

INSPECTION REPORT

BRENTWOOD COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

Brentwood

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115375

Headteacher: Mr Michael Trett

Reporting inspector: Ms Margaret Julia Goodchild
15918

Dates of inspection: 29 January – 2 February 2001

Inspection number: 188413

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:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Shenfield Common Brentwood Essex
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Ian Berry
Date of previous inspection:	April 1996

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Brentwood County High School is an 11 to 18 foundation comprehensive school, with 1395 pupils on roll, 733 boys and 662 girls. There are 180 students in the sixth form. The school is bigger than most other secondary schools and the number on roll has increased since the last inspection. The school has been over-subscribed for several years. A significant number of pupils come from outside the area, from a mixed urban and rural catchment. The vast majority are of white heritage, although the percentage of pupils speaking English as an additional language is a little higher than in most schools. The number of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The percentages of pupils identified as having special educational needs and having a Statement of Special Educational Need are also below the national average. Pupils' attainment on entry in Year 7 covers the full ability range and is skewed slightly above average, though the school has fewer high-attaining pupils due to competition from other local schools.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Brentwood County High School is a successful school with many very good features. Strong leadership and management, together with good quality teaching, enable pupils to achieve well and to reach standards that are above and frequently well above the national average. The school is very effective in supporting pupils' personal development and in producing mature, well-rounded young people. It provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- The headteacher provides thoughtful leadership and sets high expectations for pupils' achievement and for their overall development; faculty directors contribute a great deal to the school's effective management.
- Results are well above the national average in National Curriculum tests at age 14 and in the percentage of pupils gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE.
- Examination results in art are outstanding at GCSE and A level, and pupils' achievement in the subject is very good.
- Teaching and learning are of high quality and support pupils' good achievement.
- The curriculum is effectively enriched by a very good range of extra-curricular opportunities, strong business links, and excellent careers guidance and work experience.
- The school provides high quality care and is very effective in promoting pupils' personal development; as a result, pupils have very positive attitudes and their behaviour is very good.
- Financial planning is very effective and the school's financial control is excellent.

What could be improved

- Pupils' achievement in French is lower than in other subjects and the monitoring of teaching and learning is less rigorous in the modern languages faculty than elsewhere in the school.
- Although there are a number of strengths in provision for pupils with special educational needs, some aspects of provision and its management require further development.
- The school analyses a good deal of assessment information but could make greater use of assessment data to set targets for individual pupils and to monitor their progress (as identified in the school development plan).

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good improvement since it was last inspected, in April 1996. There has been a very good improvement in the quality of teaching, with a much higher proportion of teaching that is now at least satisfactory. Good improvements have been made in the curriculum with a widening of opportunities in the sixth form, much better opportunities in information and communication technology, and better provision in music and religious education. Arrangements for religious education in the sixth form just meet statutory requirements, though the curriculum needs to be more tightly planned. Assessment procedures are now good overall, with greater consistency of practice, though greater use needs to be made of assessment information. The school has still to improve the monitoring of progress by pupils with special educational needs and some other aspects of special educational needs provision require further development. The modern languages faculty has not made sufficient improvement since the previous inspection: underachievement remains a key issue and standards are still below what they should be, particularly in French.

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	A	B	B	B
A-levels/AS-levels	D	B	B	

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

The school's test results in 2000 at the age of 14 were well above the national average in English and science, and above average in mathematics; the results in the three subjects taken together were well above those achieved by all schools and by similar schools. At GCSE, the percentage of pupils gaining five or more A* to C grades was well above the national average and that of similar schools. The overall results at GCSE were above average for all schools nationally and for similar schools. At A / AS level, the school's results were above those for schools nationally. Over recent years, the school has sustained its results at GCSE and improved its results in end of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests and at A / AS level.

In lessons and in work seen, pupils' attainment was generally at least above average and often well above. Standards were particularly high in English and art. The vast majority of pupils achieve well. There are examples of high-attaining pupils achieving very good examination results and achieving well in some subjects. However, in some subjects – including mathematics and science – higher-attaining pupils are not always sufficiently challenged. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall. Their progress is very good in lessons in the support base and it is satisfactory or good when they receive support in class; it is unsatisfactory on occasion where teachers do not plan tasks that are sufficiently matched to pupils' learning needs. Pupils for whom English is an additional language make satisfactory progress overall and sometimes their progress is good. The school has set itself satisfactory targets for overall results in tests and examinations but is in the early stages of using assessment data to set individual targets for all pupils in order to raise standards further.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils have very positive attitudes to school and their eagerness to learn contributes much to their academic achievement.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils behave very well in class and where they meet in large numbers; for example, in assembly, their behaviour is excellent.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils make very good progress in their personal development and relationships throughout the school are positive and supportive.
Attendance	The attendance rate is in line with the national average and the rate of unauthorised absence is below average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Very 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 and learning are of high quality and support pupils' good achievement. Teaching was at least satisfactory in 99 per cent of lessons, at least good in 76 per cent, at least very good in 36 per cent and excellent in 5 per cent. Teaching at Key Stage 3 was good. At Key Stage 4, it was very good with a somewhat higher proportion of good and very good teaching. In the sixth form it was good, with nearly half the teaching very good but a higher proportion than at Key Stage 4 that was only satisfactory. Teaching is very good in English and science; it is good in mathematics. In other subjects, teaching is mostly good and it is very good and sometimes excellent in art.

Teachers have high expectations and good subject knowledge. Relationships between teachers and pupils are positive and teachers manage pupils' behaviour well. In the majority of lessons, learning proceeds at a good pace. Information and communication technology is used well to support pupils' learning. Whilst planning is good in many lessons, teachers do not always match work sufficiently to the learning needs of higher-attaining pupils or those with special educational needs. Support from individual teachers often enables pupils for whom English is an additional language to make good progress but these pupils' progress is not formally monitored. The skills of literacy and numeracy are effectively taught, and this supports pupils' learning across the curriculum.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum provides a good range of learning opportunities. It is enriched by a very good range of extra-curricular activities, by excellent careers guidance and work experience, and by close and productive links with business.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. There are a number of strengths in provision but work is not always matched sufficiently to pupils' learning difficulties, especially in mathematics, and the responsibilities of different managers need to be made clearer.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Provision for pupils who are learning English as an additional language is satisfactory overall. Many subject teachers support these pupils well but staff do not have formal training in this area and there is no effective system for monitoring provision.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school promotes pupils' personal development very well. Moral and social development is very well promoted. Provision for cultural development is good and that for spiritual development is satisfactory. The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship, as required by law, although its assemblies are of good quality.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school provides high quality care. Pupils are very well supported, and behaviour and attendance are closely monitored. The school's assessment systems are good overall.

The school has close links with parents and the vast majority of parents who attended the parents' meeting, returned the questionnaire or wrote to the registered inspector expressed overwhelming support for the school.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher sets high expectations for the work of the school. Most staff with key management responsibilities fulfil them well and there is very effective teamwork.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors provide very good support to the school and are committed to its further development.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school is thoughtful in evaluating its performance and in determining appropriate developments. It has been effective in its work to improve the quality of teaching.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes very good use of the resources at its disposal. Financial planning is very well matched to priorities for development and careful attention is given to achieving best value for money.

Although the school has experienced some difficulties in staffing within particular subject areas, the level of staffing is sufficient to support the curriculum. More has been spent than

in many schools to ensure that most subjects are well resourced. Improvements have been made to bring the accommodation up to a good standard.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents consider that their children are making good progress. • They are pleased that the school expects its pupils to work hard and do their best. • They believe that teaching is good. • They feel that the school is helping their children to become more responsible. • They consider that the school is well led and managed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A significant proportion of parents are unhappy with the amount of homework. • Some parents feel that they are not kept well informed. • Not all parents feel the school works closely with them.

Inspection judgements confirm parents' positive views. Appropriate homework was set in lessons observed, although not all pupils were seen to write homework tasks into their diaries. The school provides good quality reports and a good range of other information to parents. Inspection evidence suggests that the school works closely with parents and it tries hard to involve them. More information could be provided about topics to be covered in different subjects but this is the only minor weakness in the information provided.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. In 2000, the school's National Curriculum test results at age 14 were well above those achieved by all schools nationally and by similar schools. In English, the proportion of pupils achieving the expected Level 5 was above the national average and the proportion achieving Level 6 or better was well above average. In mathematics, results were well above average for the number of pupils reaching Level 5 and better than average for those reaching Level 6 and above; overall results in mathematics were above the national average. In science, results were well above those achieved by all schools nationally at Level 5 and at Level 6 or above.
2. In 2000, the school's overall results at GCSE were above average in comparison with all schools nationally and with similar schools. The percentage of pupils gaining five or more A* to C grades was well above the national average and well above that of similar schools, showing an improvement on the previous year. The percentage gaining five or more A* to G grades was above the national average and above that of similar schools. The percentage of pupils gaining one or more grade A* to G was in line with the national average for all schools and schools with a similar intake. Performance at GCSE for five or more A* to C and five or more A* to G grades places the school in line with schools nationally based on prior attainment at Key Stage 3, but below for one or more A* to G. The lower result at one A* to G based on prior attainment is explained by a small number of pupils who would normally have taken the examinations but did not do so in order to catch up on missed schooling and a further small group being excluded and therefore not counted in the school's statistics.
3. GCSE results in art, drama, English literature, history, information and communication technology, mathematics, physical education and social science were particularly high in 2000 relative to pupils' performance in other subjects. Results were relatively lower in double science, design and technology (where child development and resistant materials pulled the result down), French, geography, German, and Spanish. The school did well by some more able pupils, with 14 pupils achieving five or more A* or A grades at GCSE, and the highest attaining gaining eight A* grades and two A grades.
4. At A / AS level, the school's results were above those for schools nationally in 2000. The results show that the school enables gifted and talented students to fulfil their potential, for instance, one gained five A grades, two gained four A grades, and three gained three A grades. Excellent results were achieved in art (with ten A grades and all thirteen candidates gaining an A or B grade), and results were also good in English literature.
5. Boys generally gain better results at age 14 than girls and their improved performance since the last inspection is most evident when their results are compared with the attainment of boys nationally in English, mathematics and science. At GCSE, boys' results in the latest year and over the last three years have been well above the national average for boys, whilst girls' results were above average for girls. The one subject in which boys' results are poor is modern languages. At A / AS level, the pattern is different from that across the curriculum at ages 14 and 16, as girls generally outperform boys.

6. The school has been very effective in improving the attainment of boys since the last inspection. This was achieved by every faculty focusing on the attainment of boys by monitoring teaching and learning, providing staff training, analysing the response of boys to particular styles of teaching and by seeking to ensure learning resources would be appealing to boys. Additionally, boys in Years 7 and 8 received support where necessary to develop their literacy skills in order to give them access to all subjects of the curriculum.
7. The trend in the school's results at Key Stage 3 for all core subjects was below the national trend from 1996 to 2000, but the school has consistently gained high results. The trend in the school's results at GCSE and GNVQ has also been below the national trend in the three core subjects; the school's results have remained fairly static over the last five years, whilst those for schools nationally have slowly climbed. There has been an upward trend in A-level results since the last inspection.
8. In lessons and in work seen, pupils' attainment was generally at least above average and often well above. At Key Stage 3, pupils' attainment is very high compared with national expectations in art and it is well above average in English. It is satisfactory in modern languages and physical education, and good in all other subjects. At Key Stage 4, standards are well above average in English, mathematics and art. They are below expectations in modern languages, and above average in all other subjects. In the sixth form, attainment is well above course expectations in English, science and art. It is above average in geography, history, music and physical education. It is in line with expectations in design and technology, information and communication technology, modern languages and religious education.
9. Pupils enter the school with prior attainment that is only slightly above average but the school's results are consistently above and sometimes well above average, showing that the vast majority of pupils achieve well. Pupils' achievement is good at Key Stage 3 in most subjects, with the exceptions of English and art, where it is very good, music where it is satisfactory and modern languages where it is unsatisfactory overall. At Key Stage 4, achievement is again very good in English and art. It is good in all other subjects, except modern languages where it is unsatisfactory. In the sixth form, students are achieving very well in English, science, art and psychology. They are achieving well in design and technology, geography, history, music and physical education. In the remaining subjects, their achievement is at least satisfactory.
10. Pupils' progress in the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills is good, although there is no whole-school policy to co-ordinate the development of numeracy and a literacy policy is currently being developed. Oral communication is encouraged in all subjects and pupils speak with confidence and poise. They are articulate and skilfully ask and answer questions. They participate in discussion and debate, particularly in the sixth form. Research and critical skills are generally very good, and most pupils read competently, with accuracy and fluency. The standard of written work is good and pupils write for a wide range of purposes and audiences, and most pupils understand and use grammatical features with increasing accuracy. Subjects such as history and geography encourage creative writing and extended essays and project work. There is no significant distinction between the quality of writing of boys and girls. Pupils have good numeracy skills, which they apply in many of their subjects. In science, all pupils measure and read scales accurately, and calculate averages. Higher-attaining pupils can identify anomalies in a set of results. In science at GCSE, pupils become numerically more adept, using mental calculations and algebraic formulae to calculate results. Pupils show good spatial awareness in art and apply their mathematical skills of scale and proportion in their GCSE work. In design and

technology, they measure and weigh, and draw in two and three dimensions. In geography and history, they record and analyse data and use a variety of graphs and charts. They use spreadsheets and databases in geography and information and communication technology, with higher-attaining pupils making use of algebraic formulae.

11. There are examples of high-attaining pupils achieving very good examination results and achieving well in some subjects. However, in mathematics and science, and at times in English and other subjects of the curriculum, higher-attaining pupils are not always sufficiently challenged. In most subjects where classes are small, pupils with special educational needs make good progress as a result of good targeted support that enables them to learn more effectively. However, in a few lessons where there is a clear mismatch between the abilities of particular pupils with learning difficulties and the tasks they are expected to complete, pupils do not make enough progress. This was evident in a mathematics lesson where a pupil was unable to read a test sheet on 'probability'. He could not read or understand the question and furthermore was unable to answer it because he did not understand the concepts of fractions and percentages. Pupils for whom English is an additional language generally make good progress as a result of support from individual teachers, although the school does not provide formal training for teachers in how to support the acquisition of English and there is no coherent means of monitoring provision.
12. The school has set itself satisfactory academic targets but is in the early stages of using assessment data to identify individual targets for all pupils. The development of targets and greater use of data are crucial as a means of raising standards further and ensuring that pupils make consistently good progress in all subjects.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

13. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good and support their personal development, learning and academic progress very well. Pupils are keen to come to school and are positive about their experiences. They move around the site with purpose and are considerate to others in corridors and on narrow staircases. They usually wait for lessons in a quiet and orderly manner and prepare themselves quickly, once into their classrooms. They have the necessary tools, pens, pencils and relevant books, for example, and want to learn. They respond well to the high expectations placed upon them by teachers and rise to the challenges presented. They accept responsibility for their own learning with increasing confidence as they get older and demonstrate very good levels of independence and maturity. Strong working and personal relationships with their peers and teachers underpin their very good personal development. They accept rebukes given by teachers for minor transgressions and reflect upon their attitudes and behaviour when more serious sanctions, such as detention, prove necessary. There are many examples of excellent attitudes and behaviour by pupils across the range of subjects that they study, although their attitudes in modern foreign languages are often less positive than elsewhere.
14. Extra-curricular activities are well supported and pupils appreciate the time and effort put in by teachers to enable them to happen. The notable exception is the poor response to the opportunity for visits promoted by the modern foreign languages department. Pupils take on the varied roles of responsibility offered with enthusiasm. Older pupils, acting as information and communication technology prefects, enjoy helping younger ones at lunch times in the computer rooms. The good level of initiative demonstrated supports pupils' independence and commitment to learning. They treat their school with a great deal of care and consequently work in an

environment that is free of damage, graffiti and litter. Their attitudes and behaviour in formal situations, such as assemblies, are often exceptionally good.

15. Incidents of poor behaviour are rare, and pupils and parents consider any problems that do occur, with bullying for example, to be handled well by the school. The number of pupils temporarily excluded from school is in line with that found nationally, while the number permanently excluded is below. The school monitors and analyses the details of the pupils excluded and the reasons for exclusion in order to ensure that no patterns lie hidden in the data. Pupils are able to work in an atmosphere that is free from the oppressive or disruptive behaviour of others.
16. Pupils demonstrate a good level of care and concern for others. They participate in charitable events and raise good sums of money. They are able to offer constructive criticism to, and accept it from, their peers when reviewing work in art, for example. They work co-operatively and offer each other support and guidance in how to overcome problems, as with information and communication technology coursework.
17. Pupils' attendance in all year groups across the school is satisfactory and the overall attendance rate is in line with the national average for secondary schools. The incidence of unauthorised absence is below the national average.
18. Standards of punctuality are good. Few pupils arrive late in the morning and, if they do, more often than not this is associated with transport difficulties outside their control. Pupils move swiftly round the school during the day, with the result that punctuality in respect of the timetable is good and teachers are able to start all lessons promptly.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS AND STUDENTS TAUGHT?

19. Teaching and learning are of high quality and support pupils' good achievement. Teaching was at least satisfactory in 99 per cent of lessons, at least good in 76 per cent, at least very good in 36 per cent and excellent in 5 per cent. Teaching at Key Stage 3 was good. At Key Stage 4, it was very good, with a somewhat higher proportion of good and very good teaching. In the sixth form, it was good: nearly half the teaching was very good but a higher proportion than at Key Stage 4 was only satisfactory.
20. In English, much of the teaching is of high quality. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and a clear understanding of examination requirements. Carefully prepared and chosen materials in turn help pupils to understand the work and make very good progress. Teachers challenge pupils to think creatively and perceptively about their work and this encourages pupils of all levels of attainment to aim for high standards and participate in the lessons. Teachers assess pupils' progress through questioning, feedback, short tests and the use of role-play. These approaches maintain pupils' interest and concentration. Where teaching is only satisfactory, objectives are less clear or are not matched sufficiently to all pupils' learning needs, including higher attainers and those with special educational needs, pupils are not reprimanded sufficiently for loss of concentration, and girls are not drawn into taking a more active part in lessons. Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning, contribute well and maintain a positive work ethic in most lessons. They take responsibility for their learning and work productively, revealing a strong sense of curiosity. Overall, most pupils are diligent about their work, and sixth formers are reflective and mature independent learners. On those occasions when behaviour is only satisfactory, it is usually because the teacher does not deal quickly or effectively enough with any loss of concentration by individuals or groups of pupils.

21. In mathematics, teachers have good subject knowledge and teaching typically includes clear explanations, well-organised and planned work, with high expectations of pupils, good relationships and good management. It is the consistency of these good features, backed up by good teamwork, which helps to build pupils' confidence and good attitudes and leads to the very good results that are achieved at Key Stages 3 and 4. However, teachers do not have sufficient knowledge of mathematical learning difficulties and do not take enough account of such difficulties when planning work and they do not always provide sufficient challenge to higher-attainers. In the very good and excellent teaching, teachers use many opportunities to make links with other areas of the subject and to practise numeracy. They use very good questioning to check pupils' understanding and challenge pupils to think for themselves and solve problems. In these lessons, pupils learn at a faster pace and with more depth; they also develop more independence of thought. Where teaching is satisfactory rather than good, pupils make progress at a slower rate because they are not challenged to think for themselves, questioning is not sufficiently deep to develop their understanding and the needs of pupils with mathematical learning difficulties are not fully met. A common weakness in A-level teaching is that teachers tell pupils too much. Pupils' readiness to learn is an important factor in their success. They are almost invariably co-operative and interested. They work well together discussing tasks or using computers. They set their work out well and when expectations are sufficiently high, they use rigorous methods and think mathematically. They can be quite passive if allowed to be, especially in the sixth form, and as was mentioned in the last report they are quite quick to rely on the teacher for help.
22. In science, teaching is very good and teaching methods have improved since the previous inspection so that they usually suit the needs of all pupils, although there is sometimes scope to challenge higher-attainers a little more. Relationships between teachers and pupils are generally very good with mutual respect. Pupils enjoy practical work and take responsibility for collecting and clearing away apparatus. In a Year 9 class, pupils of below average prior attainment could distinguish between different types of reactions because of the careful, patient explanation of the teacher. In a Year 11 class of higher-attainers, pupils could deal competently with calculations about transformers because of the clarity of the worked examples done by the teacher. Teachers mark work regularly and their comments generally enable pupils to improve, although the marking sometimes lacks depth in Years 7 and 8. The well above average attainment seen in the sixth form comes from the very positive attitude of the students to learning, but also from the change in syllabuses and learning methods with which the students closely identify.
23. In art, teaching is frequently very good and, in a quarter of lessons, it was excellent. High quality teaching includes a number of important features. Teachers are very gifted in teaching younger pupils how to draw and paint well. This underpins the quality of other work they do, and creates in pupils the confidence that they can achieve set tasks to high levels of technical competence. From early on, therefore, pupils' attitudes to the subject are permeated with a 'can do' approach, and they greatly enjoy their lessons. Teachers' expectations of their pupils are very high, both of their behaviour and of their commitment to work. Short, snappy, well-resourced explanations and demonstrations set very high challenges. Objectives are made clear, so most pupils are very eager to get involved in practical activity and work extremely purposefully. Teachers provide a rich diet of different media and materials, and their own knowledge and understanding of this range are very good. They also share ideas and expertise very effectively between the team, so pupils benefit from their rich experience. A key strength of teaching at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is

teachers' sensitive understanding of how to enable higher-attaining pupils to develop independence, creativity and individuality, whilst supporting less-able pupils to achieve well, both technically and creatively.

24. In design and technology, teaching is good and there are examples of some very good teaching. Teachers manage lessons well, they are hard working and organise learning resources well. The best lessons have pace and high expectations; they are well structured and purposeful, challenging all pupils in the class. Teachers use display well and this contributes a great deal to pupils' interest and the development of ideas. Through the assessment system, achievement is reviewed and appropriate targets set for future work. Teachers plan their work accordingly and lesson notes indicate how different levels of support are provided; as a result, pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory and sometimes good progress. Pupils show interest in the range of activities available to them. They are attentive and concentrate on their work for appropriate periods of time. Behaviour is good and pupils are generally well motivated. Pupils listen and are attentive when teachers are speaking, and responses are generally polite and constructive.
25. Teaching is consistently good in geography. Lessons challenge pupils and are characterised by high expectations, especially through the investigation of controversial geographical issues. A strong feature of the teaching is the use of a range of strategies to match the curriculum to different abilities. Methods employed include the skilful use of question-and-answer techniques, the planned use of appropriate resources, and the introduction of stimulating learning activities such as games.
26. Teaching in history is of high quality. Teachers are always well prepared, have clear objectives and are enthusiastic about their subject. Expectations are high and pupils learn through the investigation of challenging historical questions. As in geography, a range of strategies is used to match work to pupils' different abilities. These methods include well-structured lessons with a variety of interesting and stimulating learning activities, the skilful use of question-and-answer techniques, and well-focused interventions with individual pupils. In geography and history, pupils respond best to lessons that develop thinking skills and where they are stimulated by some kind of challenge. They enjoy lessons that are lively and interesting, and those that encourage them to develop their personal study skills through classroom-based research.
27. In information and communication technology, teachers' subject knowledge and understanding are good. Teachers generally develop a good climate for learning, which encourages pupils to apply themselves well to the tasks set and take responsibility for their own learning. The vast majority do so with interest, are well motivated and maintain a good focus. Occasionally, some pupils lose interest when teaching is satisfactory but lacks the usual vigour and pace. Teachers monitor pupils' involvement and progress well, so that minor transgressions are picked up and dealt with and difficulties do not have the opportunity to develop further. Teachers provide good feedback, so that pupils have a clear understanding of how well they are doing and what they can do to improve further. Most pupils pay good attention to this and learning and attainment improve as a result. Many teachers use information and communication technology well to develop pupils' understanding and support learning in their own subjects.
28. Much teaching in modern languages is good, and some is very good and even outstanding, but the quality of teaching is too variable and one poor lesson was seen. The use of specific grammar terms and the use of information and communication

technology in all years enrich both language and computing skills. Behaviour is usually managed well, although sometimes teachers are too tolerant of flippant interruptions and lethargy. There is usually a lively pace, activities are suitably timed, and resources are used effectively to stimulate practice of skills. Planning, however, is variable. Too often lesson planning is imprecise because the scheme of work does not provide sufficiently different tasks for pupils with different levels of attainment, and expectations of what each pupil should do are too low. Too much unnecessary English in French lessons sends the wrong messages to pupils who are reluctant to speak. Marking, too, is imprecise: it does not give pupils enough specific, targeted help and, as a result, pupils in Key Stage 3 do not know well enough how they are progressing. Some teaching is dull and is not good enough to make the subject interesting, challenging, rewarding and fun for many pupils.

29. Teaching in music is satisfactory overall, with many good features. It is more consistently good in examination work in the upper school. With these classes, a good pace is set and students are expected to produce at a rate that, with prompt and helpful feedback from teachers, enhances learning. Skilled questioning ensures participation at a good level, boosting confidence. Teachers expect mature attitudes. Teaching would be even better if more varied methods were used. The good features of teaching in the lower school include the effective management of pupils and the timing of lessons, which allows pupils to demonstrate their achievement and learn how to improve. Teachers often anticipate the next lesson, showing how to use and build on learning experiences. Clear instructions are given with necessary reminders, and teachers try to ensure that all are involved and all achieve. Where teaching does not reach this standard, it is hampered by restricted resources and accommodation. There needs to be a greater match between set tasks and pupils' different abilities to support the progress of both higher and lower-attainers.
30. In almost all lessons in physical education, teaching is at least good and it is particularly good at post-16. Purposeful, well-organised and productive lessons result in pupils responding very positively at all times. Class management is always efficient and effective. Relationships are good and levels of participation are high throughout the school. Encouraged and supported by the staff, pupils are willing to work hard to improve their level of skill. This attitude, together with the challenging but realistic tasks they experience in lessons, impacts positively on the standards achieved. The degree of commitment and maturity shown by pupils studying for examinations is good. They respond very positively to the high expectations of work and behaviour set by teachers.
31. In religious education, teaching is never less than satisfactory and in most lessons it is at least good. Where teaching is satisfactory, pupils are well managed, the teacher gives clear instructions which pupils follow, and good use is made of computers to enhance pupils' learning. However, there are missed opportunities for pupils to share ideas, exchange views and learn from each other. Where teaching is good, lessons are brisk and lively, pupils have good opportunities to take part in discussion and group work to exchange their ideas, and teachers use a variety of strategies to ensure that pupils are well focused and remain interested in the lesson. Where teaching is very good, teachers exude enthusiasm for the subject and inspire pupils to learn to their maximum potential. Pupils invariably enjoy these lessons and have a positive attitude to their learning, trying their hardest and listening carefully to the teacher and each other. Where teaching is at its best, teachers also target support where it is most needed, set very high expectations and challenge pupils so that they achieve very well.

32. The school is effective in teaching the skills of literacy, and this supports pupils' learning across the curriculum. A literacy policy is being developed. There is already a reading development policy, which all departments understand; clear guidelines on encouraging reading are contributing to pupils reading widely. The librarian works closely with the English department and makes a significant contribution to promoting good literacy skills in all subjects. In English, pupils at Key Stage 3 habitually read at the start of lessons. They are encouraged to read aloud in lessons and carry out analytical research using textbooks and the Internet. Research and critical skills are promoted in art, English, geography and history.
33. Teaching supports pupils' numeracy well in many subjects, though there is a need to co-ordinate this further through a whole-school numeracy policy. In design and technology, all teaching notes refer to numeracy as part of planning. In art, pupils' numeracy develops well through good and very good teaching. In science, individual teachers emphasise mathematical skills as the need arises in a lesson. The National Numeracy Strategy has begun to be implemented in mathematics and Years 7 and 8 lessons often include numeracy. In the best mathematics lessons, teachers take advantage of many opportunities to develop pupils' skills further.
34. In the learning support base, teachers use their detailed knowledge of the individual strengths and weaknesses of pupils with special educational needs to tailor reading, writing and spelling tasks precisely to their needs. They provide on-going checks throughout the lesson on the progress pupils are making, providing them with positive feedback on their performance and clarifying any misunderstandings along the way. This ensures that pupils always make very good progress, remain highly focused on their work and try their hardest in literacy tasks. Learning support assistants are also very well deployed in these lessons to provide individual help to pupils with additional learning difficulties. Most teachers accommodate the needs of pupils with learning difficulties well in smaller classes, by using learning support assistants effectively and targeting their teaching at individuals. In contrast, in a few subject lessons, teachers do not take sufficient account of the learning difficulties of some pupils and there is a poor match between the tasks pupils are expected to complete and individual learning needs. For example, in an English lesson of mainly boys, all pupils were given the same worksheet on 'Macbeth' and the language was too difficult for some pupils. One boy was expected to read the script aloud and was clearly frustrated with his reading, hesitating often and displaying nervousness and lack of confidence. Another pupil spent most of her time engaging in inappropriate behaviour, because the teacher focused discussion and interaction mainly on boys and made little attempt to involve the girls in this part of the lesson. Boys therefore made more progress than girls and those pupils with additional difficulties in reading made insufficient progress. All pupils in lower-ability sets are usually expected to do the same tasks and there is insufficient account taken of their particular strengths and weaknesses in literacy, numeracy and personal development when planning lessons. Tasks, teaching methods and resources need at times to be more precisely matched to the particular needs of the pupils.
35. A number of concerns were raised at the parents' meeting and in the response to the parents' questionnaire about the amount of homework that is set and the workload pupils receive on any given day. The majority of parents who expressed concern did so because they find that their children have either little or no homework on some occasions and a great deal to complete at other times. There is a clear homework timetable and inspection findings do not support parents' concerns. Homework was set appropriately in lessons observed and provided good learning opportunities for pupils. However, a confusion about the amount of homework may stem from the fact

that some pupils do not write homework tasks into their diaries, as they are supposed to do; this may lead to a number of parents making the reasonable assumption that no homework has been set.

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

36. The curriculum is good, offering a balanced range of relevant opportunities for learning. It includes a number of very strong features and helps to promote the above-average standards that pupils achieve. The school has made good improvements in the curriculum since the last inspection. Assessment data on pupils' progress now need to be used to adapt the curriculum where appropriate in order to make it even better.
37. Improvements have been substantial in provision for religious education, information and communication technology, music and a better range of courses is now offered in the sixth form. As a result of the changes in religious education and information and communication technology, the curriculum now fully meets statutory requirements at each key stage. Religious education is planned well in Key Stages 3 and 4 and all pupils now follow a GCSE course in the subject; higher-attainers follow a full course and other pupils take a short course. Provision for information and communication technology, both as a separate subject in Years 7, 9, 10 and 11, and within other subjects in Year 8, is now good, although at Key Stage 4 there are some subjects where it is not fully applied or where pupils' experience is too basic.
38. Pupils at Key Stage 3 are provided with good opportunities for academic and personal development. In addition to the National Curriculum, they all have lessons in drama, and almost all in Spanish or German, as a second modern language. At Key Stage 4, pupils have a wide choice of subjects within a framework which ensures balance. There are very few disapplications from a curriculum which includes a subject from each of the humanities, modern languages and technology areas. Higher-attaining pupils can now follow GCSE courses in the separate sciences.
39. The sixth form curriculum has been significantly enhanced with several new courses, including a GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualification) in health and social care and an A-level in psychology via distance-learning. There are also biannual religious education conferences in both years, an imaginative arrangement which effectively supplements the religious education elements in the sixth form personal and social education programme. However, planning for religious education in the sixth form needs to be stronger. The school is aware of the need to broaden the curriculum in the sixth form still further by adding more vocational courses in order to meet the needs of all the students in the school. Links with post-16 institutions are good.
40. Most pupils enter the school with good literacy skills and with an increasing number having very good skills in all areas of the English curriculum. The school has very good curricular links with the primary feeder schools and implements strands of the National Literacy Strategy. This level of curricular continuity has a significant impact on pupils making very good gains in literacy across the curriculum.
41. Provision for developing numeracy skills is good in many subjects, though there is no whole-school policy to co-ordinate this. The mathematics department has a numeracy policy and mathematics lessons often include some mental practice with number. However, mathematics provision specified on pupils' Statements of Special Educational Need are not always fully included in individual education plans. The planning of design and technology assignments incorporates appropriate number

work. There are many opportunities in science for pupils to apply their numeracy skills though these are not planned into schemes of work. Information and communication technology lessons support the development of numeracy through use of spreadsheets and databases.

42. Pupils have available to them an exceptionally rich and varied programme of extra-curricular opportunities to pursue and develop their interests and talents. Sporting activities include canoeing, windsurfing, sailing and climbing; footballers have toured Spain and athletes participated in events in Germany. As well as many artistic and other clubs and events are computing, conservation work and the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards scheme. Inter-house competitions include a drama festival, swimming galas, Masterchef, art and talent shows and a photography competition, and there are music extension workshops. Amongst recent educational visits have been one to Shropshire (Year 9), an art trip to Paris (Years 12 and 13), a geography field trip to the Isle of Arran (Year 12), ski trips, a cruise, day trips to France (Year 7), a drama visit to Greece, and an outdoor pursuits trip to Spain.
43. Through activities such as these, as well as within the taught curriculum, the school meets the needs of the full range of ability satisfactorily. The whole curriculum is open to all, classes are organised by ability where appropriate, with group sizes suitably matched to need, and more able pupils are involved in enrichment courses such as the Ford Award scheme and extension days in English, mathematics, design and technology, humanities, music and creative studies. The school's policy of making classes smaller for lower-attaining pupils means that pupils with special educational needs have more opportunities for individual support. Teachers do not yet have sufficient information, however, on any of their pupils' previous attainment and current progress. As a consequence, the curriculum is not yet tailored sufficiently to individual pupils' needs. There is a need to pay greater attention in the planning of programmes and lessons to the needs both of those pupils with learning difficulties and of the most gifted and talented.
44. Provision for pupils who are learning English as an additional language is satisfactory overall. Many subject teachers support these pupils well, enabling them to make good progress, but staff do not have formal training in this area and there is no effective system for monitoring provision.
45. The timetable is organised well but does not make it possible for subjects such as food technology and art to have any double periods, which would support teaching and learning more appropriately. The teaching time of 25 hours per week for all pupils is used well, although the time that pupils spend with their tutors when they do not have assembly needs to be used more productively.
46. Pupils' personal development is supported very effectively in lessons and throughout the life of the school. Staff communicate high expectations and show that they respect pupils, thus helping them to believe in their own potential. The school does much to enhance pupils' self-esteem and this underpins good academic achievement and produces mature, well-rounded young people.
47. The promotion of pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory overall, although pupils have some good opportunities to gain an understanding of spiritual issues. Examples include the 'thought for the week' in Key Stages 3 and 4, considering world issues from a Christian point of view, contrasting the different outlooks on life suggested by different philosophical positions, and reflecting on the meaning of prayer and meditation as a means of worship. Some assemblies make a good contribution to

pupils' spiritual development and provoke them to think about their lives and deeds. The school does not, however, comply with the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of worship for all pupils.

48. Provision for moral and social education is very good. A strong moral and social lead is provided through the personal and social education programme and religious education. The school's good community links support pupils' social development and the very good extra-curricular opportunities foster all aspects of their development. There are many opportunities for pupils to take responsibility around the school, such as representing their peers on the school council or supporting other pupils using information and communication technology rooms at lunch times. Co-operative work is fostered through pupils working, for example, in small groups on practical work in science and evaluating their own and others' work in art.
49. Provision for pupils' cultural development is good. Art and music make a particular contribution to pupils' understanding of a range of cultures and, together with religious education, contribute to their multicultural awareness. Pupils' knowledge and experience of their own and other cultural traditions are extended further through visits and through the school welcoming visitors such as religious leaders.
50. As it was at the time of the last inspection, the programme for personal and social education is of very good quality, including appropriate provision for moral, health and sex education and, in addition, study skills and the law. The school has gained Recognition of Quality awards for its pre-16 work experience and for the overall excellence of its careers education and guidance programme, strengthened by very good links with local companies. These links provide the courses 'Insight on Site' for Year 10 and 'Insight into Management' for Year 12, which build pupils' skills in teamwork, problem solving, negotiation and communication, preparing them very well for the world of work and the next stage in their education. The school makes very good use of visitors and links with the business community to provide relevant information for pupils and staff. In the sixth form, students are expected to complete a 30-hour community service commitment, either in or out of school, and to organise their own work shadowing experience. Careers advice includes a higher education convention.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

51. All staff implement a large number of well-structured and well-written policies for pastoral care consistently and inclusively across the school. This ensures that each and every pupil flourishes in a safe and caring environment, secure in the knowledge that they can turn to anyone for help and support when they need it. The daily care of pupils was a strength of the school at the time of the last inspection. High standards of pastoral care have been maintained, and indeed improved, in the intervening years and this aspect of the school's work is a significant strength, thus making a considerable contribution to pupils' achievement and progress.
52. Detailed health and safety procedures are in place to ensure that pupils work in an environment that is safe and secure. A sufficient number of staff are trained in first aid to ensure appropriate support when necessary and fire drills are undertaken regularly. An office is set aside to deal with any late arrivals each morning and also provides somewhere for pupils to go if they become unwell during the school day. The policy for child protection is particularly well devised and outlines the school's responsibilities very clearly in relation to those defined for other agencies. The policy and procedures

are in strict accordance with those of the Area Child Protection Committee. Staff are clearly aware of these procedures.

53. Strong policies in respect of behaviour and discipline are implemented consistently across the school by all staff and result in the high standards of behaviour observed throughout the school day. The policy contains rewards and sanctions that are clearly understood by pupils. They comment on how much they value commendations and certificates and are proud to show off their achievements in this respect. The school operates a straightforward and sensible anti-bullying policy. In conversation with pupils, it is very clear that bullying is a rare occurrence. If and when it does happen, pupils say that staff immediately sort it out and they feel confident in reporting it in the knowledge that they will be taken seriously. Monitoring of pupils' behaviour and development is tracked well in a number of different ways by form tutors, heads of year, heads of department and key stage co-ordinators. Staff expectations of pupils' behaviour are very high and pupils know exactly where they stand.
54. The programme for personal and social development ensures that pupils have an hourlong lesson each week in which issues of behaviour, relationships and citizenship are discussed, thus making a further contribution to their care and welfare.
55. The school wishes to improve on its already satisfactory rate of attendance. Some excellent strategies are in place to achieve this aim. These include sending a copy of every pupil's attendance record sheet to their parents each term and a separate telephone line for parents to telephone the school with explanations for non-attendance on the first day of absence. If parents do not do this, the school telephones them immediately.
56. The school rightly places great emphasis on pupils settling into their secondary education as quickly as possible. Accordingly, it has developed a rigorous and effective set of procedures to realise this aim. This includes smaller classes than in the rest of the school to ensure that Year 7 pupils soon feel at home and can settle down in their new environment with confidence. Parents at the pre-inspection meeting picked out this seamless transition as being a particular strength of the pastoral care for pupils, and pupils themselves commented, without prompting, on how easy they found it to settle into this large school.
57. The procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are generally good and have improved since the last inspection, although there is still some variation in the quality of assessment practices in different subjects. A clear and effective policy is now in place that requires faculties or departments to produce their own guidance outlining how the school policy will be implemented. Faculties have been monitored by the assessment co-ordinator to ensure that they conform to the school's overall guidelines. Procedures for assessment remain particularly effective in English, science, history, geography and religious education. Improvements have taken place in mathematics and physical education. However, in modern languages, teachers' knowledge of National Curriculum levels at Key Stage 3 has been insecure, leading to unrealistic expectations at Key Stage 4. In art, whilst assessment is good among individual teachers, the policy has not yet been incorporated into the departmental documentation. Although procedures have yet to be implemented fully in music, progress has been made since the last inspection.
58. Good procedures for the annual review of pupils with Statements of Special Educational Need are in place. Individual education plans are mostly based on the provision specified in pupils' Statements, especially for literacy. However, in a few

cases, particularly where pupils have been identified with mathematics learning difficulties on their Statements, insufficient account is taken of the provision specified when formulating individual education plans and setting targets. This is due mainly to lack of effective systems for identifying learning difficulties that are associated with the technical language of mathematics, mathematical concepts, mathematical thinking and mathematical learning styles.

59. Assessment information is starting to be used effectively in most subjects of the curriculum. It is particularly good in English, where pupils undertake standardised tests at the end of each unit of work. It is also very effective in religious education, where each pupil completes a personal record and self- assessment sheet at the end of each topic, identifying what has been learned and how they might improve. There is a consistency of approach in science and a detailed profile sheet in design and technology that indicates specific targets for improvement. A commercial assessment software package is used and this is a valuable tool in monitoring summary assessments of pupils' progress in order to provide parents with interim reports.
60. The school is at an early stage in using its assessment information to raise standards and modify aspects of provision. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is analysed and used to compare their actual results in National Curriculum tests in Year 9 and at GCSE with predictions. The findings from this analysis are shared with senior managers and faculty directors. However, the predictions stemming from data analysis are not generally shared with anyone beyond the senior management team. Consequently, teachers do not have information about their pupils from which to set individual targets or monitor pupils' progress, and there is a need for staff training in order that all staff understand the potential that data has to offer in raising standards. The school has used data to set satisfactory overall targets for examination performance, but much more is still to be done to make the most of assessment information and to track the value the school adds to what pupils bring with them in the way of attainment.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

61. The good partnership with parents at the time of the last inspection has been maintained. Parental involvement is valued and the school operates an open-door policy in which two-way communication between it and parents is a regular daily feature. Responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire and comment at the pre-inspection meeting confirm that the vast majority of parents have confidence in the school and that it is viewed positively in the local community.
62. An interesting and well-produced newsletter is sent regularly to parents and the school prospectus is of high quality so that prospective parents and pupils are very well informed about what is expected of them. There is constant communication between the school and parents with regard to attendance and behaviour issues when necessary.
63. Annual reports on pupils are of good quality, keep parents well informed of their children's progress and help pupils to assess their own performance. They contain detailed comments on all subjects, a report from form tutors, targets for improvement set by either teachers or pupils themselves, and they invite parents' comment.
64. Parents are fully involved in the annual review of their children's Statements of Special Educational Need and in the individual education plan process. Many parents attend

reviews and are encouraged to share any concerns with the special educational needs co-ordinator, who provides a clear point of reference for them.

65. Homework diaries provide another means of communication between school and home. These contain homework timetables and the expectation that parents and teachers will sign them regularly. A small number of parents pointed out that there is some inconsistency across the school in the setting of homework and that it does not always happen when scheduled. Inspectors found that homework was generally appropriately set but that pupils did not always write homework assignments into their homework diaries. Other parents commented that they would like more information regarding the curriculum within subjects, for example the topics to be covered over a set period of time. The inspection team supports parents' views that provision of this kind of information would improve further the already good communication and partnership that exist.
66. The school's designated catchment area is wide and pupils enter Brentwood County High from 44 different primary schools, thus illustrating the distances between the school and the homes of many of them. This makes close involvement with the well-run Parents' Society difficult for many parents, particularly those who work full-time. However, the small group of parents who run the Parents' Society say that all the fund-raising events they arrange are well supported and that there is always help available on the day. Their efforts have resulted, for example, in the provision of the school's two minibuses.
67. In large secondary schools where pupils come from a wide geographical area it can be difficult for a school to ensure good standards of communication and partnership between itself and parents. Brentwood County High School is successful in this respect because of the hard work it invests in ensuring that parents play an effective and valued part in the life of the school.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

68. The headteacher provides thoughtful leadership and has a clear vision for the school. He sets very high expectations for pupils' academic achievement and personal development: this forms the foundation for close teamwork amongst the staff and ensures a shared sense of purpose in pursuit of common goals. There is effective delegation of key responsibilities to other managers and the establishment of faculty directors is especially significant in the school's success. There is a clear management structure that gives rise to coherence in both the academic and pastoral organisation of the school, and roles and responsibilities are mostly very well understood. A senior manager oversees the work of each faculty. A review of the senior management team is currently taking place to ensure increased effectiveness in response to the growth of the school. There is strong commitment to further developing middle managers, such as heads of department, and staff have attended middle management courses.
69. The governing body provides good support to the school, and governors in key positions have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and its potential for further development. Governors, senior managers and other staff work closely together. Governors have established effective procedures for gathering information and assuring the quality of provision. There is an appropriate range of governor committees that monitor the school's performance and governors have links with subject departments. Governors ensure that statutory requirements are met, except

that the school does not fulfil the legal requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

70. Since the last inspection, high priority has been given to improving the quality of teaching through in-service training and other professional development, mutual observation of teaching within departments and faculties, and professional dialogue. The effectiveness of these initiatives is evident in the significant increase in the amount of teaching that is at least satisfactory. Senior managers sample lessons in the faculties that they line manage and faculty directors undertake a planned series of observations. This means that managers have a good idea of the relative strengths and weaknesses in the performance of individual teachers. There is, however, scope for more precise critical feedback to teachers, and this is key to raising standards particularly in modern languages but also in mathematics and science. There is some rigorous monitoring and evaluation of teachers' work by senior managers, as well as by faculty directors, but some aspects of monitoring are not as well established as they could be. This is particularly the case in relation to special educational needs, provision for pupils with English as an additional language and modern foreign languages.
71. The commitment to raising standards and to improving further the quality of education is strong. The school is in the early stages of developing the use of data analysis and there is potential for making much greater use of a range of data to set targets for individual pupils, and as a means of more precisely monitoring the performance of one subject in relation to another. Senior managers monitor and evaluate the work of each faculty, seeking year-on-year improvement, and use staff appraisal / performance management to develop individual and whole school performance. There is a regular pattern of meetings of the senior management team, of co-ordinators and the consultative committee. These methods enable senior managers to target help and support to areas of greatest need, whilst continuing to support all aspects of the school.
72. Priorities and targets for development are appropriately identified through an annual planning cycle. Longer-term planning is linked to financial planning but the school is only just bringing this together formally into a three-year strategic plan. Development planning within faculties and departments is thorough and relates well to whole-school development priorities.
73. The special educational needs co-ordinator works very hard and provides good leadership for improving provision for pupils with special educational needs. She maintains good links with outside professionals, such as the speech therapist and the behaviour support team, and promotes effective teamwork between support teachers and learning support assistants with subject teachers. The well thought out special educational needs policy provides excellent guidance for subject teachers on the effective use of learning support assistants in lessons. The co-ordinator takes her own professional development seriously, updating herself on new initiatives in order to bring about further improvements in special educational needs provision. Her recent attendance at a special educational needs management course has led to a recognition of the need to carry out an audit of special educational needs provision throughout the school.
74. When at full strength, levels of teaching staff are satisfactory, with several good features. Both the number of pupils per teacher and staff contact ratios are at an average level. There is a good mix of experienced staff and those newer to the school. The provision of qualified and experienced teachers to match the curriculum is good in

English, science and mathematics, and in physical education and modern foreign languages. In all other subjects it is satisfactory, though with the unfortunate coincidence of there being only temporary, recently appointed curriculum leaders in art, drama and music. Drama and music urgently need the appointment of permanent heads of department but the school is working to remedy this situation. There is no non-specialist teaching which is detrimental to pupils' progress.

75. A continuing problem is the recruitment of additional learning support assistants. However, the school should be relatively well staffed for learning support once it has realised its intentions of appointing a further two members of staff to the learning support team. Of particular value is the support of foreign language assistants in modern languages and technicians in design and technology and science. While numbers of administrative staff are high, the agreed policy of devolving more administrative support than usual to faculties, to relieve teachers of more routine work, works well. Staffing for lunchtime supervision is currently under strength, but this work, and that of premises staff, is well organised, with clear responsibilities.
76. The school's longstanding appraisal system has been easily adapted to the requirements of performance management. Staff development is targeted to match the school's priorities and individual needs. It is offered, as appropriate, to all support staff as well as to teachers, and described as 'collective learning'. A deputy headteacher is responsible for monitoring training needs and for resourcing professional development, using sources both in and beyond the school.
77. A particular feature of the staff is the strong teamwork shown in most subject areas, including support for new teachers and for those in training. The school tends to attract young staff with much potential who gain experience and then move on to gain promotion elsewhere. As a result, it has a significant turnover of staff but its systems for inducting new teachers to the expectations and routines of the school are very effective. The school is in partnership with a number of institutions for the training of teachers, and those supporting newly qualified teachers are given appropriate time to fulfil this responsibility.
78. The school's accommodation is good and supports high quality teaching and learning. It consists of some older buildings, together with several more modern extensions. Almost all rooms are warm, bright and carpeted. In most areas of the school, there are attractive wall displays of pupils' work. Particularly good examples can be found in mathematics, art, geography and history. The various buildings are maintained to a high standard through the hard work of the caretakers and cleaners, and there is very little litter and no graffiti.
79. At the time of the last inspection, concerns were expressed about insufficient workshops in design and technology and inadequate teaching spaces in modern languages, music and drama. The school has made very significant progress in rectifying those deficiencies. An impressive new building was opened in the autumn term consisting of a computer suite, two areas for teaching drama and a number of general-purpose classrooms. The new science laboratories were remodelled from three classrooms in the science and technology building. Accommodation for teaching modern languages is now excellent. There is new flooring in the drama studio and considerable improvements have been made in the provision for the teaching of design and technology. Sixth form accommodation has been vastly improved through the creative solution of lowering a ceiling to add an additional floor, and the resulting suite of rooms provides very effective spaces for studying and socialising. Most departments now have the benefit of adjacent rooms and the

increase in the number of general classrooms has reduced pressure on specialist rooms. Accommodation for music is now satisfactory although there remains a lack of suitable small areas for group work. The school hopes to completely renovate the swimming pool and enlarge the turning circle for buses at some time in the future.

80. In recent years, the school has spent more on learning resources than schools nationally with a similar budget and, as a result, its learning resources effectively support the demands of the curriculum. Governors have successfully budgeted to resource new courses, for example, the new Year 12 AS levels. With the exception of music, most departments have enough good quality materials, tools and equipment for all pupils to benefit from their lessons in most subjects. Difficulties in music relate to the numbers of instruments, for example keyboards, available when two classes are timetabled together, as well as to the adverse effects of some damaged equipment. Overall, pupils have enough textbooks in lessons, and where necessary for homework, to avoid sharing, except in mathematics in Year 8, again where classes occur simultaneously.
81. The library/learning resources centre provides a very good quality and quantity of book-based and computer-based resources and supports the curriculum very well. It is managed well and used well by pupils, and is generally a great asset to the school's provision for pupils' learning.
82. Although the numbers and quality of computers in the school are average, and access is generally satisfactory, more departments require increasingly frequent use of the existing equipment so demand currently outstrips availability. The school recognises this and plans are well in hand to provide more computers to meet the growing need. More computer-aided design and manufacturing equipment will soon be needed to meet the increased demands in design and technology, and the school plans to acquire this. The usefulness of computer hardware and software in some departments, particularly in history and geography, is compromised by the lack of a site licence for certain programs, which prevents access for pupils when they are in the department. Similar hindrances occur for special educational needs pupils through a lack of appropriate computer software programs for supporting the development of basic skills.
83. Financial planning is very good. Governors are fully involved in the process and the budget is clearly allocated to school development priorities. Internal procedures for controlling income and expenditure are excellent, and this was reflected in recent audit reports that had no recommendations to make for improvements. The school systematically monitors and checks all income and expenditure against the budget, holds a small contingency fund for unforeseen events, and ensures that all checks and balances are in place, with clear lines of delegated financial responsibility drawn up for all staff concerned. The bursar prepares regular monthly statements of income and expenditure, and attends governors' finance committee meetings to account for the budget. Systems for managing the budget are fully computerised and there has been a considerable improvement in the use of new technologies which is now good, throughout the school. Staff with financial management responsibilities ensure that the school receives best value in all its spending decisions. Staff, accommodation and learning resources are used well to support the curriculum and teaching and learning.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

In order to build on the school's existing strengths and further improve, the headteacher, senior managers and governors should:

- (1) Significantly improve standards in modern foreign languages, especially in French, so that they match – then exceed – the national average, by:
- ensuring, through rigorous and regular monitoring, that the quality of teaching consistently matches that of the current best practice in the faculty;
 - maximising the benefits of information and communication technology and the outstanding new accommodation so that all pupils enjoy and value learning a foreign language;

- using information from assessment to amend the curriculum where necessary so that every pupil is encouraged and enabled to achieve as well as possible.
(Paragraphs 168-178)
- (2) Ensure that all pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as they can, by:
- ensuring that teachers' subject planning is based on full diagnostic assessment to accommodate pupils' particular needs and difficulties;
 - consistently matching resources, tasks, and teaching approaches and methods to the pupils' learning difficulties;
 - fully reflecting the provision detailed on pupils' Statements of Special Educational Need in relation to mathematics in their individual education plan targets and the teaching they receive;
 - ensuring that mathematics teachers and learning support staff are fully trained in diagnostic assessment, teaching methods and approaches to support pupils with mathematical learning difficulties;
 - more clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of the different managers who have a part to play in the systematic monitoring of special educational needs provision in order to strengthen this aspect of the school's work.
(Paragraphs 11, 21, 34, 43 and 58)
- (3) Make greater use of assessment data to target and monitor the progress of individual pupils, and provide staff training in the use of data analysis, in order to*:
- raise standards further, especially for higher attaining pupils in English, mathematics and science;
 - inform the monitoring of teaching and learning by senior managers and faculty directors.
(Paragraphs 12, 43, 57 and 60)

**This issue is an identified priority in the current school development plan.*

In addition to the key issues above, the following less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the action plan:

- the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils is not met (paragraph 47);
- provision for pupils for whom English is an additional language is too dependent on individual teachers, who do not receive formal training in this area, and there is no effective system of monitoring progress (paragraph 11);
- there is no whole school policy for the co-ordination of numeracy to guide teachers in the development of numeracy skills (paragraph 33);
- resources are limited in music, restricting pupils' achievement especially at Key Stage 3, and there are problems relating to the accommodation with some health and safety concerns (paragraph 184);
- planning for religious education in the sixth form needs to be strengthened (paragraph 197);

- having no double lessons in art and design and technology creates difficulties when pupils are engaged in what should be more extended periods of creative work (paragraph 45).

THE SIXTH FORM

84. The sixth form provides a good environment for students to learn and to make effective progress. The range of courses on offer has been extended since the previous inspection, sometimes with imaginative approaches such as distance learning and video conferencing to provide a psychology course. Some vocational study has been introduced, in health and social care, and the school is looking to extend this further. The new Year 12 courses are being implemented successfully, adding further breadth to individual students' study.
85. Each student's chosen subjects are supplemented by a range of further activities to produce a broad and well-balanced curriculum. The personal and social education and general studies programmes are used well to ensure that students consider social and moral issues, such as Third World debt. Statutory requirements for religious education are met, but more emphasis needs to be placed upon the unique contribution the subject has to offer to social, moral and spiritual development through improved planning. In addition, formal qualifications are offered in key skills, covering the application of number, communication and information and communication technology. There has been some difficulty in implementing some aspects of the key skills programme but appropriate evaluation has already ensured that these teething problems should be eliminated for next year.
86. Students' personal development is supported further through a range of additional activities and experiences. They are expected to participate in community service and to organise their own work shadowing. Careers advice and guidance continue to be provided, and participation in a valuable management programme is also offered. There are many opportunities to take responsibility and to play a full part in the life of the school. Sixth formers act as prefects and most realise quickly the role that they play in setting the tone and standards expected for younger pupils. There are further opportunities to be involved in school and sixth form committees and to organise charitable events.
87. The leadership and management of the sixth form are very good. Monitoring systems are in place to check academic progress and attendance, for example. Careful evaluation is also made of students' views and perceptions when reviewing provision and considering change. There is a good balance between encouraging their personal development and ensuring that a safety net exists to identify and support those who are having some difficulty developing the degree of independence and responsibility expected. Supervised private study is proving a good mechanism for helping students to make the transition between a fully taught timetable leading up to GCSE and the sixth form curriculum, when they are expected to work independently some of the time.
88. The proportion of pupils transferring to the sixth form has increased in recent years, with a very high proportion of Year 11 showing early interest for next year. Much effort has gone in to providing suitable accommodation, in terms of both quantity and quality. Plans will soon be implemented to improve sixth formers' access to information and communication technology equipment to aid further independent study.

89. The school is successful in its aim to provide a rich sixth form environment which encourages a positive approach to learning and which refines academic skills to produce students who are ready and suited for the world beyond school.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	243
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	76

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5	31	40.5	22.5	0.5	0.5	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	1215	180
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	102	na

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	24	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	196	1

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	16

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	20
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	40

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	7.7
National comparative data	5.9

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.1
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	130	104	234

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	94	106	107
	Girls	80	76	69
	Total	174	182	176
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	74 (70)	78 (74)	75 (67)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	38 (27)	52 (45)	44 (26)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	92	102	116
	Girls	76	73	86
	Total	168	175	202
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	72 (78)	75 (68)	86 (82)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	35 (33)	43 (40)	50 (45)
	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	121	108	229

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	67	113	116
	Girls	70	104	105
	Total	137	217	221
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	60 (61)	95 (94)	97 (96)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	42
	National	38.4

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

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	43	46	89

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	15.0	19.9	17.5	N/A	N/A	N/A
National	17.7	18.6	18.2	2.6	2.9	2.7

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	2
Indian	18
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	2
Chinese	4
White	1322
Any other minority ethnic group	43

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	56	1
Other minority ethnic groups		

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)	83.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7– Y13

Total number of education support staff	16.0
Total aggregate hours worked per week	389

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.2
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	23.4
Key Stage 4	22.0

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	3713387
Total expenditure	3658458
Expenditure per pupil	2681
Balance brought forward from previous year	144932
Balance carried forward to next year	199861

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1395
Number of questionnaires returned	371

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	38	51	8	3	0
My child is making good progress in school.	42	51	4	1	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	30	60	5	0	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	62	12	5	1
The teaching is good.	33	61	2	0	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	33	50	12	3	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	48	44	5	2	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	57	42	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	22	59	13	2	3
The school is well led and managed.	39	53	4	1	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	35	58	3	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	31	54	6	1	8

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

ENGLISH

90. The levels of attainment in English have been well above the national average since the time of the last inspection and there is a rising trend in performance. In 2000, the proportions of pupils reaching Levels 5 and 6 in National Curriculum tests at age 14 were well above the national average and well above those achieved in similar schools. The standard achieved was also better than the results obtained between 1997 and 1999, when they were also above the national average. However, a smaller number of pupils than expected gain the highest level in the test. Boys and girls achieve equally well but boys are performing better in relation to boys' achievement nationally than girls are relative to girls nationally. The trend in the school's results is broadly in line with the national trend. Overall, pupils make very good progress from entry to the school at the age of 11 to age 14.
91. In GCSE examinations in English and English literature in 2000, for which virtually all pupils were entered, 70 per cent achieved A* to C grades in English and 69.5 per cent in English literature. These results were considerably higher than results nationally. All pupils gained grades within the A* to G range. In English, 36 per cent of pupils gained GCSE grades A* to B, and in literature, over 40 per cent gained similar grades. The percentage of pupils gaining A* grades is just below the national average in English but above in literature. Attainment at GCSE over the last three years shows consistency and pupils' performance in English literature is better than it is in English, science, mathematics and many other subjects. Boys' attainment is better than that of girls, contrary to the national picture.
92. The A-level results are consistently good and, in 2000, results exceeded the school target and the national average, with over 50 per cent of all entrants gaining grades A or B, compared with the national average of 37.2 per cent. From work seen during the inspection, standards of attainment are well above national expectations in all years, although there is variation between the higher and lower sets.
93. Speaking and listening skills are very good and are a positive feature of the department. Pupils are articulate and exude confidence when taking part in oral work. At Key Stage 3, pupils adopt an enquiring approach to their learning. They show an increasing readiness to follow up ideas and give precise information, as seen in a Year 7 lesson where pupils spoke knowledgeably about their research on animal rights. By the end of the key stage, Year 9 pupils use talk effectively during role-play and when reviewing work. In Years 10 and 11, pupils organise their thoughts and ideas clearly when taking part in group work or responding to questions. They are adept and reflective during presentations, feedback and discussion. These skills were evident in a Year 10 lesson where pupils did a mock broadcast in response to exploring injustice and racism in 'To Kill a Mocking Bird'. Similar responses were seen when high-attaining Year 11 pupils gave succinct answers when analysing poems. Throughout both key stages, girls tend to be reticent speakers whereas boys are quick to respond and dominate oral sessions. Sixth form students listen attentively to complex ideas and respond accordingly. They use a range of devices to generate debate, occasionally adopting polemical and provocative views in order to stimulate discussion, for example in a Year 13 lesson when, in response to reading Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales', they discussed the institution of marriage now and in medieval Britain.

94. Standards in reading are good for most pupils and very good for high and many average-attaining pupils, who read with insight and understanding. A high priority is given to reading, through initiatives such as reading at the start of lessons in Key Stage 3, research projects, 'reading passports' and literacy awards. The library is used well to develop reading, research and independent learning skills. Texts normally reserved for GCSE are used throughout Key Stage 3. For example, a Year 7 mixed ability class made inferences and deductions when analysing Conan Doyle's 'The Speckled Band'. By the end of Year 9, the majority of pupils read critically and can select and use appropriate quotations to support their views. High-attainers and many average-attaining pupils can identify the different layers and meaning in a text and comment on the use of language and themes, as seen in their work on 'Macbeth'. Lower-attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good gains in developing their reading skills and vocabulary through the literacy programme. On occasion, pupils with special educational needs do not make as much progress as other pupils when tasks are not matched sufficiently to their learning needs.
95. At Key Stage 4, high-attaining and most average-attaining pupils read analytically and the practical criticism of high-attainers is very good. These pupils read closely and offer alternative interpretations that show good textual grasp and appreciation, as seen in their analysis of the poems 'Dulce et Decorum Est' and 'Anthem for Doomed Youth'. Average-attaining pupils respond well to analysing literary texts and show an increasing ability to select appropriate points and quotations to support their views. Lower-attaining pupils have a good grasp of their reading but they do not sustain a critical approach when responding to a text. Students in the sixth form use a wide range of background notes to aid their learning. They read critically and analytically and grapple with complex issues and themes, as illustrated in their analysis of selected poems by Gunn and Hughes. The highest attaining sixth formers give clear and well argued responses to texts they have read.
96. Most pupils are competent writers and structure their work effectively. High-attaining pupils use an extensive vocabulary. They use technical and grammatical features with great accuracy and skilfully use the processes of writing to produce polished essays of a high standard. By the end of Year 9, these pupils produce excellent pieces of creative writing that demonstrate flair and talent. At Key Stage 4, high-attaining pupils write with precision: first drafts are often concise and their written work is tightly structured. Pupils make very good use of writing frames and information and communication technology to plan, draft and edit their work and, as a result, essays are well structured and presentation is good, as is the final standard of their work. Overall, weaknesses of expression and technical errors mar the work of some average and lower-attaining pupils. Lower-attainers do not always recognise immediately their grammatical errors. Students in the sixth form write analytically and those working towards the highest grade write succinctly and in a controlled way that shows mastery. Overall, presentation is very good and handwriting is of a neat cursive style.
97. Overall, teaching is very good. It was very good and occasionally excellent in over a third of lessons. Teaching at Key Stage 4 was slightly less good than at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form, with a higher proportion of satisfactory teaching. Teachers' planning in most lessons is very good. They plan lessons based on clear schemes of work. Planning has very clear objectives that are achieved in highly structured lessons. Teachers make good links to prior learning, seek to increase pupils' vocabulary and knowledge of language and use questions effectively to involve pupils in their learning. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and understanding of

examination requirements, which enable them to give clear exposition. Carefully prepared and chosen materials in turn help pupils to understand the work and make very good progress. In a Year 10 lesson, for instance, the teacher prepared a high quality worksheet to reinforce the use of quotations in literary criticism and used many examples, including the work of pupils in the class, to illustrate the standard of work required. This enabled pupils to gain a better understanding of literary criticism. Teachers challenge pupils to think creatively and perceptively about their work and this encourages pupils of all levels of attainment to aim for high standards and participate in the lessons. In most lessons, work is carefully matched to the needs of pupils and support for pupils with special educational needs is good. Teachers listen to pupils' comments and incorporate them into their exposition; they assess pupils' progress through questioning, feedback, short tests and the use of role-play. These approaches maintain pupils' interest and concentration. Where teaching is only satisfactory, learning objectives are less clear or are not matched sufficiently to all pupils' learning needs, pupils are not reprimanded sufficiently for loss of concentration, girls are not drawn into taking a more active part in lessons and occasionally reading tasks are too difficult for pupils with special educational needs. Teachers use homework to reinforce learning and give pupils clear guidance on how to improve their work. Marking is thorough, as is record keeping.

98. Pupils' learning is very good and the subject makes a significant contribution to pupils' overall development. Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning, contribute well and maintain a positive work ethic in most lessons. They take responsibility for their learning and work productively, revealing a strong sense of curiosity. Overall, most pupils are diligent about their work, and sixth formers are reflective, responsive and mature independent learners. Relationships between pupils are very good, with excellent co-operation evident during group work. On those occasions when behaviour is only satisfactory, it is because the teacher does not deal quickly or effectively enough with any loss of concentration by individuals or groups of pupils.
99. Curriculum planning is very good and the strong curricular links with feeder primary schools ensure very good progression from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. Leadership and management are outstandingly good and the head of faculty has a committed team. Responsibility is delegated, and the head of faculty is proactive in taking measures to ensure that standards are raised further. There is regular and consistent monitoring of both teaching and learning. For example, all pupils take departmental standard assessment tasks at the end of a unit of work. Target setting is now a prominent feature of planning and development. The department has made great strides in carrying out mutual classroom observations and sharing good practice since the last inspection. This is an effective and well-led faculty that is aware of its strengths and weaknesses and of the action needed to improve standards.

Literacy

100. Oral communication is encouraged in all subjects and pupils speak with confidence and poise. They are articulate and skilfully ask and answer questions. In science, they speak with assurance and across the curriculum they give coherent and sustained answers, readily adapting talk to a range of situations. They participate in discussion and debate, particularly in the sixth form. These skills are used extensively in English, geography and history, where pupils' contributions show understanding and insight into a topic. A literacy policy is being developed. There is already a reading development policy, which all departments understand, and the clear guidelines on encouraging reading are contributing to pupils reading widely. The library is extensive and pupils have access to a specialised computer package to locate and increase their

knowledge of literary and non-literary texts. The librarian works closely with the English department and makes a significant contribution to promoting good literacy skills in all subjects. In English, pupils at Key Stage 3 habitually read at the start of lessons. They are encouraged to read aloud in lessons and carry out analytical research using textbooks and the Internet. Research and critical skills are generally very good in art, English, geography and history. Most pupils read competently, with accuracy and fluency.

101. The standard of written work is good and pupils write for a wide range of purposes and audiences. Sentence construction is generally good and most understand and use grammatical features with increasing accuracy. Subjects such as history and geography encourage creative writing and extended essays and project work. In science, pupils redraft their coursework and make good use of information and communication technology to enhance their presentation. Most departmental schemes of work include aspects of literacy and there is a good emphasis on increasing vocabulary in all subjects through 'word of the week', which is integrated into teaching, and word displays on classroom walls to reinforce technical vocabulary. There is no significant difference between the quality of writing of boys and girls. Presentation is of a high standard and pupils make very good use of different information and communications packages for producing their written work.

Drama

102. At Key Stage 3, pupils attain standards that are in line with and often above national expectations. They are attentive and follow instructions very carefully. Pupils understand how to use stimulus material to develop ideas for a script. In a Year 7 lesson, pupils worked in small groups to write short pieces on animal rights for a radio broadcast. The work enabled them to train their voices when giving different and opposing views. By Year 9, pupils use good discussion skills to develop their ideas. For instance, Year 9 pupils used creative and imaginative skills to construct potential scenes around a number of personal belongings. They have a good understanding of drama conventions and know how to write evaluative reports about their work.
103. Attainment at GCSE is well above the national average for most pupils. In the last three years, there has been a rising trend in performance and pupils have achieved exceptionally good results since the last inspection. In the 2000 examination, 92 per cent gained A* to C grades, significantly higher than the national average. Of these, 77 per cent achieved grades A* to B. Pupils attain high standards in drama and their performance is strong compared with their attainment in most other subjects. Results at GCE A level are good and, in the 2000 examination, 27.2 per cent achieved the top grades. However, this was a decline on the 1999 result when 50 per cent gained grades A and B. The subject continues to be an increasingly popular option in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
104. At Key Stage 4, pupils are confident and perceptive when discussing and performing their work. They work impressively, practise their roles with zest and use suggestions and advice to improve their performance. Pupils show an increasing understanding of the importance of space, timing when delivering lines, and gestures and focus when performing. Students in the sixth form understand the theoretical aspects of performing and incorporate them into their work.
105. Teaching at both key stages and in the sixth form is at least satisfactory, with some very good features. In the limited number of lessons seen, pupils' learning was enhanced by the attention teachers gave to improving pupils' drama skills. Teachers

maintain a sharp focus on evaluating work, which enables pupils to use identified techniques to improve their level of performance. Expert knowledge is used to plan lessons and explain practical approaches to performing. A good example of this was seen in a Year 12 lesson where students learned by reflecting and rehearsing again and again, after evaluating their performance on Stanislavski's approach to theatre. Teachers insist on high standards and challenge pupils by setting interesting tasks, intervening and modeling to illustrate the standard of work required. Teaching is only satisfactory when specialist knowledge is not passed on, pace is slow and explanations are brief.

106. Pupils are keen to learn in drama and exhibit a high level of interest and enthusiasm. They work well together, collaborating effectively and developing their ideas. Pupils' willingness to co-operate with each other and their teachers was clearly seen in a number of lessons. For example, despite the fact that the department is experiencing difficulties with staffing and has had a number of supply teachers, not one pupil was disruptive in lessons or shied away from working. They are motivated and focused and the maturity of the older pupils is a contributory factor to their learning.
107. The subject is presently without a head of department and the day-to-day management is carried out by a very supportive and forward thinking head of faculty, who has introduced appropriate measures to stabilise the staffing crisis. For example, the two newly qualified teachers are given good quality support over and above the normal requirements and a temporary specialist teacher has been appointed to take over some of the examination classes. However, the present staffing remains inadequate as supply staff are not always subject specialists. The school is aware of the impact this might have on examination results and is seeking to appoint a high calibre candidate shortly. Previous attempts to attract candidates have been unsuccessful. The department handbook is in need of revision. Since the last inspection accommodation has been greatly improved and the department benefits from having three studios, of which two are new. The subject makes a very good contribution to pupils' understanding of the arts.

MATHEMATICS

108. In 2000, the school's results in National Curriculum tests at age 14 were above the national average and well above those achieved in similar schools. The proportion of pupils gaining Level 5 or better was well above average but no pupils attained the highest level. Results in 2000 were the highest of the last five years, though the overall trend of improvement during that time was below the national trend. The performance of boys is better, relative to boys' results nationally, than girls' performance is relative to the results for girls nationally, but with some variation from year to year.
109. GCSE results in 2000 were well above the national average, and well above those achieved in similar schools. Pupils' mathematics results were significantly better than their attainment in many other subjects. Girls did slightly better than boys at A* to C, gaining more B grades but fewer A* grades, though there is no consistent difference between performance of boys and girls. Over the last three years, GCSE results have remained steady, but the proportion gaining A* and A grades has declined from above average to below average.
110. A-level results were below average in 2000 and have declined over the last three years. Girls did better than boys in 1999 and 2000, but not in 1998.

111. In work seen during the inspection, pupils' attainment in Years 7 to 9 was above average overall and their achievement was good in relation to their attainment on entry. The highest-attaining pupils have good algebraic skills, investigate mathematical patterns and understand geometrical formulae. They reach the higher levels of the National Curriculum, though few reach the top level. Average-attaining pupils have good numeracy skills, and are making good progress with algebra. They are working above the national average level. Many lower-attaining pupils understand fractions and percentages, substitute into simple formulae and do simple investigations. There are no significant differences in the levels reached by boys and girls. Some pupils with special educational needs make good progress in line with other pupils in lessons. However, there are occasions when tasks are not matched sufficiently to pupils' needs because of insufficiently precise diagnosis of their learning difficulties. Pupils for whom English is an additional language reach similar standards to other pupils.
112. The GCSE work of pupils in Years 10 and 11 is well above average, and pupils are achieving very well. A high proportion of pupils achieve at grades B and C, but few pupils achieve at the very highest level, and in work seen some lower-attaining pupils are making slower progress than other pupils. Higher-attaining pupils develop understanding and good skills in algebra and geometry, though many make a small number of errors and only a small proportion develop a full mastery. Average-attaining pupils are working above the national average and are competent in trigonometry and area, but in algebra they tend to make errors using fractions and negative numbers. Lower-attaining pupils are able to use simple percentages, substitute numbers into simple formulae and find the circumference and area of circles.
113. Work seen in the sixth form was better than the standards indicated by the recent A-level examination. A minority of students are working at above average levels but many are below average and standards are below average overall. Students' achievements are satisfactory in relation to their GCSE attainment, since a number of students going on to study A-level mathematics were not amongst the top performers at GCSE. The majority of students gain a sound understanding and knowledge of the mathematical techniques they are taught. Higher-attainers can recall these quickly and apply them to new situations. The difficulties for most students are in applying their knowledge to solving problems, and in knowing which skill to use in a particular situation. Their skills are also sometimes not reliable enough under the pressure of an examination. The weakest students have difficulty mastering the basic skills needed in A-level mathematics.
114. Teaching is good overall. It is always at least satisfactory, good or better in two-thirds of lessons and very good or excellent in one-sixth. In the sixth form, some teaching is very good but it is satisfactory overall. Teachers have good subject knowledge and much mathematics teaching typically includes clear explanations, well-organised and planned work, with high expectations of pupils, good relationships and good management. It is the consistency of these good features, backed up by good teamwork, which helps to build pupils' confidence and good attitudes and leads to the very good results that are achieved at Key Stages 3 and 4. However, teachers do not have sufficient knowledge of mathematical learning difficulties and do not take enough account of such difficulties, especially when planning work for pupils with Statements of Special Educational Need.
115. In the very good and excellent teaching, teachers use many opportunities to make links with other areas of the subject and to practise numeracy. They use very good questioning to check pupils' understanding and challenge them to think for themselves and solve problems. In these lessons, pupils learn at a faster pace and with more

depth; they also develop more independence of thought. Such lessons are relatively rare, which is one reason why few pupils achieve at the highest level. Where teaching is satisfactory rather than good, pupils make progress at a slower rate because they are not challenged to think for themselves, questioning is not sufficiently deep to develop their understanding and the needs of pupils with mathematical learning difficulties are not fully met. On occasion, teachers do not provide sufficient challenge for higher-attaining pupils, and a common weakness in A-level teaching is that teachers tell pupils too much. They need to use questioning more to develop pupils' ability to solve problems, rather than telling them the approach that is needed.

116. Pupils' attitudes to mathematics are very good and their readiness to learn is an important factor in their success. They are almost invariably co-operative and interested. They work well together discussing tasks or using computers. They set their work out well, and, when expectations are sufficiently high, they use rigorous methods and think mathematically. They can be quite passive if allowed to be, especially in the sixth form and, as was mentioned in the last report, they are quite quick to rely on the teacher for help.
117. The curriculum is very well organised and well matched to the needs of pupils of most abilities, although the individual learning difficulties of pupils with special educational needs are not always taken into account sufficiently. Numeracy is soundly taught within mathematics and most pupils have good numeracy skills. Numeracy is supported well in many other subjects though there is no whole-school policy to co-ordinate this. Information and communication technology is used well to support the learning of mathematics, though the department does not have enough access to computer facilities. Teachers promote literacy in mathematics lessons through teaching vocabulary, but this needs to be done more consistently and the good practice seen in some lessons of pupils explaining to the class should be extended. Gifted and talented pupils are provided with opportunities through projects, competitions and extra lessons for those aiming at A* in GCSE. The department has appropriate plans to develop materials to stimulate and challenge the highest-attaining pupils and to introduce a project aimed at improving pupils' thinking.
118. The department is well led, with an ethos of high standards and enthusiasm for learning mathematics. There is good teamwork on the part of a strong team of teachers with a good range of age and experience. The department is very well organised and teachers are well supported. Monitoring of teaching takes place within the school's performance management policy, but should be developed further so that observation forms the basis of sharing the very good practice that exists in some teaching.
119. Teachers assess work and know their pupils well, and the department has recently begun to introduce more formal assessment and record keeping. This needs to be developed further to use assessment data to set pupils targets and monitor their progress. To improve A-level results, students' work needs to be monitored more consistently. The very good displays of pupils' work help to establish a good ethos for mathematical learning.
120. Overall improvement since the last inspection has been good. The high standards reported in the last inspection have been improved further, except at the highest level of GCSE and at A-level. The proportion of pupils reaching Levels 5 and 6 in Year 9 tests has increased by 10 per cent. At GCSE, more pupils now gain grades A* to C, but the proportion gaining A* and A grades has declined slightly. A-level results are now less good than they were. Teaching is now more consistent, particularly in the

management of pupils, and pupils' good attitudes have been maintained. Marking has improved and is now satisfactory, though it could still be more consistent. There is still a need to encourage pupils to be more independent in their thinking.

Numeracy

121. Pupils have good numeracy skills, which they apply in many of their subjects. In science, all pupils measure and read scales accurately, and calculate averages. Higher-attaining pupils can identify anomalies in a set of results. In GCSE science, pupils become numerically more adept, using mental calculations and algebraic formulae to calculate results. Pupils show good spatial awareness in art and apply their mathematical skills of scale and proportion in their GCSE work. In design and technology, they measure and weigh, and draw in two and three dimensions. In geography and history, they record and analyse data and use a variety of graphs and charts. They use spreadsheets and databases in geography and information and communication technology, with higher-attaining pupils making use of algebraic formulae.

SCIENCE

122. In 2000, the school's science results in National Curriculum tests at age 14 were well above the national average and well above those achieved in similar schools. Results have been well above the national average since the previous inspection, with a four per cent increase of pupils achieving Level 5 or above. The percentage of pupils achieving a Level 6 or above has risen by nine per cent since the previous inspection. The performance of boys is better than that of girls.
123. GCSE results in science in 2000 were above the national average, with 57 per cent of pupils achieving an A* to C grade compared with a national average of 49 per cent. The results have been above the national average since the previous inspection. However, the percentage of pupils achieving higher grades is below the national average, 6.4 per cent of pupils achieving A* and A grades compared with the national figure of 10.7 per cent. The performance of girls was slightly better than that of boys in 2000. Of all pupils entered for science, 99.2 per cent achieved at least a grade G: this was above the national average.
124. The percentage pass rates at A-level in 2000 were below the national averages in biology, chemistry and physics. The percentages of passes at higher grades (A to C) were below the national averages in biology and chemistry and well below in physics. Girls do better than boys in achieving higher grades. Despite results that were below the national average, there has been a trend of improvement in overall percentage passes for the last three years in all three science subjects. There have been some fluctuations in results particularly in physics, but often the high-attainers in science - particularly girls - do not opt to take this subject. In 2000, the first students were entered for A-level environmental science as part of a pilot for this course. There was a 50 per cent pass rate, which was below the national average. Although the A-level results are below the national average, they have improved considerably over the last three years. An improvement in the range of teaching strategies has been the main contributor to this improvement.
125. By age 14, the attainment of the majority of pupils is above average. Pupils have improved in their ability to remember scientific facts and can apply this knowledge in test situations. Their reading skills are well developed and most deal confidently with comprehension exercises. They can follow precise instructions on how to carry out

practical investigations. Pupils are competent in the basic use of computers, but opportunities for such activities need to be increased. Pupils deal confidently with numbers and higher-attainers can do calculations mentally. In a Year 7 lesson, pupils were very enthusiastic about their practical work, which was to discover the effect that changing the height of a ramp has on the distance travelled by a model car. In Year 8, a class of average attaining pupils could discuss the effects of tobacco smoke on the respiratory system. Higher-attainers could also refer to the effect it had on the heart. In Year 9, a class of lower-attainers understood that in a television, electrical energy is changed into light, sound and heat. Pupils with special educational needs recognised that light and heat energy are produced when a candle burns, but did not understand the idea of stored chemical energy in the wax.

126. By age 16, pupils' attainment is above average. They deal confidently with an increasing range of practical activities as their knowledge grows. They have developed a large repertoire of information and communication technology skills: a class of higher-attainers used a computer software package on the solar system to very good effect, analysing sophisticated data about planets. The wider range of teaching strategies allows their practical skills to improve, particularly in planning and observation. Their evaluation of results is less competent. Average-attainers understood that when sperm and eggs are formed the amount of nuclear material (chromosomes) is halved. Pupils with special educational needs, while not fully understanding the nature of genes, knew that they are responsible for inheritance of characteristics such as eye colour. In a Year 10 class of lower-attainers, pupils were aware that a high concentration of salt would cause red blood cells to dehydrate. In a class of average and higher-attainers, a significant majority could explain the effect of changes in volume on the pressure of a gas. Higher-attainers could also show how temperature changes have an effect on pressure. By the end of Year 11, pupils produce high quality investigative course work, the presentation of which is enhanced by word processing. The results are communicated in a clear precise format and graphs show a high level of accuracy. Analysis of exercise books shows quality work with attention to detail, but there is an inherent weakness in the spelling of everyday words. Pupils are encouraged to carry out more independent investigative work and to rectify their weakness in evaluation.
127. By age of 18, students' attainment is well above average and standards in work seen during the inspection were significantly higher than those indicated by recent A-level examination results. Students are committed to their study of science and regularly engage in independent research using the resource centre. Their ability to take notes and their general communication skills have all improved since Year 11. In a Year 12 physics class, they could all use laptop computers to explore data plotting, conductance and resistance in a thermistor using software provided by the examination board. In a Year 12 chemistry class, a significant majority understood that in the fractionating of crude oil, molecules of different boiling points condense and so separate. Higher-attainers understood the use of a catalyst in the breakdown of crude oil. By the end of Year 13, students have increased their depth of knowledge and have detailed understanding of their subjects. A Year 13 biology class could carry out an experiment on the effect of detergents on plant cell membranes after formulating hypotheses as to what might happen.
128. Teaching is a major strength of the faculty and is very good in science throughout the school. Progress is therefore good across the whole age range for a significant majority of pupils. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress from 11 to 16. Their progress is linked to the high expectations of their teachers. In a Year 7 class, pupils could work out that a developing baby was protected by the pelvis and

uterus wall of the mother, because of the excellent visual resources used by the teacher. In a Year 8 class, pupils with special educational needs could set up a circuit containing a variable resistor and understood that it could alter the current in the circuit. All pupils enjoy practical work and take responsibility for collecting and clearing away apparatus. In a Year 9 class, pupils of below average prior attainment could distinguish between different types of reactions because of the careful, patient explanation of the teacher. In a Year 11 class of higher-attainers, pupils could deal competently with calculations about transformers because of the clarity of the worked examples done by the teacher. Pupils do their homework regularly, but it is not always written down in their diaries. Teachers mark it regularly and the comments generally allow pupils to improve, although the marking sometimes lacks depth in Years 7 and 8. The well above average attainment seen in the sixth form comes from the very positive attitude of the students to learning, but also from the change in syllabuses and learning methods with which the students closely identify.

129. Teachers are good role models for pupils and incorporate good moral provision within their lessons. Teachers deal with social implications in science and make considerable contribution to the personal development of pupils. Teaching strategies have improved since the previous inspection and they suit the needs of all pupils. The relationships between teachers and pupils are generally very good, with mutual respect, but occasionally the attitude and behaviour of a small number of pupils disrupt the learning of the majority.
130. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment are very good and are used well to inform planning and to follow the progress of individual pupils. Assessment has improved since the previous inspection in that it is now linked more productively with teaching and learning. Procedures for assessing pupils' progress are good. Assessment complies with National Curriculum statutory requirements and the time allocated to the subject is satisfactory. The curriculum has breadth, with all pupils having good opportunities to work at levels in line with their abilities. The recent introduction of a new scheme of work in Year 7 caters well for the increase in the number of pupils with Level 5 coming from primary schools. Since the previous inspection, the curriculum has been appropriately broadened in Year 10 by the introduction of separate sciences for the top set in each half-year group. Talented pupils are provided for throughout the school by extension material in the schemes of work.
131. The faculty is well managed and the head of faculty has welded together an effective team. There is a good atmosphere in the faculty, which promotes successful teaching and learning. The sharing of good practice increases the effectiveness of the team. Leadership and management are good and the head of faculty provides clear educational direction and vision. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching by observation are well in place, but need to be more structured in terms of professional feedback. Targets for the subject have been met and faculty analysis of subject performance is regularly carried out, with attention paid to gender differences.

ART AND DESIGN

132. GCSE results at A* to C grades in 2000 were well above the national average, particularly at A* / A grades. They were even better in the previous two years. As at the time of the last inspection, a smaller than average proportion of pupils in the school enter the subject, but those who do so achieve very well compared with their other subjects. A-level results have been excellent of late, with most students attaining A grades.

133. Pupils' good spatial awareness on entry to the school forms a secure foundation for the very good progress they make to the end of Year 9. They learn key skills very well, particularly those of painting and drawing, so that by the time they are 14, their attainment in art is well above average. Pupils now experience a good variety of media and, by Year 9, they use a rich range of materials, tools and techniques highly effectively in both two and three dimensions. Drawing remains very strong, as seen for example, in current preparatory observational drawings for a sculpture project on fruit in Year 9. Pupils' use of colour develops very well. The standard of boys' work in particular is well above average, with no perceptible differences between their attainment and that of girls, which is unusual. Girls' work is better than average, but the highest-attainers are often boys. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, and those with particular talents in art, progress very well through Years 7 to 9, so that any pupil is well prepared with a good or very good skills base to proceed into GCSE work. Their understanding of how historical and critical aspects link to practical work is also unusually strong, again in both genders and for all abilities. Pupils' sketchbooks, though, do not usually reflect the high standards described.
134. The work of those pupils taking the GCSE course is well above average. From early in Year 10, pupils use and refine their skills to create an individual, often very imaginative, response to a given stimulus. This is currently exemplified by work following a recent visit to the Tate Britain gallery. Pupils have chosen artists to study, and are developing very interesting responses in two and three dimensions to a wide variety of ideas, including both research and practical aspects. Work here, and in Year 11, is well above average. Year 12 students are developing very high standards for their AS-level portfolios and studies. The work of students in Year 13 currently shows a broader spread of attainment than that suggested by last year's results, but still with far more above average than below. Students' work shows the expected individuality and flair in almost all cases.
135. The quality of teaching in the department is very good. Over a quarter of teaching seen was excellent. Teachers are very gifted in teaching younger pupils how to draw and paint well. This underpins the quality of other work they do, and creates in pupils the confidence that they can achieve set tasks to high levels of technical competence. From early on, therefore, pupils' attitudes to the subject are permeated with a 'can do' approach, and they greatly enjoy their lessons. Teachers' expectations of their pupils are very high, both of their behaviour and of their commitment to work. Pupil management at all levels is very good. Lessons proceed at an extremely brisk pace, making maximum use of the 60-minute lessons. Short, snappy, well-resourced explanations and demonstrations set very high challenges. Objectives are made clear, so most pupils are very eager to get involved in practical activity and work extremely purposefully. Teachers provide a rich diet of different media and materials, and their own knowledge and understanding of this range are very good. They also share ideas and expertise very effectively between the team, so pupils benefit from their rich experience. A key strength of teaching at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is teachers' sensitive understanding of how to enable higher-attaining pupils to develop independence, creativity and individuality, whilst supporting less-able pupils to achieve well, both technically and creatively. Teachers ensure that art contributes very significantly to pupils' self-development, and to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimensions of their lives. Very good examples of this were seen in the use of texts and poetry to inspire work - such as William Blake in Year 8 - and in the sense of spirituality developing in a Year 7 project about Aboriginal art. These aspects, together with identified assessment opportunities and procedures, need to be integrated into the revised schemes of work currently being developed by the absent head of department.

136. The last report was exceptionally positive. The availability of three-dimensional work was criticised, however. This has improved significantly and is now a strength. Other factors beyond the control of the department are still of concern. The options system still restricts the proportion of pupils able to take this very successful subject in Key Stage 4. Access to computers is still restricted in the art rooms. Although pupils go to computer rooms for a Year 8 project, they do not regard computers as creative tools for general use in the curriculum, mainly because they are not accessible for regular use in each art room. Timetabling which allows only single lessons at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form conflicts with the needs of these pupils and students for a length of time in which to develop greater continuity and depth in their work. Department staffing was in transition at the time of the inspection, and an old, outdated handbook still in place. This needs urgent revision to reflect current, often excellent, planning, resourcing and other practice amongst teaching staff.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

137. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above the national average. Teacher assessment at the end of the key stage and observation of lessons during the inspection indicate that, overall, pupils are achieving standards higher than the national average. Pupils' learning is assisted by use of a framework within which they experience focused tasks and design assignments. They build up a resource of knowledge, understanding and skill which they increasingly use in newer and more challenging contexts. Work in books and folders is progressive and includes opportunities for pupils to generate and develop ideas, research new topics, analyse results and plan their project work. However, the quality of graphics varies and this aspect should be improved to ensure that pupils are able to present their ideas effectively. There is evidence of the use of information and communication technology within modules of study in control techniques and also for more general use in subject studies. Further developments are planned in this area of work. Emphasis has been placed on improving written work and the use of key words, and support for a technical vocabulary is having an effect. Scrutiny of completed work indicates that pupils benefit from a broad programme of work in food, textiles, graphics, electronics and product design in resistant materials. Working in these different media, pupils develop key planning skills and graphical techniques, alongside a range of practical assignments. Setting arrangements have enabled teachers to focus more closely on the needs of the different groups of pupils and this is assisting achievement overall. The best teachers are able to adjust their styles of teaching to suit the learning of pupils in the group, and when this happens pupils make good progress. Higher-attaining pupils make good progress and demonstrate independent learning skill when appropriately challenged. Lower-attaining pupils are also making good progress when they are set appropriate targets. The assessment system enables teachers to present pupils with a detailed profile of their work at the end of each module and to focus on specific targets for improvement.
138. Attainment at Key Stage 4 is above the national average. Work in Key Stage 4 is more focused and pupils may opt for a GCSE course from food, graphics, systems and control, engineering, resistant materials, or a combined course in resistant materials and business. These programmes make different demands on pupils but all use a similar framework and build on the work in the previous key stage. Through a number of minor and major design projects, pupils develop their work both in planning and in making. There is evidence of greater emphasis on the use of information and communication technology in their studies and design folders reflect this. Pupils use a range of graphical techniques, computer and otherwise, to illustrate their ideas, and many reach high standards. The presentation quality of subject studies is also of a

good standard. Practical skills are generally well developed within the specialist areas and the quality of products is good. In 2000, the number of pupils gaining grades A* to C at GCSE was higher than in the previous year. In food technology, pupils gained 55 per cent A* to C grades, in graphics 68 per cent, in engineering 63 per cent, in resistant materials 25 per cent, and in resistant materials and business studies (combined course) 60 per cent. The lower results in resistant materials - and also in child development in the previous year - were caused by a small group of lower-attaining pupils who chose these options. The school is working to ensure that similar groupings do not occur in the future. Overall, the GCSE results are higher than the national average and reflect changes and improvements that have taken place since the last inspection. Observation of classes during the inspection indicates further improvements in standards which support the upward trend.

139. Attainment in the sixth form is in line with national expectations and sometimes better. Students may choose a course in A-level design and technology (product design). Numbers in the sixth form are small but students develop individual styles, build on their interests and demonstrate a degree of independent learning skill. Last year, all students passed the A-level examination with grades ranging from B to E. Students develop important personal and social skills and show evidence of a growing maturity.
140. Overall, the quality of teaching is good, and there are examples of very good teaching. Teachers manage lessons well, they are hard-working and organise learning resources well. The best lessons seen had pace, expectation, structure and purpose and they challenged all pupils in the class. Teachers have introduced a number of changes and have revised schemes of work and assessment procedures. These initiatives have been successful and they have resulted in considerable improvements in standards. The team is admirably supported by two experienced and competent technicians and they make a significant contribution to the work of the department. Teachers use display well, and this contributes a great deal to pupils' interest and the development of ideas. Homework is integral to current work and is outlined in schemes of work and in teaching notes. Staff arrange extra-curricular opportunities and the variety of activities enriches pupils' work in many ways.
141. Pupils' learning is good. They show interest in the range of activities available to them, they are attentive and are able to concentrate on their work for appropriate periods of time. Health and safety matters are given a high profile and pupils respond positively to codes of conduct employed in specialist rooms. Behaviour is good and pupils are generally well motivated. Pupils with special educational needs are clearly identified by staff and some are assisted by learning support staff. Through the assessment system, achievement is reviewed and appropriate targets are set for future work. Teachers plan their work accordingly and lesson notes indicate how different levels of support are provided. As a result, pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory and sometimes good progress. Relationships between teachers and pupils are good and attitudes are positive. Working in pairs and groups encourages further development of personal and social skills. Pupils listen and are attentive when teachers are speaking, and responses are generally polite and constructive.
142. The department is led by an able and enthusiastic co-ordinator who is also the faculty head. There is a clear management structure and delegation of responsibility. Administrative procedures are good and documentation (including schemes of work) is exemplary. Accommodation has been improved since the last inspection and specialist rooms reflect a high level of organisation and care. Display is an important factor in providing an attractive and stimulating environment. There have been improvements in the use and provision of information and communication technology,

both centrally and within the subject. Emphasis has been placed on the introduction and development of CAD/CAM (computer aided design/computer aided manufacture) and some production machines are already in use.

143. The department has addressed the issues listed in the last inspection report and significant progress has been made. A systems and control course has been introduced, accommodation and equipment issues have been tackled, attainment at Key Stage 4 is improving, there is increased support for pupils with learning needs and there have been changes in information and communication technology provision.

GEOGRAPHY

144. Attainment by age 14 is well above national expectations and there are no significant differences in the standards achieved by girls and boys. In lessons, most pupils - including higher-attainers, those with special educational needs and English as an additional language - are making good progress. Pupils have a sound core of knowledge and are competent in using geographical skills. Most have an awareness of location, and high-attaining pupils have a very good knowledge of a range of places. The handling and interpretation of a variety of sources of evidence, together with numerous opportunities for individual research, allow pupils to acquire the necessary expertise for making real progress in their geographical studies. They are familiar with the representation of data in a variety of graphical and diagrammatic formats and have a sufficiently sound understanding of these techniques to harness their knowledge effectively. In Year 9, pupils have a good understanding of physical processes, such as those that cause tectonic activity, and this gives them an awareness of the impact of natural hazards on society. Most pupils are able to see the relationships between the physical and human environments, and participate in meaningful discussions about the different approaches to the management of the environment. Assignments using information and communication technology, a weakness in the last inspection, are now an integral part of the scheme of work, and pupils have access to a range of computer skills using the geography web site. For example, a Year 8 class was using the Internet to provide the background data for a debate on the relative importance of the Snowdonian and Pembrokeshire National Parks. In their study of geography, pupils have many opportunities to develop their numeracy and literacy skills.
145. Attainment by age 16 is in line with national averages, as reported in the GCSE results. However, attainment in lessons and in work seen during the inspection was well above the national average. This rise in standards is the result of appropriate strategies put in place by the new head of department, the implementation of new schemes of work and consistently good teaching. All these factors should enable this upward trend in results to continue. In lessons, higher-attaining students are achieving well and overall attainment is well above national averages. Achievement amongst pupils with special educational needs is good and pupils with English as an additional language make sound progress. Results at the end of the key stage indicate that girls achieve just as well as boys. This is borne out by the evidence from most lessons.
146. Pupils on the GCSE course are encouraged to work independently, develop powers of concentration and formulate their own ideas which can be voiced in serious debates. They have well developed fieldwork skills, and higher-attainers can provide detailed and sophisticated explanations for processes seen in the natural and human environment. Most pupils know about the ecosystem and the scale of global destruction in the recent past. Lesson observation confirmed students' broad geographical knowledge, their proficient use of correct terminology and their general

competence in the use of information and communication technology to promote learning.

147. Attainment by the age of 18 is well below national averages as reported in the A-level results in 2000, and there has been a downward trend over the past three years. However, attainment during the inspection was above and in some cases well above national averages. This upward trend is the result of very good teaching, the implementation of appropriate strategies by the new head of department and the production of more comprehensive schemes of work. Students now benefit from high quality specialist teaching, excellent dialogue with teachers, and the new confidence they have been given in their own ability to undertake independent research. Students have well developed skills of interpretation and evaluation in a wide range of contexts, for example when studying slopes.
148. Consistently good teaching is a real strength of the department. All the lessons observed were at least good and over half were at least very good. Teachers have clearly stated objectives, plan very carefully, and are enthusiastic about their subject. Lessons challenge pupils, and are characterised by high expectations especially through the investigation of controversial geographical issues, for example 'How can you balance the need for resources against environmental considerations?' and 'What justification can be put forward to defend the one child policy in China?'. A strong feature of lessons is the use of a range of teaching strategies to match the curriculum to different abilities, in order to provide opportunities for all pupils to make progress. Strategies employed include the skilful use of question-and-answer techniques, the planned use of appropriate resources, and the introduction of stimulating learning activities such as games. A Year 9 lesson on plate tectonics with a group of low-attaining pupils used a series of game cards to teach complex concepts effectively. Very good relationships between teachers and pupils lead to high standards of work and behaviour.
149. This good teaching means that pupils are able to make good progress. They respond best to lessons that develop thinking skills and where they are stimulated by some kind of challenge. Pupils behave well when the lesson is delivered in a lively and interesting way and when they are encouraged to develop their personal study skills through classroom-based research.
150. Overall management of the department is very good. The schemes of work have been revised at all three key stages, there is an excellent handbook providing comprehensive information and guidance for teaching staff and departmental resources are well deployed. Effective teamwork, a noted feature of the whole faculty, has enabled the department to lay down firm foundations for future development through a well-structured development plan. There is a good system in place for assessing, monitoring and evaluating the progress and attainment of pupils and there is regular feedback to pupils in the majority of lessons. However, the process of feedback in some lessons needs to be more clearly focused on what pupils need to do to improve their work. Homework is set on a regular basis and the department monitors its quality.
151. The study of environmental issues and diverse societies ensures that geography makes a significant contribution to the development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. The teaching areas have excellent wall displays which contribute to pupils' progress by providing an attractive and stimulating learning environment. There is a wide range of enrichment activities. In addition to the normal fieldwork visits, there are a number of cross-curricular activities. The Docklands

project embraces all the faculty specialisms and introduces pupils to social, economic, urban and historical change within the London Dockland area.

152. Significant progress has been made since the last inspection in the area of information and communication technology and in the development of a wider range of teaching styles, especially at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. In order to improve further the provision for the subject, attention should be given to the sharing of good practice to ensure that recent improvements continue.

HISTORY

153. Attainment by age 14 is well above national expectations as reported in the statutory teacher assessment results. Most pupils, including those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language, are achieving well. There are no significant differences in the standards achieved by boys and girls.
154. The range and depth of pupils' historical knowledge and understanding are impressive. Through the handling and interpretation of evidence, together with ample opportunities for individual research, pupils are acquiring the necessary expertise for making real progress in their historical studies. For example, in a Year 8 lesson pupils had to decide what were the main causes of the English Civil War by analysing a variety of historical sources. In their study of history, pupils are helped to develop their literacy skills, especially their creative writing, and high quality projects are produced. Opportunities are also provided to develop their numeracy and information and communication technology skills. Assignments using computers, a weakness in the last inspection, are now an integral part of the scheme of work, and pupils develop a range of information and communication technology skills using the history web site.
155. Attainment by age 16 as reported in GCSE results has been consistently higher than national averages over the past three years. The percentage of higher grade A* to C passes has increased by 13 per cent over that period. Appropriate departmental strategies, together with consistently good teaching, should enable this upward trend to continue. In lessons, higher-attaining pupils are achieving well and overall attainment is well above the national average. Achievement amongst pupils with special educational needs is good and pupils for whom English is an additional language make sound progress. Results at the ends of both key stages indicate that boys do just as well as girls. This is borne out by the evidence from most lessons. Pupils on the GCSE course are acquiring a good grounding in knowledge and understanding and are provided with ample opportunities to develop their historical skills. A strong feature is their ability to analyse and interpret sources, building on their earlier learning.
156. Standards by the age of 18 are well above national averages and there has been an upward trend in A-level results over the past three years; in 2000, there was a 100 per cent pass rate. Students benefit from high quality teaching, excellent dialogue with teachers, and their own ability to undertake independent research.
157. Teaching in history is very good and this is a real strength. All the lessons observed were at least satisfactory. Over 80 per cent were at least good and over half of these were very good. Teachers are always well prepared, have clearly stated objectives and are enthusiastic about their subject. Lessons are characterised by the setting of high expectations through the investigation of challenging historical questions, for example 'How and why did William the Conqueror win the Battle of Hastings?' and 'What were conditions really like in the trenches?'. A marked feature of lessons is the deployment of a range of strategies to match the work to pupils' different abilities, to enable all pupils to access the work and make progress. These strategies include well-structured lessons with a variety of interesting and stimulating learning activities, the skilful use of question-and-answer techniques, and well-focused interventions with individual pupils. Another strong feature observed in most lessons was the obviously good relationship that the teacher had with all pupils and the high expectations of work and behaviour.

158. This good teaching means that pupils are able to make good progress. They respond most readily to lessons which concentrate on the development of their thinking skills and present an element of challenge. Lively and interesting lessons motivate pupils and ensure that levels of attention remain high. Where teaching is only satisfactory there is usually a lack of these essential elements.
159. Management and leadership are a major strength of the department. The schemes of work have been revised to incorporate the new history curriculum at all three key stages. These, together with an excellent handbook, provide invaluable guidance and advice for the teaching staff. The very strong teamwork, a noted feature of the whole faculty, has established a firm foundation for future development. The department has a good programme for assessing, monitoring and evaluating the progress and attainment of pupils in each key stage and there is regular feedback to pupils in most lessons. However, in the marking of work and the setting of target grades, there is insufficient detailed feedback in some lessons on exactly what pupils need to do to improve. Meaningful homework is set on a regular basis.
160. The contribution of history to the development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. This, together with the regular use made of the well stocked library for many history lessons and the clear departmental commitment to providing an attractive and stimulating learning environment in the teaching areas, has had a positive impact on pupils' achievement. The history department provides a wide range of enrichment activities.
161. The consistently good teaching, the upward trend in examination results, the development of comprehensive schemes of work and the widespread use of information and communication technology represent significant progress since the last inspection. There is scope for improving further by sharing the very best practice in teaching.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

162. Attainment by age 14 is above the standard expected and above that achieved in many other schools. Pupils are confident and competent with computers and use them well in many subjects, giving them some experience of all the necessary aspects of information and communication technology. Most pupils in Year 9, for example, use a commercial spreadsheet with ease. They can input data and produce a variety of graphs and charts to display it. Higher-attaining pupils know how to analyse the information, in terms of maximum, minimum and average, and produce the formulae to do so. Information and communication technology lessons in Years 7 and 9 enable pupils to develop a breadth of knowledge and understanding and a range of skills that they then use and apply in other subjects. Pupils in a Year 8 mathematics lesson, for example, were able to use a graph plot program quickly and easily to aid their understanding of straight-line graphs. Both boys and girls, pupils with special educational needs, and those for whom English is an additional language make good progress, because teaching is good and the teaching programme develops their skills and ideas systematically and progressively. In some lessons, however, more consideration needs to be given by the teacher to how gifted and talented pupils can be fully challenged and extended.
163. Results at GCSE in 2000 were well above the national average. This was a very significant improvement since the previous inspection when they were well below. Pupils' performance was also significantly better than the average of all their other subjects. The proportion of the higher A* and A grades awarded was low, but the

reason for this has been identified and rectified. The standard of work of pupils currently following a GCSE in information and communication technology is again above that expected. Pupils in Year 11 have a good understanding of identifying and implementing a design brief. Their understanding of a commercial database program is used to good effect when producing solutions. Higher-attaining pupils have sufficient working knowledge of the program to use some of its more demanding tools to good effect, such as simplifying procedures for the final user of the system. Pupils again make good progress because teaching is good. There is a clear structure to the course, which is communicated well to the pupils. They are provided with all the necessary details for their projects and the criteria for assessment. There is a very good balance between requiring the pupils to work independently, and evaluating their work and providing clear feedback on its quality and ideas for improvement. This enables all pupils to work at their own appropriate level. Gifted and talented pupils are encouraged to pursue their ideas in depth, while pupils with special educational needs receive greater support. Those pupils not following a GCSE course in information and communication technology still use their skills across all subjects of the curriculum. Good use is made of computers, for example to support graphic work in design and technology and to improve the quality of coursework in English. Pupils have experience of all the aspects of information and communication technology required at this age, but do not experience the depth and breadth provided in the earlier years. Nevertheless, they do make satisfactory progress through Years 10 and 11 and attain at the level expected by the age of 16.

164. Students in the sixth form continue to make good progress in using and developing their information and communication technology capability. Those students who are not following the subject to A/AS level study towards a key skills qualification and have a depth and range of skills above that in many other schools. All students use the Internet with ease, to research information on suitable university courses, for example. They use word-processing and spreadsheet packages to good effect to present and analyse the information obtained. Higher-attaining students are then able to translate this into a commercial presentation package, paying due attention to the target audience. Those following the A/S level course are developing their understanding of system design and analysis to a good level, with many exploiting the capabilities of the commercial programs used to good effect. As at GCSE, their progress is good because teaching is good, and the structure of the course developed is well suited to their individual needs.
165. The use of information and communication technology does much to support the development of other important skills. There is much focus with younger pupils on working with numbers in spreadsheets and using angles in drawing and control programs. The use of word-processing packages supports pupils' spelling and grammar, as they become increasingly skilled at using the tools provided with the programs. These and desktop publishing packages help with layout and presentation, providing pupils with a sense of achievement and pride in their work. The ability to research and synthesise information is also well supported through use of information sources, including the Internet.
166. Teaching is good overall and particularly strong at GCSE and in the sixth form. Many teachers use information and communication technology well to develop pupils' understanding and to support learning in their own subject. Teaching is more variable in Years 7 and 9, with more teachers involved in delivering the subject, but the quality never falls below satisfactory. Teachers' own knowledge and understanding are good and this usually helps to draw out and emphasise some of the finer details of the intended learning. Sometimes, however, these finer details are not picked up or

explored and learning lacks the same cutting edge. Teachers generally develop a good climate for learning, which encourages pupils to apply themselves well to the tasks set and take responsibility for their own learning. The vast majority do so with interest, are well motivated and maintain a good focus. Occasionally, some pupils lose interest when teaching is satisfactory overall but lacks the usual vigour and pace. However, teachers monitor pupils' involvement and progress well, so that minor transgressions are picked up and eliminated and difficulties do not have the opportunity to develop further. Teachers provide good feedback, so that the pupils have a clear understanding of how well they are doing and what they can do to improve further. Most pupils pay good attention to this, and learning and attainment improve as a result.

167. Management of the department has been very effective in bringing about a transformation in the quality of education and standards achieved within the subject, and there is a clear direction for future development.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

168. By the age of 14, pupils' attainment in French, their first foreign language, has most recently been assessed as above average. Since 1998, assessed standards at Key Stage 3 have risen faster than the national trend, but this is a false picture. Attainment of current Year 10 pupils indicates that in 2000, when they were in Year 9, teachers assessed many of them at levels which were too high - in particular, too many were assessed as attaining National Curriculum Level 5, the expected level.
169. By the age of 16, as in other similar schools, pupils perform less well in modern languages than in their other subjects, but to a greater extent than in the rest of the country. Overall results for modern foreign languages are consistently the poorest in the school. GCSE standards across all three languages are still below average, as at the last inspection. Since 1998, the percentage of pupils achieving A* to C grades for French has improved faster than nationally but remains below the national average. Results at A* to G are in line with the national figure. Boys underachieve very significantly in relation to their predicted attainment. In 2000, the gap between girls' and boys' performance in French and German was greater than the difference nationally. Results at A* to C in German fell to below average because of the very poor performance of boys, and the improvement in French was due mainly to girls' improvement to approximately the national average. On the other hand, from a small entry, boys did very well in Spanish compared with the girls. Entries for both German and Spanish are small.
170. In contrast, the faculty achieves good results in French at A-level. Since 1997, between a fifth and half of candidates have been awarded grades A or B. Entries in German and Spanish are too small for valid comparisons with national figures.
171. Current standards in Year 9 are in line with expectations for pupils' age, but they should be higher. Standards in the top sets in French are disappointing. Some of the more gifted pupils are on course for above average standards by the end of the year and can use past tenses accurately in extended paragraphs, but other higher-attainers are insecure in grammar and do not know the expected range of structures. Most pupils use the present tense in short descriptions, and take part in rehearsed dialogues. Achievement in Year 9 is unsatisfactory because most pupils do not take the subject seriously enough. Some teaching enables pupils to acquire good knowledge and understanding of topic vocabulary and phrases, but some is not good enough to motivate pupils to raise standards to above-average levels, so that gifted pupils and those in the middle range do not attain highly enough for their ability. As at

the last inspection, there is often little difference in standards achieved between higher and lower-attainers, because there is insufficient planning for different needs. Pupils with the most distinct needs achieve satisfactorily in their small groups when they are well managed and tasks are appropriate. Achievement is starting to improve in Years 7 and 8, where pupils are more motivated, and German and Spanish beginners in Year 8 are generally making good early progress.

172. Current standards in Year 11 are below average, reflecting recent GCSE results. Some gifted pupils, but not enough, are realistically targeted for higher grades A* to B. They write fluently and accurately, using a range of tenses and interesting structures. Most pupils, however, are not secure or ambitious enough in writing or speaking to cross the grade C/D boundary and raise the A* to C proportion to average levels. Pupils' comprehension skills are better because their vocabulary is generally good, but some are weak at understanding and responding to teachers' spoken language because they have not heard it used consistently enough in the past. The weakest skill throughout both key stages is speaking: few pupils recall and use memorised language, or use language spontaneously. Some teachers have created a culture where it is expected that pupils speak more freely, but in most classes the majority of pupils do not have the confidence to connect ideas and are unwilling to polish their pronunciation. Too many rely on seeing the printed word. Standards are below average because the typical higher and average-attaining pupils underachieve. Modern languages are not popular and, although pupils comply and behave well, too many show at best neutral attitudes towards the work. It is not important enough for boys to strive for the highest standards of accuracy and range of expression, and girls are generally too reticent. In essence, previous teaching has not motivated them or expected enough of them, although there is now much good teaching in each key stage. In Year 10, it is beginning to help compensate for earlier slow progress, and expectations are higher. In addition, coursework is beginning to improve writing standards, especially for the middle range of ability.
173. Standards in the sixth form are average for A and AS-level expectations, and achievement is satisfactory. Standards of speaking and writing are varied. In Year 12 there is a particularly impressive oral command and range of idiom, and students were observed expressing personal views on the meaning of love and relationships based on very demanding texts. Some writing in both years, however, demonstrates a very insecure grasp of basic verb forms and agreements.
174. Teaching needs to be good or very good to raise the importance of the subject and change pupils' attitudes. Much of it is good, and some very good and even outstanding, but it is too variable. In two-thirds of lessons seen it was good or better, but there were weaknesses in otherwise satisfactory lessons, especially in Years 7 and 9, and in one lesson teaching was poor. Teaching was good in Years 10 to 13. There are common strengths. Literacy, including the use of specific grammar terms and satisfactory emphasis on listening, is taught well. The use of information and communication technology in all years promotes the development of pupils' computing skills. Behaviour is usually managed well, although sometimes teachers are too tolerant of flippant interruptions and lethargy. There is usually a lively pace, activities are suitably timed, and resources, especially video and the Internet, are used effectively to stimulate practice of skills. Homework is set regularly and consolidates learning effectively.
175. Planning, however, is variable. At its best, it is outstanding and takes into account pupils' learning in the previous lesson as, for example, in Year 11 German where objectives for the lesson on seeking tourist information via the Internet were clearly

linked to pupils' previous homework and an oral follow-up with the German assistant. Again in German, in Year 10, a very enjoyable activity in which pupils, seated in a circle, had to understand the teacher's use of relative clauses describing particular pupils who then changed places, was designed specifically to clarify and practise that structure. Such planning enables pupils to learn through being challenged to think in and use the language. There is good learning, too in the lessons where teachers show real flair and panache, and plan tasks well, as in a lower French set in Year 9, where pupils conducted a survey on facilities in the local area. Often the results of such enquiry are displayed in graphical form using computers.

176. Too often, however, lesson planning is imprecise because the scheme of work does not provide sufficiently different tasks for pupils with different levels of attainment, and expectations of what each pupil should do are too low. For example, teachers have a very good command of the spoken language, but use it consistently well only in German, Spanish and in some French lessons. Too much unnecessary English sends the wrong messages to pupils who are reluctant to speak, as in a top set French lesson in Year 9. Sometimes, where teachers conducted the lesson through the target language during the inspection, this was clearly a novel experience for the pupils. Marking, too, is imprecise. It does not give pupils enough specific, targeted help and, as a result, pupils in Key Stage 3 do not know well enough how they are progressing. Some teaching is dull and is not good enough to make the subject interesting, challenging, rewarding and fun for many pupils.
177. The faculty has not made sufficient improvement since the previous inspection. Underachievement is still a key issue. Standards are still below what they should be. Interest in languages in the sixth form is not as strong as it was and the foreign exchanges are now scarcely viable. Upper and middle-ability pupils in Key Stage 3 are not challenged enough to commit language to memory so that they might progress more quickly through the attainment levels. The introduction of GCSE coursework, further development of information and communication technology and the advantages of the excellent new accommodation need to be fully exploited, and the encouraging response in Year 8 properly encouraged and rewarded.
178. It is now urgent that the school ensures through rigorous monitoring that all teaching and learning are consistently up to the highest standards. Where teaching should be improved, mainly in French, all pupils need to be trained to accept the use of the target language as the norm, and expectations of top sets - their pronunciation, their working from memory, their application to the task in class - raised. Pupils should be expected to memorise, reproduce and extend what they learn to say, and spontaneous use should be encouraged and rewarded. The culture needs changing radically, so that pupils are positively attracted into choosing a second language at Key Stage 4. There needs to be a clearer, more frequent link between routine monitoring and National Curriculum levels, so that pupils know what to do to improve.

MUSIC

179. Attainment in music is high, above the national average at each key stage. Teacher assessment of pupils at the end of Year 9 in recent years has shown remarkably high proportions of girls and boys reaching and going beyond national expectations, well above the national average. While current performance, as sampled, remains at a high level of attainment, the more refined system required at the end of this year makes it difficult to compare past standards with present. Pupils of all levels of ability achieve satisfactorily, including those with special educational needs, with the higher attaining pupils often raising the level of understanding of others in their groups.

However, attainment could be higher because restricted resources and accommodation hinder the achievement of all pupils.

180. Pupils in Year 7 use technical terms with understanding, perform on classroom instruments with confidence and show considerable invention in striving for contrast in group improvisations. Those in Year 8 come to appreciate something of the power and process of commercial music. They select rhythms and pitches for jingles, writing note names under syllables for phrases they have devised. In Year 9, pupils can easily identify both aurally and with a score similar phrases in a melody. They show good recall of previous learning in, for example, the features of reggae, and find triads quickly on keyboards, though with haphazard fingering and little use of stave notation. With better learning conditions, tasks would be completed more quickly by all pupils, concentration would be improved and higher level tasks attempted (for example, inventing tunes that start on other than the key note). Some pupils present their work, for instance on African instruments, using word processing.
181. Numbers of pupils taking GCSE music have risen in recent years, though they are still in single figures in Years 10 and 11. There are now more boys than girls in the groups, with an equal share in high attainment. There was an upward trend in the proportion of pupils gaining A* to C grades until 2000 when results were below the results nationally, although the average over four years is above the national figure. Current pupils, as sampled in classes and through the analysis of their work to date, are achieving well both in composition and in listening. Instrumental lessons support performance, and standards remain above average.
182. Three students now form a Year 12 AS-level class, the first for three years. One C grade was gained by a girl in 1998; the standards of work currently are such as to match or surpass this, with work in harmony and analysis being particularly rigorous. All those choosing to study music from Year 10 onwards remain keen and show confidence in their learning.
183. Teaching in music is satisfactory overall, with many good features. It is more consistently good in examination work in the upper school. With these classes, a good pace is set, and students are expected to produce at a rate which, with prompt and helpful feedback from teachers, enhances learning. Skilled questioning ensures participation at a good level, boosting confidence. Teachers expect mature attitudes, and the styles employed are appropriate for this age group. Teaching would be even better if more varied methods were used within the lessons. The good features of teaching in the lower school include the effective management of pupils, in spite of the current physical circumstances, and the timing of lessons, which allows pupils to demonstrate their achievement and learn how to improve. Teachers often anticipate the next lesson, showing how to use and build on learning experiences. Clear instructions are given with necessary reminders, and teachers try to ensure that all are involved and all achieve. Teaching deals well with those pupils who constantly seek attention from others. Where teaching does not reach this standard, it is hampered by a difficult learning environment and restricted by resources and accommodation. In practical work with instruments, especially keyboards, teachers need to develop higher expectations of the pace of learning, levels of understanding, and of pupils' sensitivity to sound. There needs to be a greater match between set tasks and pupils' different abilities, to support the progress of both higher and lower-attainers.
184. There have been three different heads of music since the last inspection, the most recent, a temporary appointment, having started only three weeks before this inspection. Evidence of good management by the last permanent appointee lies

mainly in the documentation. Schemes, policies and procedures, including those for assessment, are detailed and clear. There is, however, a legacy of neglect of resources and of some accommodation which is restricting learning. Practical sessions in the lower school take place in a cacophony of sound, affecting learning and behaviour and safety of pupils and equipment. Wires to some power points trail on the ground or at chest height. There is no use of headphones for keyboards in lower school lessons, and rare use of two cold and poorly maintained practice rooms. Another larger space nearby is wastefully employed as inefficient storage. Senior managers have shown their support for the subject in various ways, and the head of faculty keeps in contact. Staff development has been targeted well. But since there are also no permanent leaders in art or drama at present, liaison and the support of a team are lacking.

185. Against this deficiency, there are notable improvements since the previous inspection, resulting in satisfactory progress overall. Curriculum time and frequency of lessons are now satisfactory. Standards of attainment have risen, especially those of boys. Pupils with special educational needs are no longer removed from music lessons for support elsewhere. Target setting for individuals is built into the assessment system and objectives of lessons are now shared with pupils. There is also some provision for computer-aided learning, though this needs expansion in both resources and use in every key stage. However, the standard of extra-curricular work is no longer high. Some targets in development plans have not been reached, with very small numbers in performing groups and a low take-up of instrumental tuition in school compared with that in similar schools. Resources are now unsatisfactory, and accommodation not used to best effect. The school needs to establish a permanent curriculum leader who will be both able and enabled: to create the best conditions for learning, with a much improved level of acoustic separation for practical work; to expand on the evident interest that already exists in music, so as to increase the number of pupils involved beyond the statutory curriculum; and to build on the collaboration with the other arts that has already taken place through special projects, so as to maximise the achievement of pupils.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

186. Attainment by age 14 remains in line with national expectations, with some individual pupils continuing to attain at a higher level. Most pupils are competent and confident in a range of activities which, during the inspection, included gymnastics, netball, hockey, basketball, badminton and health-related fitness. Standards in badminton are particularly good. Many pupils are able to play the basic strokes very effectively. They understand the rules and are beginning to appreciate elements of tactical play. In health related fitness, pupils are able to monitor successfully the short-term effects of exercise on the cardiovascular system.
187. A total of 34 pupils sat the most recent GCSE examination in physical education. The results achieved were outstanding, with 97 per cent of pupils achieving A* to C grades. The results obtained by the 16 students who sat the A-level examination were also very impressive, with all achieving pass grades.
188. Standards of practical attainment among most pupils by age 16 exceed national expectations. In Year 11, the majority of pupils take full advantage of the excellent facilities at Brentwood Leisure Centre. The specialist coaching that pupils receive at the Centre supplements the work of the departmental staff, and has a significant impact on standards. As well as continuing to take part in activities studied in Years 7 to 10, pupils are able to experience aerobic sessions and play squash. Among GCSE pupils, written coursework shows a very good understanding of the theoretical aspects of the syllabus. Standards of practical and theory work are well above average in the current Year 11. The same is true of students who are studying for A level in Year 13.
189. In relation to prior attainment, most pupils are achieving well. For example, pupils' learning was particularly good in three Year 7 lessons involving netball, hockey and badminton. The same positive rate of progress was seen in a Year 8 badminton class. Pupils with special educational needs, who are fully integrated into all physical education lessons, also make good progress. Progress is good in Years 10 and 11, where pupils consolidate and extend skills acquired earlier, as well as experiencing new activities. Boys and girls achieve equally well throughout the school. Sixth formers following A and AS-level courses also make good progress. Individual pupils of different ages have gained regional and national honours in athletics, badminton, basketball, cricket, football and netball.
190. In almost all lessons, teaching is at least good at both key stages, and it is particularly good at post-16. Purposeful, well-organised and productive lessons result in pupils responding very positively at all times. Class management is always efficient and effective. Relationships are good and levels of participation are high throughout the school. Encouraged and supported by the staff, pupils are willing to work hard to improve their level of skill. This attitude, together with the challenging but realistic tasks they experience in lessons, impacts positively on the standards achieved. The degree of commitment and maturity shown by pupils studying for external examinations is good. They respond very positively to the high expectations of work and behaviour set by teachers.
191. The curriculum offered fully meets National Curriculum requirements. Most departmental staff make a substantial contribution to the very good range of extra-curricular activities on offer. Accommodation and resources for physical education are generally good. However, the swimming pool - which cannot be used at present - is in need of complete renovation. The school makes good use of off-site sports facilities,

including on occasions some local playing fields. All the lunchtime and after-school activities observed during the inspection were attended by large groups of very enthusiastic and committed pupils. The school competes against other schools in a variety of sports throughout the year. Recent successes include the sixth form and Year 11 football teams winning the Mid-Essex League and Cup. Boys in Year 8 won the Mid-Essex basketball league, whilst girls in Year 8 qualified for the national finals in athletics.

192. A number of improvements have taken place since the last inspection. The examination courses at GCSE and A level that were first introduced in 1996 have now become a very strong feature of the department's overall provision. The scheme of work for pupils at Key Stage 3 has been rewritten and updated. An effective system of assessment linked to the new National Curriculum levels has also been introduced at Key Stage 3. Last year the school received the Sportsmark Award in recognition of the quality of its provision in physical education.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

193. By age 14, pupils' attainment is above the expectations of the Local Agreed Syllabus. Pupils have a good understanding of religious beliefs and worship, understand the main tenets of Christian belief from New Testament stories, and learn about moral issues from a Christian perspective. They know that victims' families, perpetrators, executioners and social workers all have different views on capital punishment, which include a desire to reform the criminal, to protect society, to make retribution or to seek revenge. Younger pupils understand Christian views on issues such as sex before marriage and on divorce. They use the Internet to access a Christian charitable website and consider young people's views on the advantages of abstaining from sex before marriage. This enables pupils to reflect on moral issues and develop a deeper sense of understanding of the sanctity of marriage within a Christian context.
194. By age 16, pupils are achieving above average results in their GCSE short course examinations. The vast majority of those entered achieved grades A* to G, with 41 per cent achieving A* to C grades. This represents good improvement since the last inspection. Pupils consolidate their understanding of different religious perspectives on moral issues. They understand the differences between absolute morality and relative morality in considering issues such as contraception, adultery and polygamy. They cite many examples of absolute and relative moral views, for example 'rape is always wrong' but 'swearing can be justified in some circumstances'. Pupils also know that different faiths assume different moral positions. For example, they understand that the Catholic Church holds an absolute moral view about abortion whereas the Church of England holds a relative view.
195. By age 18, students' achievement is only satisfactory because the religious education programme is limited. Students identify what is right and wrong from Christian and atheistic perspectives, and they understand the basic philosophies of Voltaire and Sartre. They are able to distinguish between Christian and atheistic positions when they articulate arguments on a given topic. Students also know that people have different views of the purpose of life depending on whether their outlook is informed by, for example, hedonism, nihilism or existentialism.
196. Pupils throughout the school are achieving well because the quality of teaching and learning is good. Teaching is never less than satisfactory and, in most lessons, it is at least good. Where teaching is satisfactory, pupils are well managed, the teacher gives clear instructions which pupils follow, and good use is made of computers to enhance

pupils' learning. However, there are missed opportunities for pupils to share ideas, exchange views and learn from each other. Where teaching is good, lessons are brisk and lively, pupils have good opportunities to take part in discussion and group work to exchange ideas, and teachers use a variety of strategies to ensure that pupils are well focused and remain interested in the lesson. Where teaching is very good, teachers exude enthusiasm for the subject and inspire pupils to learn to their maximum potential. Pupils invariably enjoy these lessons and have a positive attitude to learning, try their hardest and listen carefully to the teacher and each other. Where teaching is at its best, teachers also target support where it is most needed, set very high expectations and challenge pupils so that they achieve very well. Teachers make good use of computers, particularly in Year 8, and videos in lessons. Some pupils use CD-ROMs or the Internet for researching religious education topics, and many pupils present their work in a word-processed format. They take a great pride in their work and improve their literacy skills, as they are encouraged to check the text for spelling mistakes and punctuation errors prior to submitting it as course work or for display.

197. There has been good improvement in the curriculum since the last inspection, particularly in opportunities for accreditation at Key Stage 4, and the 'thought for the week', which creates excellent opportunities for reflection, enhancing pupils' spiritual development. However, the school is aware of the need to improve provision for religious education in the sixth form in order to move beyond the present position, where it is taught as part of the personal and social education curriculum and through two conferences per year. The new assessment system for religious education is excellent. It includes pupils' achievements within a unit of work, and space for recording the level of pupils' understanding of key terms, recording specific subject knowledge and skills, achievement in personal development and targets. But this is not fully used by all teachers and has yet to realise its full potential for informing planning and raising standards of pupils' achievements. There are sufficient books and a good range of artefacts for most world religions to enhance teaching and learning, and resources are generally used well. The subject is very well led by a hard-working co-ordinator, and the excellent communication and teamwork between all staff in the department ensure that non-specialist teachers are confident in teaching the subject and are able to do so effectively.