are still below the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus, they are nevertheless higher than at the previous inspection, when they were well below. Provision for teaching the Agreed Syllabus in the Sixth Form has improved, and now meets statutory requirements. The level of resources has been significantly increased, and is having a positive impact on pupils' learning. Consequently, although weaknesses remain to be addressed if standards are to be further raised, the overall trend since the previous inspection has been towards improvement.

## VOCATIONAL COURSES

233. Since the last inspection, the provision for vocational education has been consolidated and the number of courses increased. In this period, the number of pupils studying on these courses has grown from 17 to more than 60, with a few returning to school to complete GNVQ units in Year 14.

234. In Key Stage 4 in 1999, attainment in GCSE business studies was well below the national average in respect of pupils gaining grades A\*-C, when compared with similar schools, but a little above average in relation to grades A\*-G. Pupils' average points score was below those for their other subjects. No business course is currently taking place in this key stage.

235. Attainment at the end of the Sixth Form is above average in each of the four courses offered at GNVQ Level although the proportion of candidates achieving distinction in 1999 is below average. In GNVQ Advanced art and design and in health and social care all successful candidates gained merits, as well as about half of those taking business or leisure and tourism. In GNVQ Intermediate art and design and leisure and tourism, over 70 per cent achieved a merit, with no failures. Results for individual pupils exceed expectations based on their prior attainment in Key Stage 4. Key skills, in which pupils reach good standards, are well integrated into vocational studies.

236. Since the last inspection, attainment at both GNVQ Advanced and Intermediate levels has been very good, with the proportion of candidates achieving merit or distinction being well above national averages. Completion rates for the full award, which vary nationally between 60 and 70 per cent for these subjects, are also well above average.

237. The majority of pupils are progressing at an appropriate rate, with additional flexibility offered to those who need to take longer than the usual two years in order to complete the full award. Pupils are adding to their knowledge and understanding. Completed and ongoing assignments demonstrate that individual achievements are most impressive. Particularly noteworthy are: the collages and sculptures produced in art and design; the analysis by health and social care pupils of aspects of health and social welfare. Business pupils have good expertise in research skills, efficient use of the Internet and other information technology, give articulate oral explanations of their findings and appropriately use their information in assignments. Those following leisure and tourism courses also acquire very good investigative, evaluative and research skills as well as a sound background knowledge of the industry.

238. Pupils on GNVQ Intermediate leisure and tourism courses, many of whom have special educational needs, produce good quality assignments, above course expectations. They prepare tourist brochures containing very good examples of a comparative analysis of a range of leisure attractions, very well illustrated with photographs and computer-scanned images. Many successful activities and workshops are undertaken involving partner primary schools, the community, local business and industry, as well as continental Europe. Many speakers are invited to contribute to lessons, and pupils have regular contacts with a range of local organisations. All of this contributes positively to pupils' learning.

239. Vocational studies pupils have very positive attitudes to work and some are expanding their skills as independent learners. Many others, however, lack confidence in intellectual discussions. They are less prepared to argue critically or to pursue additional lines of enquiry through self-directed study. There is, however, considerable dependence by some pupils on teacher-directed activity. The reduced number of hours currently allocated to courses affects opportunities for teachers to encourage higher-order skills and levels of accreditation. In spite of these restrictions pupils' progress, including those with special educational needs is very impressive, and the qualifications that many have achieved have made it possible some to pursue their careers into higher education. In all the vocational education groups, pupils' relationships with teachers and with each other are excellent. Lessons are enjoyable experiences and work proceeds at a good pace. Pupils are confident and competent users of computers, take pride in the appearance of their work, and are interested and involved in the wide range of curricular and extra-curricular activities.

240. The quality of teaching is never less than satisfactory, and is good or very good in over two-thirds of the lessons. The good quality of the teaching is a major factor in the progress and the attainment levels reached by vocational studies pupils, many of whom do not come to the Sixth Form with secure GCSE grades. Teachers are enthusiastic about their specialist subjects and have a very good understanding of GNVQ course requirements and processes. Most lesson plans indicate the attention that teachers pay to meeting the diverse needs of their pupils. There is, however, room for further development in the regular identification of lesson objectives, as well as the sharing of these with learners in each lesson. Teachers ensure successful learning through the effective use of praise, encouragement, advice and appropriately structured tasks. Success assists pupils to achieve higher standards in their work and in raising their own self-esteem. Additional class-contact time would enable teachers to provide greater breadth and depth of syllabus coverage as well as for pupils to achieve higher levels of accreditation. Nevertheless, the considerable amount of extra-curricular time being made available to Sixth Form pupils within departments does offset some of the disadvantages that arise from insufficient timetabled lesson allocation.

241. The organisation and management of vocational education are good. For example, the scheduled weekly team meetings are a major factor in the high standards of course management and delivery being achieved. Assessment, moderation and verification processes are well organised, to the satisfaction of the external verifier; administration procedures are standardised; and the team work very well together. Arrangements for mentoring and monitoring pupils contribute to the raising of standards. Planning for the implementation of Curriculum 2000 is well advanced, and includes consideration of progression in learning from Key Stage 4. Sharing good teaching practice is already encouraged through formal and informal lesson observation: this could be further extended to include work on questioning skills, or identification of shorter-term learning objectives within unit deadlines.

242. The current deployment of staff in more than one subject area helps to provide consistency as well as links between study areas. However, pupils have no base room, where central resources could be available and where they could share specialist knowledge or advice with those on other courses. Accommodation in the annexe is unsatisfactory. However, the restriction on pupils' access to computers is hindering learning, especially for those studying GNVQ Intermediate leisure and tourism. Generally, resources are adequate for the delivery of each course.