

INSPECTION REPORT

RIDGEWAY SCHOOL

Plympton, Plymouth

LEA area: Plymouth City Council

Unique reference number: 113535

Headteacher: Dr S E Sweeney

Reporting inspector: Mrs Rosemary Tong
2552

Dates of inspection: 26 February – 2 March 2001

Inspection number: 188405

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Moorland Road
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Appropriate authority: Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr P Hutchings

Date of previous inspection: 29 April 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
2552	R Tong	Registered Inspector		What sort of school is it? How high are standards – the school's results and pupils' achievements? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
19693	S Hall	Lay Inspector		How high are standards – pupils' attitudes, values and personal development? How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
27719	P Metcalf	Team Inspector	Mathematics	
16434	R Samways	Team Inspector	English	
11481	L Lindsay-Clift	Team Inspector	Science; Equal opportunities	
8682	M Trevor	Team Inspector	Design and technology; Information and communication technology (ICT)	
18740	M Headon	Team Inspector	History	
17618	M Hillary	Team Inspector	Geography	
4344	T Ferris	Team Inspector	Sixth Form	How well are pupils taught? How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
10053	J Simms	Team Inspector	Art	
24026	C Holland	Team Inspector	Music	
1085	J Laver	Team Inspector	Physical education	
30427	F Shuffle-Botham	Team Inspector	Religious education	
27380	K Stevenson	Team Inspector	Special educational needs ; English as an additional language	
12590	J Tirrell	Team Inspector	Vocational subjects	
16765	M Higgins	Team Inspector	Modern foreign languages	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Ridgeway is a large comprehensive school with 553 boys and 584 girls currently on roll. There are 196 students in the Sixth Form. Almost all pupils are of white UK heritage and very few have English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals and the proportion of pupils with special educational needs are both broadly average. The range of special needs includes learning difficulties, physical impairment and emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school takes in the full range of ability, but there are more pupils whose attainment is below average and fewer higher attaining pupils. This means that the overall attainment of pupils in recent years has been below average, although the attainment of the current Year 7 on entry was in line with the national average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Ridgeway is an effective and improving school. Results in the end of Key Stage 3 national tests in 2000 were below the national average overall, but the GCSE and A-level results were in line with the national average. From the pupils' below average starting point in Year 7, the Key Stage 3 results represent sound achievement and the Key Stage 4 results show good levels of achievement. Teaching is good throughout the school and particularly strong in Key Stage 4, resulting in good progress for almost all pupils. The headteacher gives an effective lead and key staff provide competent leadership and management throughout the school. The school's income and expenditure are about average and the school uses its resources wisely, giving good value for money.

What the school does well

- The teaching is good and it leads to good levels of achievement.
- There is very good teaching and learning in English and in Spanish.
- Very good teaching leads to standards which are well above average in the GNVQ courses and music in the Sixth Form.
- The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good and enables the pupils to make good progress.
- There is good provision for sport beyond the school day and a good level of take-up by pupils.

What could be improved

- The standards in information and communication technology (ICT).
- The monitoring of the pupils' academic progress and setting individual targets for them.
- The behaviour of a small minority of pupils.
- The information to parents about their children's progress.
- The accommodation.

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 inspected in April 1996 and has made satisfactory improvement since that time. Key Stage 3 national test and GCSE examination results have fluctuated year by year, but the changes largely reflect the differences in pupils' attainment when they enter the school. Post-16 results have improved. Teaching has improved and there is now even more good teaching than at the time of the last inspection. There have been improvements to the curriculum, to procedures for monitoring, and to ICT provision and to the accommodation, although there is still more to be done in each of these areas. In the other areas for action identified last time, there has been good progress on Sixth Form consortium work and developing the role of the governors, but the school has not yet found a way to provide a daily act of collective worship. The school has the capacity to sustain and build on its improvement to date.

STANDARDS

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

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

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

At the age of 14, the proportion of pupils reaching level 5, the nationally expected level, was in line with the national average in English, science and mathematics. The proportion reaching higher levels was below average in mathematics and science and well below in English, and results overall were therefore below the national average and well below schools with a similar intake of pupils (based on eligibility for free school meals). Boys performed better than girls in mathematics, but there were no significant differences between boys and girls overall. Given that the pupils' attainment on entry was below average and that a larger proportion reached the nationally expected levels, the achievement in the tests was sound. In science, where results overall reached the national average, achievement was good. Standards are broadly average in most subjects, except in design and technology and Spanish, where they are above average, and in ICT where they are below. Pupils work hard and achieve well in most subjects, but achievement and progress in ICT are unsatisfactory.

In GCSE, the school's results were close to the national average in the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades and A*-G grades. Although the results were below those of schools with pupils from similar backgrounds, when compared with schools with similar results at the end of Key Stage 3 two years earlier, they are above average. Therefore, they represent good levels of achievement and progress. There were no significant differences between boys and girls. The strongest subjects in GCSE were English and design and technology where results were above the national average. Results were also above average in Spanish, music and history, but below average in art, science, French and physical education. Overall, the standards currently reached by the oldest pupils in Key Stage 4 are above average and pupils are achieving well as a result of good teaching. However, standards in ICT are below average. In both Key Stages 3 and 4 the trend over the last five years has been below the national trend, but this reflects the differences in the levels

of pupils' attainment when they started the school. The school came close to meeting its reasonable GCSE target and has set satisfactory targets for the future. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress throughout the school.

The A-level results in 2000 showed a steady improvement on previous years and were close to the national average in the percentage of students entered for two or more A-levels or AS equivalent who gained A or B grades. Results in the GNVQ courses, chemistry and music were well above the national average, but were below average in art and history. Current students are reaching standards which are average or above in most subjects and achieving well, particularly in music and GNVQ courses.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Sound. Most pupils respond well to good teaching and have reasonably positive attitudes towards school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Sound. Most lessons are orderly and the majority of pupils behave well. A small minority, mainly boys, are disruptive in class and there is some unruly behaviour between lessons.
Personal development and relationships	Sound. Pupils form good relationships with their teachers and generally co-operate with each other.
Attendance	Attendance and levels of unauthorised absence are average.

Most parents report that their children like school. Exclusions are low compared with similar schools. Pupils have relatively few opportunities to take responsibility, but show a good level of interest in the activities and opportunities which are provided.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

Teaching is good overall. During the inspection, 97 per cent of the lessons seen were judged to be satisfactory or better, 69 per cent were good or better and 25 per cent were very good or excellent. The teaching is particularly strong in Key Stage 4, where over a third of lessons were very good or excellent. Teaching is good for all age groups in science and very good in English. In mathematics it is sound in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4 and Post-16. In French, geography and religious education teaching is sound. In all other subjects it is good overall, except in ICT where some subject teachers do not have sufficient expertise.

The teachers have very strong subject knowledge and plan their lessons well. They explain work clearly, have high expectations and set a good pace in many lessons. This motivates the pupils to work hard, gives them confidence and helps them to make good progress. They are also skilful in asking questions and this makes pupils think and helps them to recall previous work. Very occasionally teachers' expectations are too low and they have difficulties

in managing behaviour. This results in poor concentration and unsatisfactory behaviour. The teachers often make good use of homework, but do not always keep to a timetable.

The school is generally successful in meeting the needs of all its pupils. Pupils with special educational needs are taught well, both within the learning support department and across the curriculum. This means that they learn effectively and make good progress. The teachers know the pupils well and draw up detailed plans to meet their needs. Learning support assistants provide very good support.

Literacy is generally taught effectively, with a good focus on the vocabulary for each subject. The literacy programme for pupils with special educational needs is particularly successful in helping them develop their reading skills. Many subjects make a good contribution to helping pupils develop their numeracy skills, for example geography and science, and most pupils make reasonable progress.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Sound, with a good range of opportunities in many subjects and in extra-curricular sporting activities. The provision for ICT is unsatisfactory.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Pupils with special needs are given very good opportunities to learn. They are taught well and make good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	The school provides well for pupils' personal development and makes good provision for their social, moral and cultural development. Provision for spiritual development is sound.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Sound. The school offers good support for pupils' attendance, but the monitoring of their academic progress is unsatisfactory.

Most parents have a positive view of the school and the links with parents are satisfactory. The assessment of pupils' attainment is sound in most subjects but the school does not keep a close enough check on pupils' academic progress across the curriculum. There is insufficient use of target setting to help pupils improve. The school offers a wide range of sporting activities with school teams in many different sports, and there is good take-up by pupils. Provision for ICT is unsatisfactory: a combination of lack of teacher expertise, insufficient resources and a lack of planning to ensure that all areas are covered mean that the pupils' experience is patchy and the requirements of the National Curriculum are not being met. The school also fails to meet the statutory requirement to teach religious education to all Post-16 students.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Sound. The headteacher has a vision for the school and subject leaders manage their areas effectively. There is a commitment to continuing improvement throughout the school.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors discharge their responsibilities appropriately and are rapidly developing the part they play in the school's improvement.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Sound. The school monitors some aspects of its work and is starting to evaluate teaching effectively, but the analysis of data to evaluate pupil performance is weak.
The strategic use of resources	Good. The school makes good use of its resources and financial management is effective.

The school has clear aims which are reflected in many areas of its life and work. It is well staffed, with a good range of experience and expertise in most subjects. Procedures for staff development and induction are good. With the exception of provision for ICT, learning resources are adequate. Accommodation is unsatisfactory in some subjects because it restricts the range of learning opportunities. For example, physical education facilities are limited and accommodation in mobile classrooms makes it difficult for teachers to use technology equipment. The school has recovered from a budget deficit and uses its money carefully. It applies the principles of best value in comparing its costs and its spending with other local schools. The school does not make enough use of data about pupil performance, for example through analysis by gender, to pinpoint areas for improvement.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High expectations. • Children make good progress. • Approachable staff. • Good teaching. • Children like school. • Literacy support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school could work more closely with parents. • Information about progress. • Behaviour. • Homework. • Arrangements at lunchtime.

The inspection team agrees with the positive comments made by parents and carers, and shares their concerns. The positive comments highlight the good teaching and high expectations which motivate children and help them to make good progress. The literacy support was also judged to be effective.

The school could do more to give parents information about how their children are progressing and how they could improve their work. Behaviour is satisfactory overall, but there is disruptive behaviour by a minority of pupils, mainly boys, in a small proportion of lessons and there is some boisterousness around the school. There is some good use of homework, but teachers do not always set work according to a homework timetable and the planners could be used more effectively for communication between home and school. At lunchtimes, pupils have very few places to sit down to eat and to socialise, and the layout of the site makes supervision difficult. The school is about to build a new canteen and parents are working hard to raise funds to improve the environment.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Pupils' attainment when they arrive in the school in Year 7, based on their average scores in National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 2, has been below average overall. There have been variations from year to year, but the current Year 7 pupils are the first recent year group whose attainment was in line with the standards expected nationally on entry to the school. There are fewer pupils with high levels of attainment.

2. By the end of Year 9, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level in the national tests 2000 (level 5) in English, science and mathematics was in line with the average. However, the proportion reaching higher levels was below average in science and mathematics, and well below average in English. Therefore, the overall performance of pupils was below the national average and well below similar schools (that is, other schools with the same proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals). Taking all levels of attainment into account, the results in mathematics and English were below the national average, but in line with the average in science. These results are less good than in 1999 and they reflect the lower attainment of this particular year group when the pupils started at the school. Nevertheless, they represent sound achievement because more pupils reached the nationally expected levels by the end of Key Stage 3. The achievement in science was good, because pupils' overall performance in the subject was in line with the national average. There were no significant differences between boys and girls in the overall results, although boys' achievement was higher than girls in mathematics. This sound achievement is the result of much good teaching and good preparation for the end of Key Stage 3 tests.

3. At GCSE, the school's results in 2000 were close to the national average, but below the average for schools with pupils from similar backgrounds. The percentage of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades and five or more A*-G grades was in line with the national average for both boys and girls, but the proportion of pupils gaining one or more GCSE grades was below average. These results were less good than the previous year, but they represent good achievement for the year group who entered the school below average, were still below average overall by the end of Key Stage 3, but made up ground to reach the national average by the end of Key Stage 4. Compared with other schools with similar results in the end of Key Stage 3 tests two years ago, the Ridgeway 2000 GCSE results were above average. This was the result of very effective teaching in Key Stage 4 and good preparation of pupils for examinations. The trend in results over the last five years is below the national trend, but this reflects the fluctuations in attainment of the different year groups on entry to the school.

4. The strongest subjects in the GCSE examinations were technology, where results were above the national average, and English, where both boys and girls achieved higher results on average than in their other subjects. Results were also above average in history, sociology and Spanish and well above in music. Results were below the national average in art, science, French and physical education.

5. The A-level results show a steady improvement over the last two years. The 2000 results were close to the national average in the average points score for students entered for two or more A-level subjects or AS equivalent, and above average for those entered for fewer than two subjects. Results in GNVQ and in chemistry and music were well above the national average. Results were above average in the proportion of pupils gaining grades A or B in geography, mathematics and sociology, but below average in art and history.

6. From the work seen during the inspection, standards are satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form. These standards reflect the way pupils are benefiting from good teaching and the fact that the current Years 9 and 11 were stronger than last year's cohorts on entry to the school. Most pupils are making good progress and achieving well in relation to their prior attainment. The standards of the oldest pupils in Key Stage 3, the current Year 9, are above average in English and both boys and girls are achieving well and making good progress. Similarly, the standards of the oldest pupils in Key Stage 4, Year 11, are also above average and almost all pupils are achieving well as a result of very good teaching with high expectations and well planned lessons. Standards in literacy are generally good. Pupils of all ages read competently. They are able to use technical vocabulary accurately and they make progress in improving the accuracy of their writing.

7. In mathematics, the standards of the oldest pupils in Key Stage 3 are about average and pupils are demonstrating reasonable levels of achievement. In Key Stage 4, standards are above average and this shows good levels of achievement and progress as a result of teachers' good subject knowledge and effective teaching methods. Pupils' numeracy skills are about average. Some subjects make a significant contribution to the development of numeracy, such as the development of algebraic skills in science and spatial skills in art.

8. In science, the standards reached in Year 9 are about average and this represents good achievement because pupils have made progress from being below average overall. In Year 11, standards are above average and pupils are achieving at a satisfactory level, maintaining the progress they made during Key Stage 3. Achievement is not quite as good as it is in Key Stage 3 because the work in the three separate sciences is not effectively co-ordinated.

9. Standards for the oldest pupils in Key Stage 3 are average in most subjects, but standards in Spanish are above average and pupils' achievement is good. Achievement is generally sound, but good in physical education, history and art in relation to pupils' starting points in these subjects and the progress they are making now.

10. In ICT standards are below average for the oldest pupils in both Key Stages 3 and 4 because pupils do not have sufficient opportunity to work on their ICT skills through other subjects and there are parts of the programme of study which they do not cover. They work well in lessons, but the gaps in their opportunities for improving their standards mean that they are not able to make steady progress and their overall achievement is not satisfactory.

11. In other subjects, the oldest pupils in Key Stage 4 are reaching average standards in art, geography, French, physical education and religious education, and above average standards in technology, history, Spanish and music. Pupils' achievement in Spanish is very good. In French, religious education and geography achievement is sound, and in other subjects pupils are working hard in response to good teaching, achieving well and making good progress.

12. In the Sixth Form, the standards of the work seen during the inspection were well above average in GNVQ courses and music, above average in English, mathematics, science, ICT, and Spanish and average in other subjects. Students are achieving well and making good progress in most subjects, with particularly good achievement in both GNVQ courses and music, where students have a mature attitude to their work and develop their skills very effectively.

13. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in nearly all their subjects. Those with the greatest difficulties in reading and writing are achieving well, particularly in

Year 7, as a result of a well-designed programme to meet their specific needs. Pupils with special educational needs also achieve especially well in art and drama, where many achieve the national average in GCSE examinations. Gifted and talented pupils make satisfactory progress in most subjects, but there are particularly high levels of achievement in music in the Sixth Form. There are very few pupils with English as an additional language and all are fluent in English and make good progress.

14. The school set a reasonable target of 46 per cent of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades last year, which it almost reached, and has set satisfactory targets for further improvement.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

15. Overall the pupils' attitudes to school are satisfactory but not as positive as at the last inspection when they were judged to be good. The younger pupils are proud of their school and are keen to come to school. Other pupils have a reasonably positive approach and the attitudes of Sixth Form students are often very good.

16. In most lessons pupils are keen to carry out practical work and interested in the lesson. Although most pupils have a positive attitude towards their work, their attitudes vary in response to the approach of individual teachers. Nearly all pupils respond well to those teachers who have established clear classroom routines, conduct lessons at a brisk pace and set challenging work. This was seen in a number of lessons, such as a Year 9 art lesson where pupils arrived noisily but the teacher insisted on good behaviour, set high standards of work and pupils were soon working well. A minority of pupils, mainly boys, have negative attitudes to learning. They are unconcerned about arriving late for lessons, disturb others and make little effort with their work.

17. The behaviour of the pupils is generally satisfactory and the behaviour of Post-16 students is very good. In Years 7 to 11, behaviour in lessons is often good and this has a positive impact on pupils' learning. In these lessons the teachers have established clear ground rules but sometimes have to work hard to maintain discipline. The pupils know that the teacher has high expectations of behaviour; they do not call out and they are silent when the teacher is talking. In a significant minority of lessons there is low level chatting throughout the lesson. The inspection teams shares the concerns raised by parents and pupils with regard to disruptive behaviour. A few pupils, mainly boys in Years 9 and 11, are disruptive in some lessons and this has a detrimental effect on their own learning and sometimes that of others. They call out, talk while the teacher is talking and show a lack of respect and consideration.

18. Behaviour in assembly is good, but as pupils move around the school behaviour is sometimes inconsiderate. There is some noisiness and pushing in the corridors. The pupils and parents say that incidents of bullying are not common and usually dealt with appropriately. The number of fixed term and permanent exclusions has decreased steadily over the past three years and is less than that found in similar schools.

19. The pupils' personal development and relationships are satisfactory. Pupils are generally keen to take up responsibility, but there are limited opportunities open to them. Some Post-16 students help younger pupils in lessons and other pupils volunteer to act as librarians. Pupil representatives endeavour to bring about changes to school life through the school council and the health and safety committee. The pupils enjoy raising money for charity and Post-16 students also organise social events. Many Year 11 pupils take responsibility for their learning by attending voluntary revision classes to improve the standard of their work. Pupils value the wide range of out-of-school sporting activities and take part

with enthusiasm. Relationships are satisfactory. Pupils generally co-operate with each other in lessons. They often have good relationships with their teachers, particularly in the Sixth Form. A few pupils are disrespectful to staff and to visitors. Most pupils show due respect for property but a small minority of girls and boys misuse the facilities in the toilets, for example, by strewing toilet paper around.

20. The attendance of the pupils is satisfactory but has declined since the last inspection when it was judged to be good. The attendance rate of 92.1 per cent for 1999/2000 and the unauthorised absence rate of 0.6 per cent are in line with the national average. All year groups (Years 7 to 11) had an attendance rate of over 90 per cent. Nearly all pupils arrive at school on time and the school day starts promptly. Due to the nature of the site, pupils often arrive late for lessons, especially in mathematics.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

21. The overall quality of the teaching is good. Of the lessons seen during the inspection, 97 per cent were judged to be satisfactory or better, 69 per cent to be good or better, and 25 per cent to be very good or excellent. The teaching is strongest in Years 10 and 11, where one-third of lessons were very good and some were excellent. The teaching has improved since the time of the last inspection, when 90 per cent of lessons were judged to be at least satisfactory and 60 per cent to be good or very good.

22. Almost all the teaching has a positive impact on the pupils' learning and on the good progress that most of them make. In the vast majority of lessons, the teachers have good knowledge of the subject, they plan well, have appropriate expectations of their pupils and manage the pupils' behaviour well. The teachers' ongoing assessment of how well the pupils are learning is good. All of the above ensures that the pupils work at a good pace, concentrate well and apply a good level of effort. Pupils are making good progress learning new skills and developing their understanding.

23. The subjects in which the teaching is strongest are English, drama and the GNVQ courses. Additionally, the teaching of Spanish in Years 10 and 11 and of music in the Sixth Form is very good. In each of these subjects very good teaching leads to rapid gains in learning. Consistently good teaching was seen in science, art and physical education, and also in history in Years 7 to 11, in mathematics and design and technology in Years 10 to 13 and in music in Years 10 and 11. The teaching of geography and of religious education is satisfactory. Specific strengths in the teaching, in addition to strong subject knowledge, include: the quality of planning in English; the preparation for the GCSE examinations in mathematics; the encouragement of creativity in art; the range of experiences provided in design and technology; lively whole-class teaching in Spanish; good questioning and demonstrations in physical education; and, good use of business links in the GNVQ courses. Relative weaknesses include: insufficient challenge in mathematics in Years 7 and 8; a limited range of teaching approaches in geography; the teaching of speaking in French; and the management of the pupils' behaviour in some lessons in religious education.

24. The main weakness in the teaching is in ICT. In a number of subjects, for example history, geography, physical education and religious education, the teachers do not have sufficient skills in ICT to provide a consistent experience to their pupils. On the other hand, the teaching of ICT skills is good in design and technology, some geography lessons and in modern foreign languages.

25. A number of parents expressed some dissatisfaction with homework. The inspectors found that for many pupils homework makes a positive contribution to the good rate of progress that they are making. Most of the teachers set homework regularly and of a good

quality. However, as not all teachers keep to the published homework timetable, pupils sometimes have little homework, while at other times they suffer from overload, particularly in Years 9 to 11. Also, evidence from talking to pupils and looking at their planners indicates that many of the school's less able pupils receive considerably less homework than other pupils in the same year group.

26. Features of the best teaching (i.e. in approximately one lesson in four) include:

- very strong subject knowledge and expertise;
- very clear explanations and demonstrations;
- good questioning;
- good pace;
- meticulous planning and a good variety of activities;
- high expectations;
- very good focus on key concepts and on technical language.

27. For example, in a science lesson in Year 8, the teacher's very good questioning enabled the pupils to revise recent work very effectively. The combination of very good subject knowledge, very clear explanations and the brisk pace at which the lesson was conducted enabled the pupils to acquire a very good understanding of the reactivity series and of the properties of acids. In a Year 11 English lesson, the teacher's thoroughly detailed planning and strong subject knowledge enabled the class to explore a poem by Ferlinghetti in considerable detail. As a result of the teacher's challenging questioning, the pupils responded with increasing confidence on the poem's tone, structure and its significance to their own lives. In another English lesson, this time in Year 13 and based on the storm scene in "King Lear", the teacher's very good subject knowledge, high expectations and very effective use of varied film and video resources led to very good progress on the students' part in understanding the text as dramatic action.

28. In the small amount of unsatisfactory teaching seen (six lessons in total), the key features were low expectations and difficulties in managing the behaviour of the pupils. For example, in a Year 11 lesson, the teacher accepted work and behaviour that fell short of standards of which the pupils were capable. As a result their concentration was poor, the pace of the lesson too slow and little was learnt.

29. The pupils with special educational needs are taught well, both within the learning support department's literacy programme and across the curriculum in many areas, and consequently they learn well and make good progress. In the best teaching the teachers know the pupils well and draw up detailed plans to meet their needs, have high expectations of behaviour and progress and give clear instructions. For example, in a science lesson considering the transfer of energy the teacher used an analogy of different ways of moving the ball in a rugby match to illustrate ways in which heat transfer could be made. This immediately caught the pupils' attention and meant that they could get a better understanding of the overall concepts involved. As a consequence they quickly moved on to an appropriate experiment on conduction of heat and considerably improved their knowledge. Individual education plans (IEPs) have clear targets and provide helpful advice to staff. They are often used by teachers to identify how best to challenge and support pupils with special educational needs in their lessons.

30. Learning support teachers and learning support assistants provide very good support for the pupils with special educational needs. They are knowledgeable about pupils' needs, often show good subject knowledge and have good relationships with the pupils.

31. Literacy is generally taught effectively, with a good focus on the technical terms in each subject area. This means that pupils use specialist vocabulary with confidence. Teachers also support the development of pupils' skills in reading and writing. In many subjects, the teachers also support the development of pupils' numeracy skills, for example in geography and science, and pupils make reasonable progress.

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

32. The quality and range of the learning experiences offered are satisfactory in all years. There are strengths but also a number of weaknesses at each key stage. The overall quality of the school's curriculum is broadly similar to that described in the previous report.

33. There are a number of key strengths in the curriculum provided by specific subjects, for example the very good range of experiences provided in English, drama and in the GNVQ courses. In English, the teachers are particularly effective in adapting their planning to the needs of different groups of pupils: all pupils in Years 7 to 9 experience work on Shakespeare at different and appropriate levels. Pupils on the GNVQ courses benefit from the good links with local businesses and community organisations. Flexibility in the organisation of the courses allows the students, for example, to choose between three levels at which to study Health and Social Care. Subjects that provide a good range of experiences are mathematics, science, design and technology and Spanish. In all other subjects, with the exception of ICT, the range and quality are satisfactory.

34. The school provides a particularly good range of courses Post-16. The pupils can choose from 20 advanced courses and from four GNVQ courses: Art, Business, Health and Social Care, Tourism and Leisure. There is a well-organised programme of extension studies in Year 12, in which the students study modules of first aid and personal safety, ICT, money management, environmental studies and religious and moral issues, plus optional games. There are, however, several weaknesses in the Post-16 curriculum. The national intention for increased breadth in the Year 12 curriculum is not being met because the vast majority of the students are studying three rather than four subjects at AS level. The school's intention that four subjects will be the norm from September 2001 is appropriate. There is no programme for extension studies and requirements for religious education are not met for all students in Year 13. Good provision is made for the development of key skills (communication, numeracy, ICT) for pupils studying the GNVQ courses; this has yet to be extended to those on the AS courses. The Sixth Form is organised cost-effectively and gives good value for money.

35. The school provides a satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities. A strength in the provision is sport. There are school teams in basketball, rugby, netball, cross-country running, hockey, volleyball and football. The level of participation in these teams and the other sporting activities (gymnastics and badminton) is good. The range of musical and other activities is adequate. There is a choir, concert band, clubs for art and ICT, and Young Enterprise. There is also a good range of trips and residential visits. Additionally, most subjects provide revision classes and workshops in the run-up to GCSE.

36. The main overall weakness in the curriculum is that provision for ICT is patchy in Years 8 to 11. The extent to which the pupils are receiving sufficient experience to support their work in the subject depends too much on the level of the teachers' expertise in history, geography, religious education, physical education and in mathematics. In others, insufficient resources, both computers and subject programmes, limit the extent of the pupils' experience. This is so in science, art and music. In addition, the school has yet to develop a coherent plan for the coverage by all pupils of all the key aspects of ICT. Currently, provision

for the development of their skill in using computers for control is inadequate. Overall, because of this omission and because of the patchy provision, the requirements of the National Curriculum are not being met.

37. There are a number of weaknesses in the timetabling of the curriculum, all of which have some adverse impact on the pupils' learning. For example, the blocking of design and technology with part of the science provision in Years 10 and 11 means that it is very difficult to move pupils from the upper to the lower band and vice versa. Pupils following the work-related courses miss important experiences in their other subjects in the one day per week that they are out of school. Fundamental to the above is that the school has yet to develop a coherent curricular philosophy, particularly for Years 10 and 11. As a result, decisions are made but their implications are not always fully thought through. Another example is the drift towards entering a number of pupils for Certificate of Achievement accreditation rather than GCSE. Although for some this may be appropriate, the current entry of one third of the Year 11 pupils studying geography is questionable. This needs to be more tightly controlled by senior managers.

38. Although the school's provision for careers education and guidance is satisfactory, there is scope for raising its profile in the curriculum. There is a coherent programme of careers modules in Years 7 to 11. This is taught by a small team of teachers within the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme. Resources, including those within the careers library, are adequate though some of the latter are getting out of date. Up to very recently there has been very little in the way of computer programs to help pupils in their research. Pupils are able to have individual or group interviews with members of the careers service by request. Provision of work experience is well organised with a wide range of placements. It lasts, however, for one week in Year 10, rather than two weeks as provided by many schools. There is no similar provision Post-16 except for pupils following the GNVQ courses. The school is in the early stages of developing approaches to work-related learning but there are plans to build on the pilot scheme in Year 10.

39. The school has developed good links with its partner institutions. Transfer arrangements for Year 6 pupils are good and parents value the school's induction programme. The school works closely with local primary schools on a range of good initiatives, such as offering a course for high achievers in mathematics and an able readers club for Year 5, Year 6 and Year 7 pupils. Teachers from Ridgeway take lessons in the primary schools and Year 5 able artists attend special classes at Ridgeway to broaden their understanding. Older students are able to take courses that are not available at Ridgeway at neighbouring schools and vice versa. The NVQ courses in the Sixth Form and the work-related provision in Year 10 could not take place without the good links within the Tamar Valley consortium that enable the pupils to have access to a much wider provision than is possible in one school. Good links with the University of Plymouth are used, for example, to give students at Ridgeway an insight into life in higher education and to provide extra tuition for a pupil aiming for a place at Oxbridge in mathematics. The school has good links with a local Pupil Referral Unit and the two establishments work closely together to provide appropriate support for pupils with a range of difficulties. There is limited specific provision for gifted and talented pupils.

40. The school makes very good curriculum provision for the pupils with special educational needs. All the curricular requirements specified in statements of special educational needs are met and pupils with individual education plans are provided with appropriate opportunities to work towards their targets. Learning support assistants provide very effective support and help to ensure that the pupils with special educational needs make good progress. The learning support centre also provides extra-curricular support for pupils.

41. Provision for developing pupils' literacy skills is very good for pupils with the greatest difficulties in reading and writing, and satisfactory overall. There is a literacy consultative committee which draws subjects together and helps the school develop a planned and coherent approach. The provision for numeracy is satisfactory, with some subjects, such as science and geography, making a good contribution.

42. The provision for personal, social and health education is good. The programme is well planned and co-ordinated by a committed team. It includes sex education and teaching about drugs. The teachers repeat a five-week module and teach one topic to all pupils within a year group. This has resulted in a consistent approach and good quality teaching and learning. Team leaders evaluate and monitor the schemes and look at the pupils' written work. Tutors teach the Post-16 programme and students are also offered useful courses, for example on computer skills.

43. The school's partnership with the community is good and has a positive impact on the pupils' attainment and personal development. The school has established very good links with local employers and these enable pupils and students to prepare for the world of work. They benefit from work experience, work-related learning, work placements and mock interviews. Teachers are also offered work placements. Visitors such as the youth affairs police officer enrich the curriculum.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

44. The school's good provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development at the time of the last inspection has been maintained. Although there is no overall policy for this provision and schemes of work in subjects do not explicitly refer to these aspects, good examples are found in English, art and religious education where teachers encourage a reflective and collaborative approach to their work.

45. Assemblies are used well to reinforce positive attitudes and provide good opportunities for reflection and spiritual development. The majority of assemblies seen during the inspection included an act of prayer which was well received by the pupils. Tutor time, which replaces assembly for the majority of pupils each day, is not used as an opportunity for spiritual development and the school does not yet meet the legal requirements for a daily act of worship.

46. The provision for the spiritual development is satisfactory. A good example of provision was seen in an A-level music lesson where students were encouraged to reflect on the beauty of music and were inspired by their teacher to do so. In religious education pupils have the chance to reflect on spiritual concepts, for example the sanctity of life, and pupils in Year 9 wrote sensitive poetry on the subjects of bullying and fear. In many other subject areas, however, opportunities are not taken to encourage pupils to reflect upon the wonders of what they were studying.

47. The school's provision for the moral development of the pupils is good. The school has a clear code of conduct and the system of rewards and sanctions is well known to the pupils. Teachers reinforce the expectations of good behaviour and assemblies are well used to reinforce positive attitudes. Personal and social education lessons provide clear opportunities for discussion of moral issues such as the misuse of drugs and the effects of bullying and discrimination. In religious education, pupils consider the question of truth and morality, and consider moral issues such as abortion and euthanasia, during their work on the sanctity of life. Pupils have the opportunity to raise money for various charitable organisations such as the recent fundraising for the transitional baby unit and are encouraged to take a lead in this work.

48. The school makes good provision for the social development of the pupils in the range of extra-curricular activities offered. Sporting activities give large numbers of pupils the chance to be involved in competitive team events that depend on co-operation and collaboration. Year 8 pupils are well supported by the week-long residential visit to the activity centre. Drama makes a substantial contribution to the social development of pupils by enabling them to mix and work together. In personal and social education and in religious education, pupils have the opportunity to consider the questions surrounding relationships and marriage, and in music pupils work together to produce performances for others to appreciate. Pupils have relatively few opportunities to take responsibility around the school, however, and the school council is not yet fully effective.

49. The school makes good provision for the cultural development of the pupils. Artwork is displayed around the building, and the school has benefited from the presence of a visiting artist. There are good links with professional theatre groups and touring opera groups that enable pupils to benefit from their expertise. The opportunities for pupils to experience other cultures can be found in several subjects, for example in history where pupils can investigate the lives of North American Indians, and in music where the music of other countries, such as Indonesia, is studied. Opportunities for visits to France and Morocco, and to go skiing are provided, whilst a visit by a European theatre company brings Europe to Plympton. Good links are being forged with an African School, but there is a lack of positive multicultural images around the school.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

50. Overall, the school has satisfactory procedures to ensure the pupils' welfare, health and safety, but there has been limited development in this area since the last inspection. The school's arrangements for child protection are good and a clear policy is in place. A deputy head and most heads of year have received comprehensive training and carry out their duties effectively. Most other adults working in the school have received basic awareness training. The appropriate arrangements for first aid are in place. The school has good procedures to treat pupils who are injured, although the accommodation for pupils who are unwell is barely adequate.

51. The school pays due attention to health and safety. The premises manager handles the day-to-day management of health and safety issues effectively. Appropriate systems are in place to report and deal with potential hazards. There is regular monitoring through the health and safety committee with pupil and staff representatives. This reviews ongoing issues and reports to the governors. Pupils, teachers and the caretaking staff make regular checks of the premises and risk assessments are undertaken. Various health and safety concerns were discussed with the school during the inspection, including:

- the fire alarm system in the new building is not yet connected to reception;
- the testing of portable electrical appliances;
- no soap for pupils.

52. The inspection team shares the concerns of parents and pupils about the arrangements at lunchtime. Conditions are far from ideal. Pupils have very few places to sit down to eat and socialise and the layout of the site makes supervision difficult. However, the school has plans to build a new canteen and the parents are working hard to raise funds to improve the environment.

53. The school is actively involved in the Healthy Schools initiative. Relevant sex and drugs education forms part of the structured PSHE programme. In addition, the school

invites two Youth Workers to run lunchtime sessions with a particular emphasis on relationships and sexual health. The school has established valuable links with the youth affairs police officer, who talks to the pupils about drugs, crime and punishment and rights and responsibilities. The school has a sound anti-bullying policy and clear anti-bullying statements are printed in the pupils' planners. Bullying is discussed in the PSHE programme and pupils say that incidents of bullying are usually dealt with effectively.

54. The procedures for assessment and for monitoring the progress of pupils with special educational needs are very good and the annual review process is extremely thorough. Elsewhere in the school, the assessment of pupils' attainment and progress is satisfactory overall. Procedures are good in some subjects, for example in physical education and English, and sound in most other subjects, but unsatisfactory in ICT where assessment lacks rigour and does not give a clear view of pupils' attainment. The school does not keep a close enough check on pupils' academic progress across the curriculum and has no clear view of whether pupils are making sufficient progress in relation to their prior attainment. More could be done to support pupils in their learning. For example, the school could make better use of the information gained through assessment to set targets for pupils and to plan the next steps in their learning.

55. The school's procedures for monitoring personal development and promoting good behaviour are generally satisfactory. Clear systems of rewards and sanctions are in place and pupils and parents value the system of commendations and merits. Most teachers have established clear classroom routines to encourage pupils to behave appropriately. In some subject areas, such as the English department, the careful match of teachers to classes where behaviour is potentially challenging has minimised disruptive behaviour. A few teachers struggle to maintain discipline and would benefit from more training in dealing with anti-social behaviour. Appropriate sanctions are in place and many of the senior staff, subject teachers, tutors and heads of year are involved in supporting pupils with behavioural and other personal difficulties. The school's monitoring system provides an overview of pupils' attitudes and behaviour but it is not always clear who is responsible for co-ordinating discipline and for providing support for the minority of pupils who do not respond to the school's rewards and sanctions.

56. The school's procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are good. Procedures for registration meet requirements and tutors follow up unexplained absences. The heads of year work closely with the educational welfare officer to monitor and support pupils whose attendance is a cause for concern. The school has set an attendance target of 93 per cent and awards certificates for very good attendance.

57. The support and guidance, for pupils in Years 9, 11 and in the Sixth Form, about their next steps are satisfactory, and tutors provide general support for pupils in all year groups. They often talk to individual pupils and many check planners during tutor time. Post-16 students receive very good educational and personal support from their tutors and heads of year.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

58. The vast majority of parents and carers have confidence in the school. They generally expressed positive views about the school at the pre-inspection parents' meeting and through the OFSTED questionnaires. They feel that the teaching is good and that their children like school. Parents say that their children are expected to work hard and are making good progress. They say that if they have concerns or problems the staff are very approachable. They value the extra literacy support that some children receive. A significant

minority of parents have concerns about disruptive behaviour and homework. The inspection team found that behaviour is satisfactory overall but a few lessons are disrupted by the behaviour of a small minority. There was also some justification for the concern about homework in that the timetable is not always followed. Some parents are unhappy about the arrangements at lunchtime and the inspection team found that there are few places for pupils to sit down to eat and to socialise.

59. The school has satisfactory links with its parents and carers. The vast majority of parents feel that they can contact the school and that staff respond quickly to any concerns they may have. Parents value the information sessions provided, such as the evening on "Making the Most of Key Stage 4".

60. The impact of the parents' involvement on the work of the school is satisfactory. There is an appropriate home school agreement which gives useful guidance. Parent governors are supportive of the school and help to shape its future and the parent teacher association works hard to raise funds to enhance the school environment. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are closely involved through the work of the learning support department and this contributes to the good progress of the pupils concerned.

61. Nearly a third of parents who returned the questionnaire felt that the school does not work closely with parents and over a quarter said that they would like more information about how their children are getting on. The quality of the information which the school provides to parents about their children's academic progress is unsatisfactory. This is because pupils' annual reports do not give parents enough information about their progress and how their children can improve their work. Last year some reports were sent out on the last day of term, giving parents little opportunity to discuss the reports with relevant staff. Letters about pupils' success in the school's monitoring system are only sent to parents whose children have done particularly well or who are causing concern and the school could do more to keep all parents fully informed about how their children are getting on. Pupils' planners could be used more effectively as a means of communication between home and school. The annual parent consultations provide parents with a valuable opportunity to discuss progress with subject teachers. New parents receive good information through helpful meetings and documentation. The prospectus and annual governors' reports are informative, but the prospectus and annual governors' report to parents do not contain all the information they should. Brief newsletters celebrate some of the pupils' successes and give details of future events.

62. The parents' contribution to their children's learning is satisfactory. The school values the help given by parents who assist, for example, in the learning support department or in sporting events.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

63. The headteacher and key staff lead the school effectively. They have a clear sense of purpose and direction and they focus their work on the quality of teaching and the standards which pupils are achieving. The headteacher is ambitious for high standards and continuing improvement and has a positive and optimistic view of the school's future development. There has been a detailed consideration of the school's aims since the last inspection and the new aims are clear and well defined, and are reflected in much of the school's daily life and work.

64. In most areas, effective delegation ensures that staff with management responsibilities are able to make a good contribution to the direction of the school. For example, subject leaders in English and technology give a very clear sense of direction and

purpose to their teams and the managers of special educational needs, physical education, GNVQ courses and mathematics provide good leadership. Other subject leaders manage their teams competently. They have high expectations for pupils' and students' achievement and deploy their staff effectively so that many classes experience high quality teaching. This leads to good levels of achievement. Senior staff support the work of middle managers, although they could do more to help them to share their good practice with each other.

65. Senior staff and some heads of department are establishing a programme for monitoring and evaluating teaching and have successfully taken steps to bring about improvement in areas where teaching was unsatisfactory. The school has made a good start on introducing performance management. These actions, together with a well-defined process for ensuring that all staff have the opportunity to continue their professional development, have made a good contribution to the way in which teaching has continued to improve since the time of the last inspection and makes a very positive impact on pupils and their learning.

66. Since the last inspection there have been considerable changes to the governing body, with a new chair of governors and many new members. The governing body is therefore at a stage of transition and is currently making very rapid progress in its contribution to the work of the school. Governors fulfil their statutory duties adequately and monitor the overall progress of the school. They have a general view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are developing their procedures so that they can be more effective in evaluating the work of the school and helping to shape its improvement. There is a strong committee structure and the governors manage their business well. They are developing their knowledge of the school through a system of linking governors with subjects. They are kept reasonably well informed with reports from senior staff, but are not sufficiently proactive in requesting specific information.

67. The school successfully tackled most of the areas for improvement identified at the time of its last inspection. Since then, there has been a programme of review which ensures that the senior team and the governing body keep the implementation of policies and aspects of the school's work under review. The reviews are becoming more rigorous and the current development plan is well focused on broad priorities for improvement. Currently, the detailed action planning is at an early stage and the school does not yet make enough use of the analysis of data about pupil performance to set challenging targets, evaluate different aspects of its work and pinpoint areas for improvement. In many subjects there are clear priorities for development and all subjects have identified appropriate areas to work on. Heads of department are effective in taking action to bring about improvement and some, for example in the English and technology departments, have a particularly strong commitment to continuing improvement. The will and capability to move forward are evident in nearly every area of the school. These factors, together with the headteacher's enthusiasm and commitment to improvement, contribute significantly to the school's capacity to sustain and build on its improvements.

68. Finances are well managed. The school has recovered from its budget deficit and is now looking to carry forward a small surplus. Money is carefully allocated to priorities and developments in each subject. In the school as a whole, money is effectively targeted to the overarching priorities, but the lack of detailed action planning means that it is not possible to allocate finances to priorities more tightly. The money allocated to the school for specific purposes, such as for the support of pupils with special educational needs and for staff training, is well used. Financial control is good and the principles of best value are appropriately applied, for example in comparing costs and spending with other local schools. The school is beginning to make use of technology, for example, the timetable is computerised and staff have recently been given email addresses, but some departments,

including history, science and religious education, are not yet able to use technology effectively.

69. The school is well staffed, with a good balance of experience and expertise among teachers. There is a clear commitment to the training of staff and this is shown in the good procedures for inducting new staff and for supporting staff in their first and second year of teaching. The induction of learning support assistants is particularly good and enables them to work very effectively. The school participates in the training of trainee teachers and they are well supported in their departments and make a positive contribution to the work of the school. Whole-staff training days are appropriately focused on the needs of the school. As a result, most classes are taught by teachers with good subject knowledge, experience increasingly good quality teaching and learn effectively.

70. The Learning Resource Centre forms a good central resource to support pupils' studies, and is more effectively used, with better control systems, than at the time of the last inspection. Resources for learning are at least adequate in all areas of the curriculum with the exception of provision for ICT. Aside from Post-16 students, who have their own dedicated provision, and technology, which has easier access than other subjects, most departments have insufficient provision for pupils to access ICT easily in lessons. The school has shown a clear commitment to improving ICT and the two very recently opened computer suites have improved the overall provision. However, at the transitional stage at which the inspection took place, most subjects are unable to incorporate computer work because of the lack of resources within the departments. This means that there are limited opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in ICT and their achievement is therefore unsatisfactory. This also has a detrimental effect on the work in some subjects, for example music, where there are insufficient resources for technology.

71. The school's accommodation is unsatisfactory, in spite of improvements since the time of the last inspection. A new teaching block has been built and security has been upgraded, but much of the accommodation is comprised of old buildings in poor condition and mobile classrooms. Accommodation for the humanities subjects has improved, situated as they are in the new teaching block. However, deficiencies in accommodation restrict learning opportunities in several curriculum areas. For example English lacks a central base and secure storage facilities and accommodation in mobile classrooms makes it difficult for staff to use technology equipment, such as videos and computers. Mathematics classrooms are widely dispersed. Art and drama lack sufficient space. Poor facilities, particularly the uneven hard play areas, restrict some activities in physical education. These deficiencies in accommodation do not have a significantly adverse impact upon standards, because teachers work hard to compensate for them. However, the buildings are under increasing pressure from a growing school population, and their poor state has a negative impact upon the morale of teachers and pupils. Although there are plans to improve the teaching accommodation, its present condition remains unsatisfactory.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

72. In order to improve further the education provided and the standards achieved, senior managers and governors should:

(1) Improve standards in ICT, by:

- planning and co-ordinating the contribution to ICT in each subject area;
- ensuring that the full programme of study is covered;
- continuing the programme of staff training;
- continuing to increase the number of computers and range of programs, particularly in subject areas;
- improving assessment of pupils' attainment and progress.

See paragraphs 10, 24, 54, 96, 103, 117, 130, 132, 133 and 136.

(2) Improve the monitoring and support of pupils' academic development, by:

- developing consistency in approaches to assessment;
- making effective use of data to set targets for pupils;
- using the current monitoring procedures to monitor progress towards academic targets;
- using assessment information to inform the planning of pupils' work.

See paragraphs 54, 96, 105, 110, 122 and 130.

(3) Improve the behaviour of a small minority of pupils, by:

- developing a programme of support for pupils who are not responding to the school's rewards and sanctions;
- developing the roles and responsibilities of heads of year and other staff involved in pupil support;
- sharing good practice between subjects;
- providing further training for some teachers.

See paragraphs 17, 27, 55, 95, 109, 116, 155 and 156.

(4) Improve the information to parents about their children's progress, by:

- giving parents clear information about the standards their children are reaching, the progress they are making and what they need to do in order to improve.

See paragraph 61.

Accommodation: the school should continue to bring inadequacies in accommodation to the notice of the Local Education Authority. (See paragraph 71.)

73. Other weaknesses which are less serious but which should be considered for inclusion in the school's action plan include:

- lack of consistency in homework (see paragraph 25);
- insufficient analysis of data to evaluate the school's performance and pinpoint areas for improvement (see paragraph 67);
- limited opportunities overall for pupils to take responsibility (see paragraph 19).

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	189
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	62

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	23	44	28	3	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth Form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	941	196
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	91	

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth Form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	29	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	173	0

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	40
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	56

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.3
National comparative data	5.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.6
National comparative data	0.4

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
	2000	99	78	177

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	52	62	68
	Girls	54	48	42
	Total	106	110	110
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	60 (70)	62 (74)	62 (64)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	12 (29)	28 (39)	18 (22)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	51	72	69
	Girls	59	62	62
	Total	110	134	131
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	63 (68)	76 (78)	74 (57)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	18 (29)	47 (43)	35 (26)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	86	102	188

GCSE results		5 or more grades A*-C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	30	78	80
	Girls	54	98	99
	Total	84	176	179
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	45 (46)	94 (95)	95 (97)
	National	47 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	39 (39)
	National	38 (38)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	14	93
	National		n/a

Attainment at the end of the Sixth Form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	24	23	47

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	17	16	17 (16)	4	4	4 (3)
National	18	19	18 (18)	3	3	3 (3)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	2
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	3
White	1097
Any other minority ethnic group	20

	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	12	2
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	64.7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.6

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	26
Total aggregate hours worked per week	617

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	22.8
Key Stage 4	22.6

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	2,780,681
Total expenditure	2,736,038
Expenditure per pupil	2,419
Balance brought forward from previous year	17,299
Balance carried forward to next year	61,942

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1137
Number of questionnaires returned	149

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	34	52	9	3	1
My child is making good progress in school.	40	48	8	3	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	17	52	15	9	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	23	50	20	5	2
The teaching is good.	23	62	6	3	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	30	42	21	5	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	49	39	6	2	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	47	46	6	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	30	36	28	3	3
The school is well led and managed.	36	41	7	7	9
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	37	42	13	3	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	21	46	11	4	17

Other issues raised by parents

Parents raised concern about the arrangements for pupils at lunchtimes because their children have few places to sit and eat and the site is difficult to supervise. They showed appreciation of the good support for pupils who have special educational needs, particularly the support for those whose literacy skills are weak.

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

ENGLISH

74. Attainment on entry of the current Year 7 is broadly in line with the average nationally for pupils gaining level 4 or above. At the end of Key Stage 3 in the 2000 national tests and in teacher assessments standards were in line with the national average for pupils gaining level 5. However, few pupils reached the higher levels, so results overall were below the national average and well below similar schools. From the lessons observed across Years 7 to 9, and the scrutiny of pupils' work, pupils make good progress and their achievement is very good as a result of very good teaching, so that standards are above average by the end of Year 9. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and achieve to the best of their ability.

75. GCSE results for 2000 in English and English literature were above the national average for pupils gaining both A*-C and A*-G grades and above average for similar schools. This represents a very good level of achievement since Year 9. In lessons and in pupils' work there is a similar picture of above average attainment. Boys' results at both key stages compare favourably with the national average for boys and there is no significant under achievement by girls or boys. Pupils with special educational needs continue to achieve well.

76. A-level English literature results in 2000 were in line with the national average for students gaining A and B grades and above average for the percentage gaining A-E grades. In lessons and in the work seen the standards of attainment reflect these results, with some very high attainment in Year 13, especially in some of the literary-critical essays.

77. The quality of teaching is very good. It is characterised by a combination of strong, secure subject knowledge, well-planned sequences of work, explicit sharing of assessment criteria and detailed and diagnostic marking. As a result, the quality of learning, progress and achievement are good. Pupils are challenged to think and are enabled to acquire new knowledge. They improve their skills in using language and increase their appreciation and understanding of literature. Homework is set and monitored regularly. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in English lessons are consistently very good and often excellent. In Key Stage 3 they carry out self-assessments at the end of each unit of work and set targets for improvement. This is a potentially valuable exercise, but the targets are sometimes too numerous and unfocused.

78. There is effective speaking and listening in many lessons, often led by very good teacher questioning and commentary, drawing out a range of perceptive contributions from pupils. In a Year 9 lesson, for example, the class was challenged by their reading of 'Macbeth' to discuss complex ideas of Shakespeare's use of language. Pupils often collaborate in small groups to prepare and present their work to their class or other audiences. Good examples range from Year 9 presentations on witchcraft, as part of their work on 'Macbeth', to Year 13 A-level groups performing a 15-minute 'King Lear' to a Year 7 audience. Key Stage 4 pupils consistently achieve good results in the range of assessed oral tasks they undertake as part of the GCSE English course.

79. The department's core curriculum ensures that all pupils read a range of good quality literature, including work by pre-twentieth century authors, Shakespeare and other major writers, including a particularly wide range of poetry. Pupils read texts from different cultures and traditions, often through extracts in Key Stage 3 and as part of their set book studies for GCSE. A-level students go on to develop considerable knowledge and understanding as they

read, analyse and interpret an increasingly demanding and stimulating range of texts. The full potential of using ICT-based texts has yet to be realised in the department's work.

80. Pupils are encouraged from the start of Key Stage 3 to draft, proof-read and revise their writing, taking note of teachers' marking and setting their own targets for improvement. They write in an increasingly wide range of forms and for different audiences. Year 9 pupils, for example, made picture story books of 'The Tempest' for Year 6 readers. Pupils in Year 8 wrote 'stream of consciousness' monologues as characters from 'The Merchant of Venice', some even managing to imitate Shakespearean metrical patterns. Written GCSE coursework shows how well pupils progress, developing their skills within a range of styles and forms. The quality of writing by A-level students is often of exceptional quality in literary critical essays. Many pupils make very good use of computers to produce and publish an interesting range of leaflets, brochures and posters. A wide range of pupils' written work is displayed effectively in classrooms. A particular strength is the quality and volume of poetry written by pupils and published regularly in the school's own anthology and in the Young Writers national collection.

81. The recent appointment of a literacy co-ordinator has given fresh impetus to cross-curricular initiatives and to regular meetings of a literacy consultative committee. As a result, most departments are making good use of displays of subject-specific vocabulary. In a Year 10 science lesson, for example, the teacher emphasised the correct spelling of technical vocabulary of parts of the respiratory system. There is an effective programme of support for those Year 7 pupils needing help in basic literacy skills. Elsewhere, pupils with special needs make good progress with spelling, punctuation and grammar and achieve well.

82. English is a strength in the school. The leadership and management of the department are very good, engendering a strong sense of direction and teamwork. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are now in place and the department is beginning to make good use of a range of assessment data to track pupils' progress and achievement and to set targets. Reports to parents are satisfactory, but they could be improved by relating comments more specifically to programmes of study and assessment criteria. Teachers work hard to create a good environment for learning in accommodation that is far from satisfactory. Opportunities to use television, video equipment and computers for example, are restricted by the siting and condition of the mobile classrooms.

83. Since the last inspection, examination results have fluctuated in a way which reflects the differences in pupils' attainment on entry to the school. The department has improved the overall quality of teaching and developed its curriculum effectively in response to national changes and initiatives. There has, however, been no improvement in accommodation.

Drama

84. Drama is a very popular subject throughout the school, taught separately from English at both Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the Sixth Form. Standards of attainment have been consistently good over a number of years. In the most recent GCSE and A-level examinations, however, standards of attainment were below the national average for pupils gaining the higher grades because fewer higher attaining pupils took drama courses.

85. From the small sample of lessons seen, mostly in Years 10 to 13, the quality of teaching is consistently very good and standards are high. Teachers are experienced and have a secure knowledge of their subject. Pupils respond well and work most effectively in mixed groups, interpreting scripts and devising pieces of theatre through imaginative uses of voice, movement and still images. This was shown particularly well in Years 10 and 11 lessons where pupils co-operated most effectively in groups to interpret key scenes from

Shakespeare plays. They worked with considerable concentration and feeling to create a range of powerful still images. It is clear that pupils benefit from having regular drama lessons throughout the school because they make consistently good progress in their learning and skills development. By the time they reach the Sixth Form, their work for AS and A-level is often of exceptionally high quality, amply illustrated in the Year 12 devised theatre work and in the Year 13 duologues.

86. Drama makes a very significant contribution to the life of the whole school, both in developing pupils' personal, social and cultural learning and also in providing a good range of opportunities for involvement in extra-curricular theatre activities and performances.

87. The department is well managed and makes a major contribution to the creative arts department and to pupils' personal development. It has maintained the strengths described at the time of the last inspection.

MATHEMATICS

88. Results in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in mathematics in 2000 were below the national average and well below similar schools. Although the proportion of pupils reaching level 5, the nationally expected level, was in line with the national average, few pupils gained higher grades. Boys' performance was better than girls. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school was below national averages, so the Key Stage 3 results show a sound level of achievement for most pupils.

89. On the evidence of the pupils' work and the lessons observed, the standards currently reached by the oldest pupils in Key Stage 3 are in line with national expectations. These standards reflect the stronger cohort than last year and the sound teaching which pupils experience. The work covers all of the attainment targets with an appropriate emphasis given to using and applying mathematics. Pupils can identify number patterns and solve linear equations and inequalities. They identify the symmetries of different shapes and higher attaining pupils can solve simultaneous equations and use trigonometry to calculate the angles and sides of a right-angled triangle.

90. GCSE results in mathematics have remained steady in terms of average points score but have not increased in line with national trends. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C grades has fluctuated but the percentage achieving these grades in 2000 was in line with the national average and in line with similar schools. Boys performed significantly better than girls in terms of A*-C grades, A*-G grades and the average point score. In relation to their Key Stage 3 test scores, pupils are doing better than would have been expected and their achievement is good.

91. From the pupils' work and the lessons observed, the standards of work at the end of Key Stage 4, are above expectations as a result of good teaching. The work covers all of the attainment targets with an appropriate emphasis on number work especially for the least able. Mental arithmetic skills are well practised but drawing and construction work is less well developed. Pupils can identify general terms of a linear sequence and solve simultaneous equations using a variety of methods. Higher attaining pupils can convert recurring decimals to fractions, solve algebraic equations and sketch graphs of sine, cosine and tangent functions for any angle. Pupils with special educational needs in both key stages make good progress.

92. Results in the GCE A-level examinations are now above the national average and all of the candidates entered in 2000 achieved certification (grade C or higher) and over half of them achieved the highest grades (grade A and B). There was little difference between the

performance of girls and boys. In relation to their earlier performance at GCSE, their achievement is above expectations. On the basis of the work seen and the lessons observed, standards of work in the Sixth Form are above average. Students achieve well. They can solve algebraic fractions and write expressions as a sum of partial fractions. They have a good understanding of the binomial theorem, make use of vectors to resolve forces and can calculate the variance and standard deviation of a set of data.

93. Overall the quality of teaching and learning observed were judged to be satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and enjoy positive working relations with their pupils who are productive and want to do well. They use questions well to involve pupils, as in a Year 7 lesson where pupils were challenged to decide whether statements such as "All squares are rectangles" were true or false. In Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form, teachers have a good knowledge of the syllabus and examination requirements so that the work is much more focused than at Key Stage 3. Teaching methods are appropriate, so that in a Year 11 class pupils were actively engaged in mapping out points one metre from the wall or two metres from the teacher, thus helping them to better understand the concept of locus of points. However, some weaknesses in teaching and learning remain, so that in a significant minority of classes, the lesson gets off to a slow start and curriculum time is lost. Pupils' spread of ability is not always catered for and misunderstandings are not always identified and acted upon. In Key Stage 3, especially in Year 7 and Year 8, there is insufficient challenge and rigour especially in the top sets where teaching takes little account of what pupils already know. In a Year 8 lesson, for example, pupils confirmed that they had already done the work on angles in Year 7 and in the primary school.

94. There is little observable difference between the performance of girls and boys in the classroom, although girls are less confident in their ability and underestimate their likely performance in external examinations. Pupils with special educational needs are sensitively supported by teachers and support assistants who have a good understanding of their individual needs and help them to make progress.

95. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good throughout the age range. In the majority of lessons, pupils are positive about their work and productive in their lessons. They behave well and respond to challenges when these are presented to them. In a relatively small number of lessons, pupils have poor attitudes to their work and lack perseverance, determination and commitment. In these lessons, pupils' learning is at best sound and occasionally unsatisfactory.

96. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and the department has good curricular links with partner primary schools so that Year 5 pupils who are high attainers in mathematics regularly visit the school to undertake extension work. Assessment procedures are well developed but assessment is not linked to National Curriculum levels so it is difficult to identify individual pupils' strengths and weaknesses in terms of levels and attainment targets. The provision for ICT is unsatisfactory and limited access to computer facilities does not allow the department to use ICT to support the teaching of mathematics.

97. The provision for numeracy across the curriculum is satisfactory. Although there is no coherent framework to develop pupils' numeracy skills in a consistent manner, there is effective work in some subjects. For example, pupils make good use of dates and timelines in history and their numeracy skills are also used in GNVQ lessons. Algebraic skills are developed in science where pupils substitute in formulae for speed and pressure, and in music where they look at time signatures and rhythm patterns. In geography, pupils make good use of climate graphs and line charts and they collect, present and interpret data for their coursework in Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form. Spatial skills are developed particularly

well in art where Year 9 pupils undertake a project to create virtual worlds building upon their experience of computer games. The work provides a useful vehicle for using perspective in an innovative and motivating way making use of virtual reality and the work of Escher.

98. The leadership and management of the subject are good. The head of department has a clear vision for the development of mathematics and provides a strong sense of direction for the department, reflecting the aims and values of the school. In a relatively short period of time, he has engendered a strong team spirit and a shared commitment to improvement. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching are undertaken at regular intervals but the available data is not yet sufficiently analysed to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

99. The department's improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Attainment in examinations remains similar to that reported in the last inspection although attainment in the Sixth Form has improved considerably. The use of ICT to support teaching in the classroom remains inadequate and there is still insufficient analysis of pupils' progress or 'value added', but the department is now well placed to continue to improve and to raise standards.

SCIENCE

100. The pupils' results in the 2000 National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 were in line with the national average, but well below the average for similar schools. During the last three years, National Curriculum test results have varied from below to above the national average; these variations reflect the pupils' achievement on entry to the school. The current standard of work of the oldest pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with the national average. Given their attainment on entry, the achievement of these pupils, including progress over the key stage and gains in lessons, is good. The progress of the pupils with special educational needs is also good. The major factor contributing to this good achievement is good teaching. Performance at Key Stage 3 is similar to that at the time of the last inspection.

101. The percentage of pupils attaining GCSE A* to C grades in double award science in the year 2000 was below the national average. Performance was also below the average of pupils' other subjects in the school. During the last three years, GCSE results have fluctuated, again reflecting the standards pupils reached at the end of Key Stage 3. The current standard of attainment of the oldest pupils at Key Stage 4 is just above the national average, as a result of good teaching. Given that these pupils were above average at the end of Year 9, their achievement and progress over time are satisfactory. Their progress is limited by: insufficient co-ordination across the three sciences; a lack of formal monitoring of overall academic progress; and the irregular nature of Year 11 time-tabling which results sometimes in gaps of 11 days between blocks of work. The progress of the pupils with special educational needs is good. Achievement at Key Stage 4 is slightly better than it was at the time of the last inspection; the achievement of girls is also better and is now similar to that of boys.

102. In the A-level examinations in year 2000, the results in chemistry were well above the national average, and results in biology and physics just above. During the last three years there has been improvement in the A-level science results in terms of points scores and the percentage of A and B grades. This is attributed to a change to modular courses, which are more suited to the students' needs, and to a gain in confidence on the part of the teachers as a result of in-service training.

103. At Key Stage 3 the majority of the pupils have a sound knowledge of the prescribed scientific facts and the higher attaining pupils are developing a secure understanding of

scientific concepts such as continuous and discontinuous variation, the reactivity series of metals, and speed. At Key Stage 4 the majority of the pupils have added to their knowledge and understanding; the higher attainers, for example, understand how the structure of particular blood vessels is related to their function, about rates of reaction, and about the generation of electrical power. At Key Stage 3 the majority of the pupils are satisfactorily learning the skills of scientific investigation. At the end of Key Stage 4, many are competent in planning, carrying out and evaluating scientific investigations. They produce some very good quality reports. The Sixth Formers carry out practical work proficiently and also produce reports of a very good quality. Throughout the school the pupils make good use of charts and graphs. The higher attainers are learning to apply mathematical principles competently to science. For example, in Year 9 calculating pressure, and in Year 11 using standard formulae to calculate electrical resistance, current, voltage and power from given sets of data. In the Sixth Form many students apply mathematical concepts competently and confidently. The majority of pupils produce good quality written work and are learning to use and spell scientific vocabulary effectively. Insufficient use is made of ICT in support of work in science: this is largely due to shortages of equipment.

104. The teaching is good throughout the school. Lessons are well planned and prepared. The teachers' subject knowledge is very good and they have a good knowledge of the requirements of the external examinations. They give clear expositions and in the vast majority of lessons engage pupils' attention, enabling them quickly to gain scientific knowledge and understanding. They question pupils skilfully, encouraging them to think through ideas for themselves. In many lessons, teachers show enthusiasm, provide challenging tasks, and work at a good pace; as a result pupils' interest is stimulated and they work hard to complete tasks. An example of a very good lesson was one on the respiratory system, with middle ability pupils in Year 10. The teacher sensitively dissected the respiratory system of a pig, and aided by a very good quality drawing on the blackboard, she very clearly explained the structure and function of each part. During the procedure a pupil competently labelled the diagram, the teacher ensuring correct spellings and encouraging the pupils to learn them. The pupils were interested and very attentive. They quickly learnt the names of the parts of the system and understood how the structure of each is related to its function. Pupils were able to complete challenging written work on the topic with confidence, thus reinforcing their learning. Unsatisfactory aspects of teaching in a minority of lessons include a failure to engage and motivate pupils and low expectations, resulting in unsatisfactory behaviour and a slow pace of learning.

105. The department is competently managed. Strategies employed to raise standards include: monitoring teaching and offering help to particular teachers, as needed; guiding teaching by using past assessment data to predict pupils' achievement at the next stage; and, analysing 'value added' from Key Stage 3 to GCSE in order to identify shortcomings in practice for future remedy. However, there is insufficient formal sharing of assessment information between the three subjects, and amongst teachers dealing with the same classes. The practice of setting personal targets for pupils, formally monitoring their academic progress, and intervening in cases of perceived underachievement, is not established. The lack of ICT equipment to support learning was highlighted in the last inspection report and has not yet been remedied.

ART AND DESIGN

106. GCSE A*-C results showed a marked upward trend after the last report and in 1999 reached the national average. They fell somewhat in 2000 to below average, but were still much higher than at the time of the previous inspection. Many pupils' GCSE work had been affected by staffing changes which adversely impacted on the continuity of their examination studies. Recent Sixth Form results for the relatively small number of A-level students have shown a wide spread of attainment, but overall were below average in 2000 for the proportion gaining A or B grades. GNVQ students attained a good percentage of merits and distinctions.

107. The range of pupils' current attainment by the end of Year 9 is in line with the standards expected nationally. Pupils' achievements are often good considering the weaknesses with which many entered the school. Writing, in particular, often reduces the quality of some of Year 9 work, particularly that of boys. Attainment in the present Year 7 is better with completed work showing standards above average in some aspects of pupils' work. Sketchbooks, for example, which in higher years do not provide a good record of pupils' progress, often show good learning and skills development in Year 7. Pupils experience a wide range of media in which they develop good confidence and competence by Year 9. Drawing is a particular strength which underpins other attainment well. In an innovative project about perspective in Year 9, for example, pupils' good drawing abilities are instrumental in producing some good responses to the original stimulus. The project relates to computer-games, in which perspective plays an important visual role, and this is very successful in motivating pupils to do well.

108. Pupils' standards of work in the current GCSE years also now match the national expectation and pupils are achieving well. Key features of pupils' strengths lie in their abilities to think creatively and make personal responses to stimuli from an early age. This produces a good degree of individuality from the start of Year 10 and contributes well to the creativity of their course work. Most pupils are also well able to work relatively independently from early Year 10. Examples of high quality work are found in both two- and three-dimensional areas. Some very good ceramic sculptures of head and shoulders from Year 10, for example, which have a bronze-cast effect, show an unusually high degree of individual expressiveness in their features. Many of Year 11 pupils' interpretations of still-life observations in a range of media show very good progress across their examination course, with some pupils' attainment now showing potential to attract higher grades. Post-16 students' work again shows the range of attainment expected for their A-level, AS level and GNVQ courses and students achieve well. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in both Key Stages 3 and 4. Some Key Stage 4 pupils achieve particularly well, reaching the nationally expected level in GCSE.

109. Most pupils' attitudes to art throughout the school are positive, particularly in Years 7 and 8, and those who continue to GCSE. Year 9 pupils' attitudes are more mixed, especially where their studies have been affected by the staffing turbulence mentioned. In a small minority of cases, the challenging behaviour of some boys works against their own learning. Even in these classes, though, most pupils can ignore distractions and learn well, sometimes despite very overcrowded accommodation, with little space to work in.

110. The quality of teaching is good throughout the school. Over a quarter of teaching seen was very good. This strong teaching by the new team is the most important factor in pupils' good progress and achievement in art. Teachers have a good balance of individual arts skills themselves, and a genuine interest in their subject which they transmit effectively to their pupils. They plan projects with keen attention to pupils' own interests, as with the Year 9 perspectives example, so that lesson contexts engage their pupils, who consequently

achieve well. The pace of lessons is very good, with difficult 60-minute periods used to maximum effect. Teachers manage classes very well, so that poorer behaviour seldom interrupts individuals' learning, and even then does not spread. All pupils, including those with special educational needs and those with particular talent, progress well because of teachers' sensitive recognition of individuals' needs. This leads to high levels of challenge for pupils who can make their own decisions about their work, and good support for less able pupils. Many lessons show very good, well-considered inclusion of the cultural and spiritual aspects of pupils' learning. A Sixth Form discussion about creativity and destruction, related to a recent exhibition, generated interesting debate and abstract notions of identity and self are well integrated into Year 9 work on self-portraiture. Marking is extensive, with helpful written and oral comments, but pupils do not always successfully incorporate advice into subsequent work. Teachers could usefully involve pupils more in the assessment of their work, ensuring that meaningful, individual targets are set and achieved. At present, despite good advice, pupils are often unsure what to do, specifically, to raise their work to a higher standard.

111. The issues raised in the last report have largely been resolved. The requirements of the National Curriculum are now met. Standards at both key stages have improved significantly. The carousel arrangements at Key Stage 3 have been removed leading to much higher standards by Year 9. Accommodation, particularly in one room, is now unsatisfactory because class numbers have risen to an inappropriate level for the size of the room. This restricts the nature and scale of what can be done in the curriculum. Inequality of opportunity exists between those pupils in smaller and in larger groups learning there. Computers are inadequate for current curriculum demands and are not in regular use as creative tools for pupils' immediate use in lessons.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

112. From the work seen and in lessons, standards reached by the oldest pupils in Key Stage 3 currently are about average overall, with some good attainment in resistant materials. In all other materials areas standards are in line with those expected for this age group. Achievement is sound. The great majority of pupils in Year 9 are able to use and understand a design procedure in the solution to a particular problem. They are also capable of using tools, materials and appropriate techniques to produce a system or artefact of at least satisfactory quality.

113. Since the last inspection results in GCSE have improved and last year the number of pupils gaining higher grades (A*-C) in food technology, graphics, systems, textiles and resistant materials were well above the national average and reflect the improvement in recent years within the department. Girls performed extremely well in last years' examinations, out-performing boys overall and achieving results well above the national average in food and textiles. Boys did well in resistant materials, systems and graphics in relation to their other subjects, but did less well in food and textiles. Pupils reach good standards in designing and making in resistant materials, systems and control, food, graphics and textiles. The majority of pupils in Key Stage 4, including those with special educational needs, work hard and make good progress. Their achievement is good.

114. Numbers in the Sixth Form studying for courses within the department are small but the results are about average. Eighty-six per cent of the A-level students achieved an A-E grade last year against a national average of 89 per cent. The three students following the textiles course all achieved A-E grade. Two new courses were followed last year, GNVQ engineering and AS level technology: food. Results in both were about average. Current work reflects these standards and students are achieving well.

115. Teaching is sound overall in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form. Good quality teaching and learning is the key feature that has brought the increased success within the department. This good teaching enables pupils of all ages to make gains in their knowledge and understanding of the subject effectively through the medium of design project work. Most of the staff know their subject very well indeed and are able to impart knowledge effectively. They set up a good range of projects which actively engage pupils in modelling, drafting ideas, experimenting and developing prototypes and researching. Most teachers have good class management skills and establish an effective working atmosphere. For example, in a Year 10 food lesson, the teacher had clear ground rules, and expected pupils to work at a good pace. Her good relationship with the class meant that pupils were on task all the time and enjoyed the lesson. In a GCSE graphics lesson the teacher made the objectives clear, then allowed pupils to work at their own pace. The high expectations and effective feedback to pupils encouraged them to work hard and develop a sense of pride in their achievement. One of the major strengths of the department at Sixth Form level is to stimulate the interest of the students so that they create innovative responses to the challenges they are set. For example, in a Year 12 textiles lesson, the teachers had high expectations and challenged students to work at a good pace and reach high standards.

116. Occasionally, staff either are unsure of their knowledge or do not match the work to pupils' ability. In Key Stage 3 teachers occasionally have difficulties motivating the class or establishing good behaviour. Some very good attitudes were seen within Key Stage 4 and this was also the norm for Post-16 education in the department.

117. The room in which upper school graphics is taught has good ICT provision and this helps improve the potential quality of design folder work significantly. Conversely, opportunities for using ICT in textiles are very limited and this restricts the use of computer-aided design processes or computer-aided manufacture such as the use of computer-controlled sewing machines. The department is managed well, with a clear focus on high standards. As a result, a well co-ordinated and dedicated staff team have an insistence on using manufacturing techniques of good quality in suitable materials.

118. The design and technology department is expected to teach those elements of ICT that relate to using computers to control devices and to control and automate events. At the present time this is not taking place and the National Curriculum orders are not being fully implemented.

GEOGRAPHY

119. Standards at A-level were above the national average in 2000. Standards for the oldest students are currently below the national average for grades A and B but in line with what would be expected given the students' prior attainment at GCSE. At Key Stage 4, GCSE results in 2000 were just below the national average. From the lessons and work seen during the inspection, standards of pupils currently in Year 11 are about average. At Key Stage 3 standards are in line with the national expectations for the oldest pupils in Year 9. Achievement and progress of pupils in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 is in line with what would be expected given pupils' prior attainment. The progress of pupils with special educational needs is sound in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.

120. At A-level, the most able students can apply theoretical models of urban development to local settlements and are producing high quality individual coursework. Many students at A-level and GCSE are able to use statistical techniques and make good use of ICT in presenting their investigations. Year 10 pupils are also developing the ICT skills necessary to display information as a graph, using computers. Many pupils at GCSE are able to compare diagrams showing how rivers flood and are reaching standards which are appropriate for

their age. Less able pupils are developing sound Ordnance Survey map skills but find it difficult to write extended written answers to questions. More able pupils in Year 11 are able to explain more complex patterns and processes associated with countries at different stages of development.

121. Pupils in Year 9 are making sound progress in their studies of African countries. Most pupils can describe the pattern of population density in an African country, such as Kenya, and the more able pupils are able to explain the reasons for the movement of population. Pupils in other Year 9 groups were able to collect information from the Internet about Kenyan safaris and in another group less able pupils were able to successfully compare one African country with the UK. Year 8 pupils have a sound knowledge of Italy and can describe the differences between the north and south of Italy. In Year 7 pupils are able to describe the effects of weather on human activities and the most able pupils are able to explain the processes that create the water cycle. Most pupils are developing sound use of computers.

122. The quality of teaching in geography is at least sound and there was no unsatisfactory teaching seen during the inspection. Several good lessons were seen where teachers were preparing pupils and students for forthcoming examinations. These lessons were thoroughly planned and had a clear focus on examinations and coursework requirements. Teachers often used clear, logical, sequences of explanation and questions to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding. There was a strong emphasis on the understanding of terminology and developing the basic skills of mapwork. For example, in a Year 10 mapwork lesson, the teacher gave clear and logical instructions which successfully enabled pupils to draw a cross-section. Some teachers were effectively integrating ICT into the pupils' learning, but they have only a limited range of strategies to help pupils with their written work. In the vast majority of lessons pupils have positive attitudes to learning and good relationships with teachers. Occasionally, a few boys are unresponsive in lessons. Teachers use a sound range of teaching and learning methods but these do not always accommodate the most able pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9. Occasionally lessons are too teacher directed and do not allow pupils to develop their geographical enquiry skills. Planning and assessment of pupils' work is good in Key Stage 4 and A-level, but at Key Stage 3 not enough use is made of the National Curriculum levels to assess pupils' work and plan work to meet the needs of the more able pupil.

123. Day-to-day management of the subject is sound. Sound progress has been made in all the areas highlighted in the last inspection. The monitoring of standards and teaching is now taking place, with the support of senior management. The setting of homework is rather inconsistent. The department still needs to share teacher expertise in the areas of ICT and the range of teaching and learning methods being used.

HISTORY

124. The standards of the oldest pupils in Key Stage 3 are satisfactory both in the work seen in lessons and in pupils' exercise books. When the prior attainment of these pupils is considered their achievement is good. By the end of Year 9 pupils' understanding of chronology is good; most are able to use historical terms accurately and make links between reasons for an event. Pupils with special educational needs are achieving well and are able to explain why events happened. Higher attaining pupils make use of appropriate historical terminology and can write an extended explanation of an event making links between periods of history. The use of writing frames to help with extended writing means that pupils of all abilities learn to construct historical arguments.

125. At Key Stage 4, results in the GCSE examinations in 2000 were above average and the work seen in Years 10 and 11 is also above average. The Key Stage 4 pupils'

achievement on entry was below average and so their achievement is good. Most able pupils are able to evaluate sources at a sophisticated level and even pupils entered for Certificate of Achievement are able to explain the causes of Hitler's rise to power. Pupils with special educational needs continue to achieve well and make good progress.

126. The A-level results for 2000 were below the national average. Standards of work in the present Sixth Form are satisfactory and based on their prior attainment, the majority of students are achieving satisfactorily. Students can evaluate historical interpretations, for example on the success of the French king Henry IV, and prepare a coherent case to justify a view.

127. The quality of teaching overall is good at Key Stage 3. There is some very good teaching in Year 7, some good teaching in Year 8 and in Year 9 it is never less than satisfactory. Teachers' subject specialist knowledge is very good and they explain things carefully, using a wide range of historical vocabulary. In lessons, the teacher have high expectations, maintain a good pace and use a variety of teaching methods which impact directly on the learning. In a Year 7 lesson on Becket, the pupils brainstormed the skills a historian needs, considered relevant sources and then completed a report as if they were detectives.

128. The teaching at Key Stage 4 is good and at Post-16 satisfactory. Lessons are very thoroughly planned. In Years 10 and 11 teachers use their extensive knowledge of the examination syllabus to guide pupils' learning. In a Year 11 lesson on the Hungarian crisis of 1956 students were able to evaluate a cartoon about communism and knew the criteria needed to obtain high examination marks in such a question. In Year 12 students had to prepare a series of television debates after considering different evaluations of historians on the Tudor Reformation.

129. As a result of good teaching most pupils are interested and engaged in their work and encouraged to think historically. They respond well to their history lessons at all key stages. They are mostly well motivated, listen attentively, follow instructions and answer enthusiastically. They enjoy good relationships with teachers. However, in a Year 9 group a small minority of boys was very unresponsive and noisy, making only limited progress.

130. The curriculum meets National Curriculum requirements although the time allocated to history at Key Stage 3 is low and means that the evaluation of historical sources is not covered in depth in Years 7 and 9. There are limited opportunities to use ICT for anything other than word processing and it is not sufficiently integrated into the teaching and learning of history. Although at Key Stage 4 and Post-16 students have numerical targets which they understand, there needs to be more emphasis on the monitoring of progress towards these targets. The department needs to make more use of the school data on pupil performance, particularly at Post-16, in setting targets for students.

131. The day-to-day management of the subject is sound and the department has made good progress overall since the last inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

132. Standards of attainment in ICT at Key Stage 3 are below the national average. In the year 2000 national Key Stage 3 assessment, the school's results were well below average, with boys performing slightly better than the girls. Previous years have shown a fluctuating result but always significantly below the national average. Standards achieved by pupils currently in Year 9 are also below average. This is because they have been critically affected by pupils' limited access to facilities and insufficient teacher expertise. As a result, pupils, including those with special educational needs, have not made sufficient progress and their overall achievement is unsatisfactory.

133. In the summer of 2000, 20 pupils completed a short IT GCSE course in Information Technology and achieved results which were well above the national average. The policy of the school is to allow all pupils to follow the programmes of study through their different subjects rather than in discrete ICT lessons. However, there is not yet a full plan for this and some subjects have not had access to suitable equipment. This means that pupils frequently do not study the areas that should be covered; their standards are therefore below average and achievement and progress are not satisfactory. Some curriculum mapping has taken place to try to ensure this is remedied but the process is as yet incomplete. Some notable exceptions to this general trend are to be found in English, where good quality word-processing is found in all years of the school and in geography and design and technology, where ICT is used effectively for some graphical work.

134. The achievement of Sixth Form students is good. In music, students on the A-level music technology course are reaching well above average standards. In addition, students working on GNVQ courses undertake effective research using the Internet and also reach standards which are well above average.

135. The school opened two new rooms, both equipped for whole classes with high-quality machines on a purpose-built network, just three weeks prior to the start of this inspection. This has greatly improved the available facilities and has brought positive results for those pupils who have used them, rapidly boosting their attainment. In the course of the inspection pupils were observed completing research activities using in-house data as well as interrogating data found at selected sites on the Internet. This information was then integrated into word-processed documents with predominantly good formatting style. In addition, all pupils in an observed class in Year 7 could send and retrieve their personal e-mails, print them and respond where necessary. Attainment in these instances was at or above the national expectation and the majority of the pupils observed in Year 7 during the inspection were reaching the nationally expected standard.

136. At Key Stages 3 and 4 teaching and learning are unsatisfactory overall. There are instances where teaching is good, such as in some geography lessons, and the teacher makes use of the ICT equipment to develop pupils' skills effectively. In the main, however, the pupils' learning opportunities are too fragmented in Years 8 to 11 and lack coherence. Pupils are not able to build on their knowledge and skills sequentially and learning is somewhat random, depending on the expertise of their teachers, the curriculum planning in each subject and the availability of equipment. The current system of pupil self-assessment and teacher assessment lacks rigour and is not effective in tracking pupils' progress. The school has recognised there is a large teacher-training programme in ICT to be undertaken and this is being developed as quickly as is possible

137. At the time of this inspection, the teaching programme for ICT was undergoing significant changes. There has been improvement to resources and facilities since the time of the last inspection and there are some identified pockets of good practice but the overall

situation is still unsatisfactory. The outlined plans for further development provide a suitable framework for sustained improvement. Resource provision is now similar to national levels and the majority of this equipment is of good quality.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

138. Throughout the school pupils generally do better in Spanish than in French. By the end of Year 9 pupils achieve standards broadly in line with the national expectation in French and slightly above in Spanish. Standards are improving in French where some Year 8 pupils are already achieving levels in writing that are equivalent to the national expectation for the end of Year 9.

139. The GCSE results in 2000 were well below average in French and around the average in Spanish. Coursework by the current Year 11 pupils is above average in Spanish and average in French. In the Sixth Form, numbers are small and groups vary from year to year. It is clear that standards at A-level have risen in Spanish in the last three years, whereas in French there is no discernible trend.

140. In all years, pupils achieve the standards that might be expected for their age and ability in French, including pupils with special educational needs. In Spanish, all pupils make good progress and achieve very well as a result of very effective teaching. Pupils in all years do better in writing than in speaking, because writing is better taught. Pupils are generally given more opportunities to practise writing than to speak the foreign language. The teachers often use too much English in lessons and this leads to barely satisfactory standards in listening. Most pupils read well because they transfer the comprehension skills developed in English to their language lessons. Where writing has improved significantly in French in Year 8, pupils can write about what they did on their holidays and where they are going for their next holidays.

141. Teaching in modern foreign languages is satisfactory overall in each key stage. There is a high proportion of good, very good and excellent teaching in Spanish. In some Year 10 lessons, potentially difficult pupils are very well managed. They are given very clear instructions and reasons for doing their work so that they concentrate well and make good progress. The teacher adapts the work to make it relevant to his adolescent pupils and teaches them techniques for remembering things. There is excellent teaching where the teacher leads very lively Spanish lessons. She keeps the class thoroughly involved in listening and working out answers in their heads. There is relatively little writing in such lessons so pupils learn to be confident in speaking. The teacher moves away from the less interesting textbook topics. For example a lesson on expressing preferences was based on a discussion of 'Qué prefieres, Limpbizkit o Westlife?' This was why the Year 8 pupils could not wait to give their opinion in Spanish. Preparation for GCSE and A-level coursework is very good. In a Year 10 challenging revision lesson, the teacher motivated pupils by giving them opportunities to practise and a real sense that they were learning when they proceeded to achieve success in talking about their homes and school. Most pupils have a good attitude to language learning. The group of 20 pupils studying GCSE after school is one example of pupils' enthusiasm for learning Spanish.

142. The quality of teaching in French is satisfactory overall in both Key Stages 3 and 4, but the teaching of speaking is neglected. When pupils read aloud, their poor pronunciation and intonation are not corrected and they need more help and encouragement to speak French. In some French lessons, the pupils get lost when there is more explanation of grammar than opportunities to practise using it. They need more help and encouragement to speak French.

143. Standards in French declined after the last inspection due to weaknesses in teaching and a scheme of work that prevented younger pupils from making sufficiently rapid progress. These issues are now largely resolved and the department is well placed to make further improvement.

MUSIC

144. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are broadly in line with national average standards. Most pupils demonstrate satisfactory control when playing keyboards and xylophones and perform and compose in a variety of styles. They demonstrate understanding of intervals and chords and maintain a steady pulse in their work. Keyboard technique is limited for some and the use of technology is at an early stage of development. Pupils of all levels of ability make equal progress in their tasks and achievement is at least satisfactory for all, both in their lessons and across the key stage.

145. By the end of Key Stage 4 standards are good with results well above national average standards last year. Most pupils perform with confidence and accuracy and with good understanding of balance and instrumentation in ensemble playing. They combine various musical elements within satisfactory structures and can also maintain structure in their improvisations. During a listening exercise pupils in Year 10 could use musical terminology appropriately to describe Indian music. At this key stage pupils make good use of music technology, and a sequenced backing track to accompany a vocal solo was particularly convincing. Achievement in lessons and progress across the key stage are good for pupils of all abilities.

146. At Post-16 students study A-level music and A-level music technology. Standards for both are very good and last year results were well above the national average. Music technology students develop very good aural skills and can recognise and describe various recording and performing techniques. Compositions and sequences in both classical and rock styles are very effective. Performing skills are particularly good with both technical ability and musical, stylistic understanding well developed. Students at this key stage demonstrate a convincing love for music. Their progress and achievement are very good. Standards in the instrumental lessons and in the extra-curricular activities are good.

147. Most pupils enjoy their music lessons and work well but there are a few pupils in Key Stage 3 who lose concentration and engage in background chatter which disturbs the momentum of the lesson. At Key Stage 4 pupils are very well motivated with a few taking responsibility for their own learning. Sixth Form students have a very good commitment to their learning and improvement.

148. Teaching is satisfactory at Key Stage 3, good at Key Stage 4 and very good at Post-16. The teachers have very good subject skills which they use well to demonstrate and enthuse their pupils. Their preparation and planning are good and include instructions for learning support assistants which enable them to support the pupils with clearer understanding. High expectations and the good relationships between pupils and teachers encourage pupils to try hard and work well. For example, in a Year 10 lesson involving improvisation in an Indian style, the teacher's good humour and clear expectations motivated the pupils well, to the extent that some took the initiative to extend the given task. In a Year 13 lesson, the teacher's excellent subject knowledge in discussion of excerpts from Vivaldi and Debussy contributed to inspired teaching with a strong spiritual dimension. Teachers are patient and hard working, both with a whole class and with small groups, but the pace of some lessons at Key Stage 3 needs more impetus to maintain the interest and concentration of the pupils. Teachers share their love and enjoyment of music with the pupils, and

concerts and rehearsals have been maintained during a period of some difficulty for the department.

149. Since the last inspection, generally high standards have been maintained and improved in some areas. Staffing has been increased along with curriculum time and there are now some music technology resources. More resources for music technology are needed to allow all pupils at Key Stage 3 to create, manipulate and refine sounds and to support the developing interest in the subject at Post-16. Accommodation is another area of improvement since the last inspection and the department has recently been re-designed to deliver the new curriculum. In one room there is still a shortage of spaces for small group work. Currently pupils cannot hear their own work clearly, which impedes their progress.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

150. Activities in physical education were observed in gymnastics and games for pupils between the ages of 11 and 14. Activities were observed in aerobics, games and GCSE theory lessons for pupils between the ages of 14 and 16. There are no examination courses in physical education for students between the ages of 16 and 19, and it was not possible to observe the limited amount of non-examined activities which do take place in this age group. Therefore no judgement on standards of students by the age of 19 can be made.

151. By the age of 14, pupils achieve standards in knowledge, understanding and performance which are in line with the expectations nationally for pupils of their age, with a significant minority above this level. This judgement is in line with the school's assessments of pupils in 2000, which showed that the percentage of those achieving level 5 or above was close to the national average, although girls achieved better than boys. There is now no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls. Since many pupils join the school at the age of 11 with standards in physical education which are at or below the expectations for their age group, the current standards represent good achievement and progress in relation to pupils' prior attainment, including good progress of those with special educational needs.

152. Pupils learning racket sports make good progress in developing a good grip and making a consistently accurate forehand and backhand stroke, whether in tennis or badminton. Higher achievers show good eye-hand co-ordination, they learn to use their feet and distribute their weight better, and they can sustain a rally with a partner. Pupils learning hockey develop the skills of dribbling, passing and shooting the ball more accurately. Pupils achieve a higher standard in gymnastics than those of similarly aged pupils nationally: they learn to devise, perform and evaluate a series of movements on mats with good regard to poise, control and balance.

153. The least developed aspects of younger pupils' work in physical education are their listening and speaking skills. Several pupils, particularly some boys, do not listen effectively to instructions, and they have a limited ability to comment on their own or other's performances in various sports.

154. By the age of 16, pupils achieve standards of knowledge, understanding and performance in core physical education lessons which are in line with the expectations for their age group. For most pupils this represents good achievement, although pupils with special educational needs make good progress in their performance skills. In badminton, lower achieving pupils achieve below average standards in their ability to combine good footwork and racket skills, and consequently find it difficult to execute or return a high serve. In contrast, although most pupils are new to volleyball, the majority make good progress in developing the basic skills of volleying, with correct use of footwork and arm positioning.

Pupils doing aerobics display appropriate levels of endurance, flexibility, co-ordination and balance.

155. A minority of pupils aged between 14 and 16 also take the GCSE course in physical education or the Certificate of Achievement. The percentage of pupils achieving grades A*-C in the 2000 GCSE examinations was well below the national average for both girls and boys, although boys performed significantly better than girls did. However, the evidence of the inspection showed that standards of both boys and girls currently following the short or the long GCSE course are in line with the national average because changes in the options structure have led to more able and committed pupils choosing the course. The ability level of girls following the examination courses is now much higher and matches that of the boys, whose standards have also risen. It was possible during the inspection to observe only theory lessons. Pupils in these lessons show a level of knowledge and understanding in line with national expectations for this age group. They display secure knowledge of factors affecting fitness and they increase their understanding of the muscular, circulatory and respiratory systems. Pupils learn to examine factors which affect performance in sport, such as diet and substance abuse.

156. The quality of teaching in physical education is good overall, with examples of very good teaching in both Key Stages 3 and 4. Teachers generally set out their lesson objectives very clearly, and pupils are given clear indications of how they are performing and what they must do to improve further. Teachers combine good questioning, explanations and demonstrations in order to assess pupils' understanding and to further it, for example when getting pupils to appreciate the reasons for doing warm-ups. Teachers use imaginative strategies in tennis and volleyball, combining elements of co-operation and competition. Pupils enjoy these activities, and consequently make good progress. Good examination techniques are highlighted in GCSE theory lessons. For example, in a Year 10 lesson the teacher gave clear guidance on the types of examination question and emphasised key vocabulary so that pupils had a clear understanding of requirements. Other notable features of the best lessons are the excellence of the relationships between teachers and pupils, which motivate pupils; the good use of classroom assistants; and the high expectations of what pupils can achieve. All these factors contribute to good progress in acquiring knowledge and practical skills. Although some younger pupils, particularly boys, do not listen well to instructions, they concentrate well when actively performing. On rare occasions enthusiastic teachers try to pack too much into lessons and move quickly from one activity to another, not giving lower achievers enough opportunity to consolidate newly learned skills.

157. Leadership and management in physical education are good. The department has successfully addressed some of the issues raised in the previous inspection, such as involving pupils more in planning and evaluating activities within lessons. Teachers are experienced and committed, and run a successful range of after-school clubs and teams. These have a high take-up rate and help to raise pupils' standards. The accommodation for physical education is unsatisfactory overall. Although the sports hall and gymnasium are reasonably spacious, changing facilities are limited. There are insufficient grass pitches, and the hard court area is poorly surfaced and restricts achievement in sports such as hockey.

158. Standards of pupils by the age of 16 are better now than at the time of the previous inspection, whilst standards of those by the age of 14 have been maintained. The overall quality of teaching has improved. Therefore, although problems with accommodation remain, physical education has made good progress since the previous inspection.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

159. The standards reached by pupils aged 14 are in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. The pupils' achievement over the key stage is satisfactory. By the age of 14 pupils have acquired a useful selection of facts that illustrate the main features of the major world faiths. Higher attaining pupils can compare these features across the religions, although inaccurate recall of information results in some confusion by the lower attaining pupils. Pupils explore the history of the early Christian Church and identify the key moments in the life of Jesus, and higher attaining pupils recognise the significance of the crucifixion. Pupils have a good understanding of the concept of the parable and can provide simple interpretations, using drama to express their knowledge. Most pupils can select information from text and higher attaining pupils can use it to develop their own responses to written questions. Overall, the achievement and progress of pupils in Key Stage 3, including those with special educational needs, are satisfactory.

160. The attainment of pupils by the end of Year 11 is average. All pupils follow the short GCSE course and may enter for the examination. Results for the last three years have fallen, and in 2000 the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C was below the national average. Girls are achieving a higher proportion of the A*-C grades than the boys. The percentage of pupils achieving grades A*-G has been above the national average for the last three years. Pupils consider contemporary moral issues in the light of Christian teaching and use biblical quotations to identify the authority for this teaching. They consider Christian concepts of 'forgiveness' and 'evil and suffering' and relate them to contemporary circumstances. Discussion and written work indicate a lack of depth in understanding and the responses tend to be stereotypical rather than thoughtful in a significant minority of cases. Pupils' responses are good when related to factual information, but are weaker when they are asked to analyse reasons for belief. The achievement of pupils in lessons is generally satisfactory, but unsatisfactory for a significant minority of pupils who do not apply themselves to their tasks. Oral work is sometimes thought provoking and demonstrates that pupils are considering the information before them, for example when considering the concept of the sanctity of life, but at other times responses are superficial and lack independent thought and analysis.

161. The attainment of students who follow the A-level course is in line with national expectations. The numbers of entrants is low but results are average, and appropriate for the pupils' prior attainment. The achievement of the students is good. They study the text of the synoptic gospels, and can identify and compare significant features from the text. Students consider ethical theories and consider the consequences of these beliefs. The extended writing seen indicated that they can select and arrange information in response to A-level essay questions.

162. The quality of teaching and its impact on learning is satisfactory for all years. Most lessons seen are satisfactory but occasionally teaching is outstanding. A minority of lessons are affected by the poor attitudes and behaviour of some pupils, and teachers work hard to provide learning activities which enable disaffected pupils to play a positive part in the lesson. In a Year 8 lesson, for example, pupils had prepared a drama based on parables and responded very well to the teacher's high expectations. Secure knowledge enables teachers to support pupils understanding with colourful detail, and rooms are attractive, extending pupils learning and celebrating achievement. Teachers have high expectations of behaviour and are good role models for their pupils. Oral questioning is well used to enable pupils to recap the previous lesson and to build upon existing knowledge, as, for example, in a Year 10 lesson on prejudice. Good use is made of questioning to assess pupils understanding in lessons, but the use of assessment to measure pupils' progress in the attainment targets of religious education, is not developed. Pupils are not involved in the assessment of their work

and there is no evidence of pupils being expected to correct or complete unfinished tasks. Lessons are planned for the class as a whole and as a result there is insufficient challenge for higher attaining pupils in Years 7 to 9, and material provided is not always appropriate for pupils with special educational needs. Lessons are generally teacher focused and there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to follow investigations independently.

163. The department has made good links with the community and members of outside organisations make very positive contributions to pupils' learning. The resources of the department are good, although pupils who are following the GCSE course do not have a book for home use. As a result homework, particularly for Years 10 and 11, is very limited. Little use is made of visits to places of worship to extend the experience of pupils and to support understanding. The use of ICT is undeveloped and there are no resources within the department to support its use.

164. The school meets the legal requirements for religious education in all years apart from in Year 13. Since the last inspection the department has moved into the new building and there has recently been increased access to the computer rooms. GCSE is now provided for all pupils and results in a greater incentive for pupil involvement. There has been a greater emphasis on the use of specialist vocabulary and teachers are employing a wider range of learning strategies. There is still a predominance of whole-class teaching and a lack of appropriate materials for lower attaining pupils. The department makes a significant contribution to the spiritual and moral development of the pupils.

VOCATIONAL COURSES - GNVQ and AVCE

165. In the Sixth Form, the school currently offers four intermediate GNVQ courses in Art, Business, Health and Social Care and Leisure and Tourism and three AVCE courses in Business, Health and Social Care and Travel and Tourism. A total of 43 students are currently following these vocational courses.

166. The overall standard of attainment in all the current courses is very good and significantly above the national average. In 2000, all ten intermediate Health and Social Care students achieved distinction grade, five out of eight Business students achieved distinction grade and all seven Leisure and Tourism students achieved merit grade. The first group of A-level Business students are due to complete their course in May 2001, with five of the nine students currently working at distinction level on the basis of course work and end of unit test results. Both the content and presentation of assessed coursework are generally good, with information gathered from research into local businesses and services used extensively to improve the quality.

167. Students have a good understanding of the subject matter they are studying and can use appropriate technical language effectively, for example, in Health and Social Care when discussing the operation and application of different types of body-scanning equipment. There is effective development of key skills and of the higher level skills such as analysis and evaluation in A-level courses and students' achievement is very good. Students have a good understanding of the requirements of the GNVQ course they are following and are good at managing their own research, particularly when the learning initially builds on their own experiences or is linked to real business or community contexts.

168. The response of students to all the GNVQ courses is very good. Students are enthusiastic, motivated and have a mature attitude towards their study. Many see the courses they are following as an introduction to their chosen career. They are well developed as independent learners and have a very positive working relationship with each other and their teachers.

169. The quality of teaching and its impact on student learning across the courses are very good. The staff involved are committed to vocational education and are experienced in the areas they are teaching. A wide range of effective teaching approaches are used including discussions, presentations and structured individual research. In a Health and Social Care lesson, for example, the teacher structured discussion well, drawing on students' own experience and preparing them well for their assignment. The use of local examples familiar to the students, as the starting point for building understanding, is a particular strength. The Year 12 Leisure and Recreation group visited a local hotel as part of a well-structured unit on customer care and in this unit, as in others, effective planning, the quality of the relationship between teachers and students and good links with the local community all make a significant contribution to the quality of learning.

170. The quality of coursework assessment and the use of detailed feedback to help students improve their work are good. Assessment is generally accurate, except in the intermediate Business course, where the grades awarded to work are too high. There is currently no system for the moderation of standards for the AVCE and new intermediate GNVQ courses started in September 2000.

171. Co-ordination and management of the individual courses are good. A lack of a strategic policy for vocational course development has resulted in inconsistencies in the range of courses available to students from one year to the next. This means that there is no continuity or clear path of progression opportunities from year to year and from Key Stage 4 to Post-16. The changes in the vocational areas and levels being offered have also prevented any meaningful use of results analysis to inform planning.

OTHER COURSES

172. The school offers a range of other courses and learning opportunities in both Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form. In Key Stage 4, a few pupils are involved in a work-related learning course which means that they visit the local college and work placements on one day a week. This course is motivating and relevant, but the current organisation is not satisfactory because it means that they are missing work in some of their other subjects. A GCSE sociology course is offered in Key Stage 4. Pupils show an interest in this course, reach standards in line with the national average and make sound progress.

173. In the Sixth Form, psychology and sociology courses and life skills extend the range of opportunities for students. In the 2000 A-level examinations, students achieved above average standards in sociology and their current work reflects the same attainment. Students make good progress and achieve well in response to very good teaching. In psychology two students successfully gained A-level passes last year and current students experience sound teaching and are responding positively to the course.