

INSPECTION REPORT

COWPLAIN COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Waterlooville

LEA area: Hampshire

Unique reference number: 116410

Headteacher: David Rowlinson

Reporting inspector: Mrs J M Brookes
21416

Dates of inspection: 14-18 February 2000

Inspection number: 188428

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

© Crown copyright 2000

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Hart Plain Avenue Cowplain Waterlooville Hampshire
Postcode:	PO8 8RY
Telephone number:	01705 612020
Fax number:	01705 612030
Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	R Sherwell
Date of previous inspection:	April 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
J M Brookes	Registered inspector	Equality of Opportunity	What should the school do to improve further.
D Jenkin	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development; how well the school cares for its pupils; how well the school works in partnership with its parents.
E Barratt	Team inspector	History	School's results and achievements; how well are pupils taught.
V Elliott	Team inspector	Religious Education	How well are the curriculum and other opportunities offered to pupils
J Allcorn	Team inspector	Special Educational Needs	How well is the school led and managed
B Newton	Team inspector	English	
D Jones	Team inspector	Mathematics	
C Elliott	Team inspector	Science	
R Humphries	Team inspector	Design and Technology	
		Information and Communications Technology	
J Marshall	Team inspector	Modern Foreign Languages	
H Feasey	Team inspector	Geography	
J Richards	Team inspector	Art	
R Frostick	Team inspector	Music	
J Bowden	Team inspector	Physical Education	

The inspection contractor was:

Anglia College Enterprises Ltd
 Anglia Polytechnic University
 Danbury Park Conference Centre
 Main Road,
 Danbury, Chelmsford
 Essex CM3 4AT

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Registrar
 Inspection Quality Division
 The Office for Standards in Education
 Alexandra House
 33 Kingsway
 London WC2B 6SE

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	13 - 16
The school's results and achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?	17 - 19
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?	20 - 22
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	22 - 23
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS	23 - 24
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	24 - 28
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	28
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	29
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	34

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Cowplain Community School is a large, mixed comprehensive school. It has almost tripled in size from when it first opened in 1930 but seeks to retain the characteristics of a small school in its approachability. There are 1068 pupils on roll aged 11-16. The proportion of boys and girls varies from year to year but there are more boys than girls in all year groups. The intake of the school represents a comprehensive range of ability, with variance from year to year in the proportion of pupils with well above average and well below average prior attainment. Over the years, the school has built up a good reputation for providing well for pupils with special educational needs. Included in the school's population, therefore, is a well above average number of pupils with statements of special educational needs, 30 of whom are in the attached unit for pupils with specific learning difficulties. The majority of pupils come from the neighbourhood where there is a mixture of publicly and privately owned housing. Overall, the socio-economic circumstances of the pupils are below average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an increasingly effective school in which the headteacher provides good leadership. The commitment of the staff and the governing body to raise standards of education is very strong and the school's capacity to do so is satisfactory. The school made slow progress immediately following the last inspection but, since recent management changes, the overall level of improvement is now satisfactory. The quality of teaching and learning is good. The school cares very well for its pupils, most of whom have positive attitudes to their learning and behave well. A very good programme of personal and social education and a very good range of extra-curricular activities make a strong contribution to pupils' personal development. Since the last inspection pupils' attainment has risen in line with the rising national trend. The school receives an average level of funding and makes appropriate use of its accommodation and resources. Pupils make good progress, entering the school at below average standards and attaining close to the national average at the end of both key stages. Overall the school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils, including those with special education needs, make good progress, as shown by the high number gaining five or more GCSE passes
- Much of the teaching is of good quality
- There are very good relationships between teacher and pupils and between pupils themselves
- Partnership with parents is very strong
- The school cares for its pupils very well and makes very good provision for their personal, social and health education and for their moral and social development
- Very good provision is made for pupils with special educational needs
- The range and quality of extra-curricular activities is very good

What could be improved

- The management structure
- Curriculum planning at Key Stage 4
- The systems of assessing pupils' attainment, tracking their progress and setting them realistically high targets
- The monitoring of teaching
- Standards of attainment, particularly at higher levels of GCSE

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in April 1996. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory overall. Standards of attainment have been maintained at Key Stage 3 and improved at Key Stage 4. Teaching has improved. Pupils' behaviour is better. Governors, staff and parents consider the school has improved. Staff now have a clear focus on raising standards.

Progress in implementing the key issues for action identified in 1996 was slow initially but most of them have now been addressed. There is more academic rigour for the more able and a lessening in the gap in attainment between boys and girls. Information and communications technology has improved at Key Stage 3 but statutory requirements to teach measurement and control are not met at Key Stage 4. Monitoring of teaching has begun recently and the school is preparing for the introduction of appraisal as part of its performance management policy. The school development plan has been replaced with a better formulated school improvement plan.

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				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
Key Stage 3 Tests	B	C	C	C	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
GCSE examinations	D	E	C	E	

Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is below the national average. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 have been close to national averages over the last three years with no significant difference overall in the attainment of boys and girls. The 1999 National Curriculum test results in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, when taken together, were in line with the averages for both maintained schools and those with a similar intake. Standards seen during the inspection in the work of pupils in Year 9 were in line with this pattern. At GCSE the significant improvement in the proportion of pupils gaining higher grades in 1999 brought the GCSE average points score much closer to the averages for both all and similar schools though they are still well below the latter. The improvement in boys' attainment in 1999 was especially marked, reducing the difference between their attainment and that of girls to being less than the national difference. The average points scores in English, mathematics and science were close to national averages and this picture is confirmed by the standards being achieved in the core subjects by pupils in Year 11. The trends of improvement at both Key Stages 3 and 4 are in line with the improving trend nationally.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Most pupils are motivated and take a real interest in their learning. They work conscientiously, often with enjoyment. They concentrate well and take a pride in the work they do. One or two pupils lose interest at times and become disaffected.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Overall behaviour is good and often very good in classrooms. Pupils work co-operatively in pairs or groups. They show respect for each other and for school property. Most pupils move around the school in an orderly manner. No bullying was seen during the inspection. A small number of pupils display unsatisfactory behaviour and show lack of courtesy when moving around the building.
Personal development and relationships	Most pupils show a responsible attitude to their learning. In some subjects, opportunities to take initiative are limited. Study skills are underdeveloped at Key Stage 3. Residential visits, Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and extra-curricular activities provide excellent opportunities for pupils' personal development.
Attendance	Satisfactory and in line with the national average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

In the lessons seen during the inspection teaching was good or better in 61 per cent, good in 41 per cent, very good in 16 per cent, and excellent in four per cent. Eight per cent of teaching was judged to be less than satisfactory and one per cent (one lesson) was poor. While there is no significant difference overall in the quality of teaching at either Key Stage 3 or 4, the amount of good teaching is slightly greater at Key Stage 4. While well over 50 per cent of the teaching is at least good in most subjects, there is also some which is unsatisfactory in about half. Practice is of especially high quality in history with much very good teaching and none which was unsatisfactory. There was no unsatisfactory teaching either in mathematics, art or music and in all these subjects teaching was good or better in at least 60 per cent of lessons. All the teaching was at least satisfactory in physical education, though there was less good teaching. In all other subjects, the range of teaching seen was much more variable, in some ranging from excellent to unsatisfactory. A small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was seen in science but on the other hand over 40 per cent was good and nearly 20 per cent was very good. In modern languages 18 per cent of the teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory and nine per cent was poor. Teaching has many strengths at all stages but there are inconsistencies in teachers' expectations, behaviour management, assessment procedures and in the quality of homework. Pupils' progress and achievements are good at both Key Stages 3 and 4. Teaching in specialist support lessons for pupils with special educational needs is good and often very good, and the most able pupils are well supported.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is suitably broad at Key Stage 3 but pupils do not have equality of access to French. The breadth and balance of the curriculum at Key Stage 4 is poor. Statutory requirements for information and communications technology are not fully met at Key Stage 4. The range of extra-curricular activities is very good.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Sessions for pupils who are withdrawn from lessons are well planned to meet the specific needs of pupils in the dyslexic resources unit and the learning support department. The requirements of the Code of Practice are fully met.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for pupils' moral and social development is very good and that for cultural development is good. A very comprehensive personal, social and health education programme contributes effectively to developing communication, problem solving and interpersonal skills. Attention to pupils' spiritual development is less strong, but satisfactory overall. Some subjects of the curriculum help pupils to develop an insight into values and beliefs. The school does not meet the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

<p>How well the school cares for its pupils</p>	<p>Satisfactory systems are in place to assess pupils' attainment and progress but this information is not yet used effectively to help raise pupils' expectations and the standards they achieve. In all other respects the school provides very good support for its pupils. It has good procedures for monitoring behaviour and attendance and for ensuring the health and well-being of all its pupils.</p>
<p>Partnership with parents</p>	<p>Most parents have a very positive view of the school and appreciate the way in which they are valued as partners in the education of their children. Parents are used very effectively to support the learning, particularly of pupils with special educational needs and the higher attainers.</p>

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The leadership of the headteacher is good, giving a clear focus on the importance of improving the standards of teaching, learning and of pupils' behaviour. The loyal support of a deputy and senior teacher with a heavy teaching commitment is insufficient to implement fully the school's aims and carry out all responsibilities effectively. Effective support is also provided by middle managers, some of whom are new to their post and would benefit from further training.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors try to support the school well and have a very good working relationship with the headteacher. They do not take a sufficiently strong lead in monitoring the school's activities or in setting targets which are high enough. The governing body has not ensured that the following statutory responsibilities have been met: the reporting of progress of the OFSTED action plan in the governors' annual report to parents; a daily act of collective worship for all pupils; National Curriculum requirements for information and communications technology at Key Stage 4; appraisal of teachers.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school evaluates its performance in a number of ways, including classroom observation, but the lack of a rigorous structure leads to some aspects of its work not being sufficiently covered. The outcomes of assessment are not yet sufficiently well analysed to identify clearly the school's strengths and weaknesses and the specific actions needed to improve standards. There are no clear strategies for monitoring the effectiveness of the curriculum or departmental assessment procedures.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes appropriate use of its adequate accommodation and learning resources. The qualifications and experience of teachers match the curriculum well. A shortage of teachers in modern languages, and staffing difficulties in drama have adversely affected standards in these subjects. Financial management is sound and a tight control is kept over spending. Specific grants and funds are used appropriately for designated purposes. The principle of best value for money is pursued well when purchasing capital items but there is no clear strategy to judge the effectiveness of spending decisions in relation to the standards being achieved by pupils.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school has appropriate expectations of pupils' work and attitudes the school is responsive when parents have problems or questions to ask the school helps pupils' personal development the quality of teaching is generally good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the amount and quality of homework information about how their children are getting on

The inspection findings support the positive views of parents and that there is inconsistency in the amount of homework. Parents are kept very well informed about general matters, and this is an improvement since the last inspection. The school sends home details of achievement and effort grades, holds a parents' meeting and provides an annual report. The comments in the annual report are unsatisfactory for some subjects, particularly when there is not clear information on what pupils have achieved and targets for improvement are not suggested.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is below the national average. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 have been close to national averages over the last three years, with no significant difference overall in the attainment of boys and girls. The trend of improvement at this stage has been in line with that nationally. The 1999 National Curriculum test results in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, when taken together, were in line with the averages for both maintained schools and those with a similar intake. When looked at separately, the results in English and science were above the average for both all and similar schools. In mathematics they matched the results for all schools but were below the average for similar schools. Standards seen during the inspection in the work of pupils in Year 9 were in line with this pattern. National Curriculum assessment results in other subjects were above average in art; in line with the average in design and technology, information and communications technology and modern languages but below average in geography and physical education. There was no information on National Curriculum assessments in music. First hand inspection evidence showed attainment to be similar in design and technology, information and communications technology and modern languages but to be better in history, geography and physical education. Standards in music were in line with the national expectation. The difference between the Key Stage 3 assessment results and the inspection findings in history, geography and physical education is partly explained by the trends of improvement, and partly by the Key Stage 3 National Curriculum teachers' assessment being insufficiently secure resulting in under estimation of pupils' attainment. Achievement in religious education met the expectations of the locally Agreed Syllabus.

2. While GCSE results have been below average over the last five years, the trend of improvement overall has been in line with the national trend, and in 1999, the significant improvement in the proportion of pupils gaining higher grades, brought the GCSE average points score much closer to both the averages for all and similar schools though they are still well below the latter. The improvement in boys' attainment in 1999 was especially marked, reducing the difference between their attainment and that of girls to a point where it was less than the national difference. The average points scores in English, mathematics and science were close to national averages and this picture is confirmed by the standards being achieved in these subjects by pupils in Year 11. In other subjects, the results were well above average in history, above in art and physical education, below in information and communications technology, geography, drama and business studies, and in line with the average in the rest. Standards seen during the inspection in the work of pupils in Year 11 showed a broadly similar pattern, apart from in information and communications technology where standards were higher, matching rather than being lower than the average. This is because of the higher levels of prior attainment of the pupils currently studying information and communications technology in Year 11 and wider trends of improvement in the subject.

3. In recent years much attention has been given to raising attainment especially at Key Stage 4. Close attention has been given to identifying the most accurate means of measuring levels of performance in Years 7 and 10 to predict attainment at GCSE, plan improvement in subjects and to monitor the performance of targeted pupils. More remains to be done especially in ensuring rigorous and consistent monitoring arrangements, and that the value added to pupils' attainment is more systematically measured throughout their time at the school. This need is especially reflected at present in that the target set for attainment at GCSE in 2000 is lower than the previous year and below the standards seen in the work of pupils in Year 11. Furthermore, target setting at Key Stage 3 is not fully developed. Overall insufficient use is made of all the performance data available, including National Curriculum assessment results, to track pupils' progress and attainment systematically throughout their time in the school.

4. Speaking and listening skills are well developed through the opportunities offered in many subjects. Spoken language is generally clear, articulate and sometimes extended, and pupils mostly listen attentively to each other and to the teacher. In history, the quality of oral work is good at all stages and pupils are notably fluent when they have opportunities to speak at length and they listen well. Listening skills are well developed in music lessons. In modern languages pupils listen carefully but there are too few opportunities for them to extend the utterances they make or to read aloud. Pupils' reading skills are sufficiently well developed to meet their learning needs and in several subjects teachers provide pupils with opportunities to read aloud, which they do competently. The emphasis which the English department places on reading supports pupils' wider reading development. Pupils use writing effectively for a wide range of purposes. Writing is generally neat and well presented, and mostly accurate. There is some effective use of word processing to improve presentation. In history the writing of higher attaining pupils is very good. In English, all pupils show understanding of the need to adapt writing to the demands of different purposes and audiences.

5. Pupils deal with the everyday demands of numeracy in a satisfactory manner in all subjects. Low attaining pupils do not know all their number bonds by the end of Key Stage 3, but their facility with number improves to satisfactory levels by the end of Key Stage 4. Graphical representation is good in design and technology, history, mathematics and science. Pupils handle number and measurement, mentally, orally and in writing very well in geography and well in history, science and food technology when costing food products. Calculators are used accurately in science and mathematics, where graphical calculators are used well by pupils in their learning. Spatial concepts are well developed in art as good judgements are made about perspective. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, also develop spatial concepts well through model making in design and technology and mathematics. Pupils handle statistical information in everyday contexts well in geography, history and science, and in a satisfactory manner in design and technology and mathematics.

6. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, particularly in withdrawal lessons where they receive individual or small group support. A high proportion of these pupils achieve five or more GCSE A* to G grades at 16 years. Higher attaining pupils in the specialist dyslexic resource unit attain GCSE grades at the A* to C level in line with their potential. This is attributable to the high quality of the teaching that they receive. In mainstream lessons pupils with special educational needs also make good progress overall, particularly in English. Well-structured liaison programmes with learning support ensure pupils' needs are met. Good support was also observed in history, geography and physical education.

7. Pupils of the highest ability also make good progress overall. They are identified in all teaching groups and in many, for example, in history, are provided with appropriately demanding work. At times, however, while well motivated, they do not aspire sufficiently highly because the teaching is undemanding. The very few pupils with English as a second language make similar progress to other pupils.

8. Pupils' progress and the standards achieved are good at both Key Stages 3 and 4. However, both vary between subjects. In English, science, art, history, geography and religious education progress is consistently good reflecting the strengths in the teaching and resulting in standards which at least match national averages. In these subjects knowledge, understanding and skills are developed well. Higher attaining pupils, especially at Key Stage 4, reach high levels of maturity in their work and lower attaining pupils often achieve levels which are higher than to be expected in the light of their prior attainment. In other subjects, inconsistency, especially in teachers' expectations of the standards to be reached, weak behaviour management, the quality of day-to-day assessment and of homework hinder progress. In some subjects achievement is better at one key stage than the other. At Key Stage 4, for instance, achievement in mathematics and design and technology is poorer in the case of some pupils than at Key Stage 3 because of a lack of motivation and in some instances, poor attendance. At Key Stage 3 achievement in information and communications technology, music and physical education is not as strong as at Key Stage 4 because of inconsistencies in the teaching and in some instances the setting of appropriately high targets. For instance, in information and communications technology pupils benefit from more specialist teaching at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3; in music insufficient attention is given at Key Stage 3 to ensuring that pupils have learnt sufficiently well and in physical education pupils are less consistently involved in planning, performing and evaluating their performance than at Key Stage 4.

9. The great majority of pupils respond well to high levels of challenge as is shown clearly in English where pupils rapidly improve their skills and become articulate and confident because of the realistically high expectations and encouragement of the teachers; and in history where pupils in Year 11 are working responsibly with interest and enjoyment as mature pupils of the subject and achieving well because of the challenging yet supportive teaching. Their positive response is also shown well in art and music with pupils engaging closely with their work and developing skills of a high standard in response to the teacher's high expectations of the standards to be achieved.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

10. The attitude of most pupils to learning is good and often very good. The majority of pupils respond well to the good climate for learning established in lessons and this has a positive impact on the standards achieved. The positive position reported at the last inspection has been sustained. Pupils enjoy being at school and are keen to participate in the many opportunities offered by the school during lessons and extra-curricular activities. In the classroom pupils show a real interest in their work, listen and concentrate well. They work conscientiously and try hard to do their best. Pupils are keen to answer questions, respond positively to the tasks they are given and often show real enjoyment in the work they are doing. Pupils with learning difficulties and those with emotional and behavioural difficulties generally show positive attitudes towards learning in specialist withdrawal lessons, both in the learning support unit and in the dyslexic resource unit. This includes pupils with both learning difficulties and those with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The support they receive usually translates well into at least satisfactory attitudes and behaviour in subject lessons, especially where they are provided with extra support. Some pupils, often the lower-attaining pupils, can be passive or become disaffected and restless, particularly when the teaching is less stimulating or towards the end of a double period.

11. Behaviour is good and often very good in classrooms. Pupils respond well to teachers' high expectations for good conduct and discipline and this contributes to the good progress made in many lessons. One or two pupils behave poorly, but this is usually handled well by teachers to avoid disruption to learning. No incidents of bullying or racism were seen during the inspection. The rate of permanent exclusions has fallen to five in the past year. Although the number of fixed term exclusions is slightly higher than average, this includes a large number of very short exclusions, which is not unusual for a school beginning to implement an assertive behaviour policy. Most pupils move around the school in an orderly manner, are well behaved at break time and show respect for other people's property and their school environment. A few pupils push and behave in a silly manner in the corridors, or do not show good manners by letting adults through doors. However, most pupils are polite, friendly and courteous to adults and to each other. They are cheerful and willing to talk freely about themselves and the work they do. Since the last inspection, the school has maintained and is beginning to improve the behaviour in the school.

12. Relationships throughout the school are very good and pupils respond well to the high quality of the moral and social education they receive, together with the good role model presented by staff. The trust that pupils have in their teachers means they turn to staff freely for help and advice, and that pupils feel secure and well supported in their learning. Most pupils work co-operatively in pairs or groups and listen carefully to other people's contribution or point of view. They support each other in their learning and value the contribution made by others during discussions or presentations.

13. Pupils respond very well to the many opportunities for personal development and to show initiative offered through extra-curricular activities. In particular, in the camps they rise to a number of challenges which develop their personal qualities. Most pupils show a responsible attitude to their learning. They are usually well organized and prepared for lessons and complete their homework on time. Many pupils use the library and information and communications technology facilities well in order to undertake research or support their learning. However, in some subject lessons the ability to show initiative is limited by lack of opportunities and study skills are under developed in some younger pupils.

14. Attendance is satisfactory and in line with national average. The level of authorised absence is affected by the trips that take place in school time. Unauthorised absence is in line with national average.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

15. The quality of teaching is good overall. It was good or better in 61 per cent of the lessons seen during the inspection. In 41 per cent of lessons it was good, in 16 per cent very good, and in four per cent of lessons the teaching was excellent. Eight per cent of teaching was judged to be less than satisfactory with one per cent, (one lesson), being poor. While there is no significant difference overall in the quality of teaching at either Key Stage 3 or 4, the amount of good teaching is slightly greater at Key Stage 4. Also, while well over 50 per cent of the teaching is at least good in most subjects, there is also some which is unsatisfactory in about half. Practice is of especially high quality in history where nearly 60 per cent of the teaching seen was very good, 25 per cent was excellent and none unsatisfactory. There was no unsatisfactory teaching either in mathematics, art or music and in all these subjects teaching was good or better in at least 60 per cent of lessons. All the teaching was also at least satisfactory in physical education though there was less good teaching. In all other subjects the range of teaching seen was much more variable. In English, design and technology, geography and religious education, for instance, it ranged from a high proportion of good teaching, including some which was excellent in geography and religious education, to a small amount which was unsatisfactory. A small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was also seen in science but on the other hand over 40 per cent was good and nearly 20 per cent was very good. In modern languages 18 per cent of the teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory and nine per cent was poor.

16. Where there is a high degree of consistently good teaching, the progress made in acquiring knowledge, understanding and skills is consistently good and at times better. In the great majority of cases progress is well supported by the skilful sharing of teachers' good subject expertise, at best inspiring their enthusiasm and enjoyment of the subject. This is particularly well exemplified in history where pupils are taught to work accurately and with confidence as historians from the outset resulting in the acquisition of good knowledge, understanding, highly developed skills and an enthusiasm for the subject, especially at the end of Key Stage 4. Pupils are similarly well supported in English in the development of language skills enabling them to understand increasingly complex texts, to express their views very effectively within lively discussion and to write with increasing control and accuracy. The impact of the teachers' good subject knowledge is also reflected strongly in the attainment of skills and knowledge in science, as shown in the work of pupils in Year 11 especially. For example, in one Year 11 lesson, lower attaining pupils were able to determine the number of atoms in simple chemical compounds from the symbolic chemical formula, and in another, higher attaining pupils brought their scientific knowledge to bear on their discussion of environmental issues resulting from the use of chemical fertilisers. Skills are also well taught through good quality demonstration in design and technology and in the best teaching in physical education.

17. Where progress, while satisfactory, is not as good, it usually is because of less consistency in the teaching especially in teachers' expectations, behaviour management, the day-to-day assessment of progress and the quality of homework. For example, in mathematics, progress in gaining the higher National Curriculum levels in Year 7 is limited by a lack of rigour in the setting out of solutions to problems which limits the acquisition of mathematical skills. In French, speaking skills are insufficiently well developed when too little is expected of pupils in using the language. For example, a Year 8 class shared between two teachers made much better progress with the teacher who insisted that they should respond in French than with the teacher who spoke virtually no French. Behaviour problems also restrict progress at times in French as they do occasionally in a number of subjects, among them mathematics, geography, religious education, drama and music.

18. Pupils' progress is consistently well assessed and recorded in English, history, religious education, art and music. Assessment procedures are a major strength in these subjects in enabling pupils to know how well they are doing through positive feedback and the writing of helpful comments. In other subjects practice is more variable. In most, work is marked and recorded regularly but marking varies in quality. In mathematics, for example, while some marking is very good and provides clear guidance for improvement, in other cases marking is unsatisfactory failing, for example, to identify incorrect answers and to assist improvement. In many instances, even where other aspects of marking are good, the guidance provided to pupils on improving their work is insufficiently helpful especially in the case of higher attaining pupils whose standards are often praised but for whom challenge and guidance on how to improve further is not provided. Overall, pupils are better informed about their progress and attainment at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3 through being informed of predicted GCSE grades. Insufficient use is made of assessment results to set targets for attainment at Key Stage 3.

19. Pupils work productively and at good pace in most lessons because most are well planned to provide clear learning objectives and a good range and sequence of well timed learning activities. It is only rarely, as for example in design and technology, that learning is slowed by a lack of pace resulting from a lack of thoroughness in the planning. Resources are also used effectively in many lessons to stimulate learning as, for instance, in a geography lesson in Year 9 the use of well-prepared information on possible ways of coping with a major oil spill caught pupils' imagination and stimulated lively debate. In mathematics also where there is very good teaching, time is used well and this, combined with the good use of resources and questioning, results in significant gains in pupils' understanding. Pupils make good creative effort in design and technology, art and music because of the good balance of activities which encourages them to develop their skills and appreciation of the subject. For instance, in music instrumental skills develop well, especially at Key Stage 4, as does pupils' knowledge and understanding of practical composing techniques. The best teaching in physical education also leads to good creative effort in gymnastics and a high level of physical effort in most activities. Less effort is evident where the teaching makes less demand.

20. There are also high levels of intellectual effort where teaching is stimulating and challenging. These are particularly well exemplified in the work of higher attaining pupils especially. For instance, in the making of intellectually challenging calculations in mathematics, in the initiation of debate, lateral thinking and questioning of evidence by pupils in a Year 11 history lesson on North American homesteaders; and in the notable discussion skills of Year 9 pupils in English, which focused on the vocabulary and symbolism of the witches' scene in *Macbeth*. Teaching also often makes strong intellectual demands on pupils in religious education with pupils being expected to think, develop their own ideas and their capacity for insight. There are other occasions, however, when questioning is not sufficiently searching, resulting in pupils not thinking sufficiently deeply. This pattern can also be found in several subjects where questioning is used well to test knowledge and understanding but is not sufficiently probing to challenge and extend thinking.

21. Pupils concentrate well and work hard in most lessons. In the great majority a good pace of work is quickly established and sustained with pupils responding with interest and quickly involving themselves in their learning. There are some good instances of pupils learning and deepening their understanding through discussion and debate in productive group work. This was exemplified particularly well in a Year 8 history lesson where groups of pupils were deeply engrossed in their work, helping and challenging each other and drawing on their knowledge, understanding and skills in preparation for reporting on the French Revolution. The use of this approach, however, is not consistently developed and in many lessons, including some in history, the opportunities for pupils to learn through discussion are limited because lessons are too strongly directed by the teacher.

22. It is only very rarely that a lack of interest or motivation slows learning. This usually occurs because of too low a challenge and pace to sustain pupils' interest. For example, pupils in Year 7 lost interest in a science lesson which was repeating work already covered at Key Stage 2. In mathematics and design and technology the slow pace of some lessons results in pupils losing concentration especially towards the end of lessons. Poor classroom management sometimes results in slower progress, as is sometimes the case in French and occasionally in geography where the failure of the teacher to control the behaviour of a minority can result in a poor output of work from those around them. In the great majority of lessons, however, any deviation is dealt with quickly and unobtrusively and learning is very strongly supported by good standards of behaviour and classroom relationships.

23. In most cases appropriate importance is attached to homework as an integral part of learning. It is set regularly to extend and to prepare for the next stages of learning, and to assist pupils in the development of study skills. There is, however, some inconsistency in the setting of homework. In mathematics not enough is set for lower attaining pupils; in information and communications technology sometimes homework is not always done; in some Year 7 lessons in history more could be expected of higher attaining pupils by setting more demanding tasks and in French homework is set but it is generally completion of classwork.

24. The awareness and recording of individual needs generally ensures that pupils receive appropriate work and support. The most able pupils make good progress often because of their good motivation, though at times a lack of differentiation in the work results in them not being fully challenged. This is the case, for instance, in English where work is not always sufficiently challenging and science where pupils' requirements are known but individual targets are not always sufficiently challenging. The very few pupils with English as second knowledge progress well because of the good support provided in lessons.

25. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is particularly good in withdrawal lessons, both in the learning support unit and in the special unit for pupils with dyslexia. Teachers have a high level of skill and plan lessons well. A wide range of appropriate activities is well matched to pupils' specific learning needs. These are delivered with good pace, keeping pupils interested and involved. Information and communications technology is well used to support pupils' learning. The main focus is on the development of literacy and numeracy skills, but for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties there is a good emphasis on supporting the development of their social skills. Nearly all withdrawal sessions have a slot to check on pupils' recording and understanding of homework, which ensures they are able to benefit from the activity. Encouraging and positive feedback from special educational needs teachers and learning support assistants values pupils' successes. It leads to special educational needs pupils being motivated to work hard and make good gains in learning. Pupils not only make gains in learning in small withdrawal groups but also in mainstream lessons. The best teaching makes good provision for their learning needs and teachers liaise well with the learning support assistants. Where progress is less good teachers have not ensured that learning materials match pupils' individual learning needs, especially in the readability of texts and worksheets and the presentation of work on the board.

26. Overall the quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection in that there is a higher proportion of good teaching and less unsatisfactory teaching.

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

27. The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is satisfactorily broad and balanced. It includes the National Curriculum subjects, with some enrichment through drama and personal and social education. Time given to English, mathematics and science matches enables national standards to be reached. The improved provision of information and communications technology has resulted in National Curriculum requirements being fully met. However, arrangements for modern languages in Year 9 are unsatisfactory. Here, only more able pupils have appropriate time for French; the reduction in lessons for others adversely affects their opportunity for progression at Key Stage 4. Furthermore, the one term course provided for able linguists to try a second modern language is unsatisfactory as it is not enough to promote pupils' progression to a second language. Pupils with special educational needs have good access to the curriculum offered, except French. Arrangements for the withdrawal of many of these pupils from lessons has a negative impact on their opportunities to learn French at Key Stage 3, as well as opportunity for continuity at Key Stage 4.

28. The breadth and balance of the curriculum at Key Stage 4 is poor. There has been some improvement of courses to support higher attainment in mathematics and better provision in information communications technology, science and religious education. However pupils do not have satisfactory access to an appropriately broad range and choice of courses relevant to their different learning needs and aspirations. Apart from National Curriculum subjects, only business studies and drama are offered as options; the limited choice of design technology subjects does not provide full challenge for able pupils; media studies is only open to those who do not take full programmes of French in Year 9 and there is no opportunity for pupils to take two modern languages. Statutory requirements for control and measurement in information and communications technology are not fully met. There is no opportunity yet for pupils to take courses with vocational accreditation.

29. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good overall. The Code of Practice is fully in place and the needs of pupils with a statement of special educational need are very well met. As a result of good liaison between subject departments, special needs teachers and learning support assistants pupils with special educational needs have full access to most curriculum areas. This is because learning support staff are linked to specific subject areas, particularly in English and mathematics, where there are timetabled liaison meetings. Withdrawal sessions are well planned to meet pupils' particular learning needs, both within the learning support area and in the Dyslexic Resource Unit. The clear focus on the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills is well matched to targets in individual education plans. Support for the two pupils with visual impairment gives them good access to the curriculum.

30. Good strategies to raise standards of literacy across the curriculum that have been introduced are beginning to have an impact on raising standards. Displays of the technical vocabulary of subjects in classrooms are helpful in improving spelling. Literacy is particularly well promoted in history, geography, mathematics and religious education as well as in English. In geography, for example, the range of writing includes journalistic and imaginative writing. Though there is no numeracy policy the school makes satisfactory provision. The mathematics department addresses the issue very well and liaises well with the special educational needs department on key numeracy targets. Good opportunities are presented in art, design and technology, geography, history, mathematics and science departments. Map work in geography and orienteering in physical education contribute well. Opportunities to handle statistical information are very good in history through the study of population and trends in unemployment, and in mathematics. Other opportunities arise in design and technology, geography and science.

31. The very good programme of extra activities after the school day makes an important contribution to pupils' academic attainment and the development of other skills and talents. Almost all staff are involved and pupils express appreciation of the variety offered, not only in sport and music but also in most other subjects areas. Good arrangements to support homework and private study enable pupils to receive supervised support, for example, with GCSE coursework. Pupils' learning in information and communications technology is also supported by regular access to facilities. Overall, this very good provision meets varying needs of different ages and abilities, including those with special educational needs.

32. The comprehensive personal, social and health education programme which encompasses health, sex and drugs education, careers guidance, citizenship and activities contributes very well to developing pupils' communication, problem-solving and interpersonal skills. The very good teaching of personal, social and health education curriculum by specialist staff provides very well for pupils' different needs as they grow up through the school. Good careers guidance takes place throughout the school with particular emphasis from Year 9. The close working with the local careers service, the programme of work experience, careers information, interviews and a careers evening to which parents are invited prepare pupils well for future work.

33. Provision for pupils' social development is very good. The rich range of after school clubs and, in particular, the excellent residential summer camps give much opportunity for pupils to take responsibility and to gain social confidence and team skills. Emphasis on looking after equipment and taking care in practical work in, for example, art, music and science lessons, also supports pupils' increasing awareness of social responsibility. Positive relationships are fostered in lessons and some subjects provide regular opportunities for pupils to learn skills of co-operation in group and pair work. Adults in the school are positive role models. Opportunities for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties to develop the personal skills needed to achieve within the classroom situation are good. These include counselling and social skill sessions.

34. Provision for pupils' moral development is also very good. Through high expectations of behaviour and a clear positive behaviour code pupils learn to consider the consequences of their actions on others. There is much opportunity for them to learn about the importance of rules and fair play in the physical education activities. Pupils discuss ethical questions. In history, lessons arising from the past are discussed and in geography environmental issues are well covered. For example, pupils gained in understanding and skill to see two sides of the argument in a lesson involving work on the effects of oil spills in coastlines. In religious education, complex questions to do with human life, arising from medical research, are dealt with well.

35. Pupils have good opportunities to develop appreciation of their own and others' cultural heritages. In English, for instance, pupils' awareness of poetry, literature and plays is widened through work in lessons, story telling weekends and theatre visits. Work in art helps pupils to see links with past and present cultures. Effective provision in religious education helps pupils to understand more of the different cultures of religious communities in Britain. Pupils learn about life in shanty towns of Brazil, for example, in lessons in geography. However, inadequacies with the modern languages provision limits the opportunity for a significant number of pupils to gain good understanding of European influences.

36. Provision for pupils to develop insight into values and beliefs is less strong but satisfactory overall. Pupils have only two assemblies a week. Reflection on a thought for the day or week in tutor time is not consistently provided and, generally, pupils do not have enough opportunities to pause for quiet reflection. Statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship are not met. However, the religious education department makes a very good contribution by enabling pupils to understand what faith means in the lives of believers. Other stronger aspects of provision for pupils' spiritual development are in the arts subjects where often their aesthetic appreciation and response is encouraged, and by the challenging outdoor adventure activities. Here, pupils learn to know more of themselves and gain awareness of positive attributes such as loyalty, commitment and powers of endurance. Overall, however, not enough attention is given at school or department level to plan and provide for this aspect of pupils' development.

37. The school has established good links with the community which contribute well to pupils' learning. Pupils take part in local events and give performances to the community. Local groups for people with disabilities and for disaffected youth are invited to be part of the camps and work alongside the pupils in activities. Visitors from the community, including the police, health professionals, church representatives, the drugs adviser, the armed forces and others with special interests, for example, an expert from the tax office, also enrich the curriculum. The interviewing of Year 11 by members of the governing body gives pupils experience of an interview situation and also enables governors to seek pupils' views of the school. Pupils support a number of charities through the 'Monster Sponsor'. The site is used widely by a range of groups, the school runs a youth club and physically handicapped club and is the largest provider of adult education in the area. There are some links with industry, as part of an apprenticeship scheme, but overall links with business and industry are under-developed.

38. Sound links with partner institutions in particular through the local cluster group of schools, promote close working and discussion to ensure some continuity as pupils move on to their next schools. The co-ordinator for special educational needs works closely with the partner primary schools to ensure the appropriate provision is made for the pupils concerned and, early in Year 7, the former Year 6 teachers are invited to the school to discuss pupils' progress. There are also satisfactory links with local colleges. There are few real curricular links with primary schools and further education institutions.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

39. Systems for the assessment of pupils' work, attainment and progress are satisfactory overall. However, assessment practice is not yet consistent enough. A draft policy on assessment, recording and reporting has recently been produced, although it does not contain a whole-school system for marking. The provision of centrally held data on attainment from entry has provided the opportunity for departments to be more aware of pupils' different needs but the effectiveness of its use varies. Data is best used by English, geography, history, religious education and modern language departments. At the time of the last inspection work was developing in linking pupils' attainment reliably to National Curriculum levels, but standardization procedures at Key Stage 3 were not sufficiently developed. National Curriculum levels are still not used effectively especially in art and geography and therefore do not provide a sound basis for planning for progression. There is no system to collate information and communications technology assessment grades in work done across the curriculum. Target setting has not yet been fully developed at Key Stage 3. Assessment is better at Key Stage 4 where it is generally closely linked to GCSE criteria. The use of assessment to help guide future learning is also inconsistent. Departments such as religious education and history use results and records of pupils' attainment very well to plan work for particular groups of pupils. However, in most other subjects, assessment is not used as well as it could be to influence future work.

40. Procedures for identifying pupils with special educational needs are good. The subsequent tracking and monitoring of their progress is very good. Regular assessments take place, both within the ongoing learning situation and at appropriate times throughout the year. Formal assessments are recorded on a computer database. Pupils' progress is regularly discussed at learning support meetings and meetings of the staff of the Dyslexic Resource Unit. Statutory requirements for pupils with statements of special educational need are well met. All this ensures learning opportunities which meet their needs well.

41. The pastoral care received by all pupils is very good and a strength of the school, a view which is shared by pupils and parents. The pastoral team is fully aware of pupils' individual needs, take them very seriously and respond to them in a positive way. Staff are approachable and conscientious in their concern for pupils' welfare. There is often a real bonding between staff and pupils which creates a supportive climate that promotes learning.

42. The school works closely with a number of outside support agencies which are used well to give additional support to pupils with particular problems. The care and support provided within the Dyslexic Resource Unit and the learning support unit for pupils with special educational needs shows a committed and caring staff. Child protection procedures are in place and known by staff. There are sound systems for monitoring health and safety and dealing with illness and accidents.

43. The new structure of learning managers, behaviour managers, heads of year and form tutors is beginning to be effective and is having an impact on promoting pupils' progress. The role of the tutor has been developed since the last inspection. Pupils' grades for effort and achievement are monitored regularly by the learning managers and action taken to address concerns, after consultation with subject departments. Pupils are also rewarded for doing well through merits and certificates. Meetings are held with parents of pupils in Year 8 and Year 11 whose progress is satisfactory, but has the potential to be better, in order to provide extra encouragement.

44. The assertive behaviour management system which was introduced in September is beginning to have a positive impact. Most staff are implementing the policy consistently and it is understood by pupils. Parents and pupils also feel the implementation of the policy has been effective in reducing incidents of poor behaviour and disruption. Individual pupils' behaviour is monitored by the behaviour managers and parents are kept informed of any problems and encouraged to support the school in sorting them out. Any bullying is dealt with quickly and effectively. Pupils do not feel bullying is an issue and know what to do if any incidents occur. Attendance is monitored closely and any absence followed up. Parents are contacted straight away if a pupil is absent. Registrations are carried out efficiently and records of attendance fulfil statutory requirements.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

45. Overall, parents have a very positive view of the school and are satisfied with the provision the school makes. In particular they feel that their children are expected to work hard and try their best, that the school is helping their children to become mature and responsible and that the school is very approachable. The view of parents that the school provides well for pupils with special educational needs is well founded. The school has worked hard to encourage parents to support the school and the work their children do, and has been successful in this.

46. Very effective links with parents have been established and parents are strongly encouraged to be involved in the work of the school. This has a very positive impact on pupils' learning. Parents are welcomed into the school and many help with school's extra-curricular activities including going on the camps. There is strong parental involvement through the Lift Group project that provides activities to encourage more able pupils, whatever their talent, and ensures good communication with parents. The school seeks parental support when dealing with incidents of poor behaviour, attitude or attendance and also shares with parents the positive news, for example, when pupils' achievement or effort has resulted in a merit award. A high proportion of parents attend the review meetings for pupils with statements of special educational need and they receive a copy of their child's individual education plan, together with an evaluation of progress, every term. Parents support their children at home by monitoring and signing the homework diaries and tracking course work. However, a significant minority of parents are not happy with the quality and consistency of some of the homework set and the inspection team concur with this view. There is an active Parent Teacher Association that organises social and fund-raising events in order to provide extra resources for the school. A home-school agreement is in place after discussion with parents. The headteacher holds a fortnightly 'surgery' to discuss any concerns parents may have. Most parents feel very comfortable about approaching the school with any questions or problems.

47. Parents are kept very well informed about general matters through correspondence and newsletters. Very good written information is given about the curriculum and meetings are held for parents, for example, when pupils are choosing their options or deciding on further education. Also good information is provided when pupils start school and through the prospectus and governors' annual report to parents. This high quality of information now given to parents is an improvement since the last inspection. Although the school sends home details of achievement and effort grades, holds a parents' meeting and provides an annual progress report, a number of parents do not feel well informed about their child's progress. The annual reports on progress are unsatisfactory for some subjects, particularly when there is not clear information about how well pupils are doing as individuals or targets for improvement are not suggested.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

48. Cowplain School succeeds in its aim of providing a supportive learning environment for its pupils. It promotes good behaviour, with pupils developing respect for themselves and others and personal qualities that make them independent and responsible adults. There is a high commitment from the headteacher, staff and governing body to provide excellent educational opportunities within the context of equality of opportunity for all pupils. Whilst this is a strength of the school, management structures and the implementation of policies are not yet sufficiently rigorous to ensure fully the achievement of these aims through the curriculum. Although GCSE results improved last year, this was from a low base the previous year. Over the last four years improvement in results has matched national trends. Expectations have been raised and more pupils are now being entered for GCSE in English, mathematics and for double science.

49. The leadership of the headteacher is good, giving a clear focus to staff and governors on the future educational direction of the school. Since taking up post in 1997 he has directed his energies to improving teaching and learning, behaviour and attendance, in order to raise standards. Measures to improve standards of literacy have been introduced and there is already evidence of the influence of this work throughout the school. Staff and pupils state there has been an improvement in the behaviour of pupils and inspection evidence points to improvements in teaching since the previous inspection. Information and communications technology is being well used as a tool to improve teaching and learning, although the monitoring of coverage of National Curriculum requirements and pupils' attainments is not yet rigorous enough. Staff feel more involved in the decision making process and appreciate the headteacher's open management style. This results in good commitment and support from heads of subject departments, learning managers and heads of year. Leadership is particularly good in the subject areas of English, design and technology, history, geography, religious education and special educational needs. There is potential for middle managers to take greater responsibility.

50. The effectiveness of initiatives is hindered by a lack of clarity and efficiency in the roles undertaken by the senior management team. This affects adversely the systematic monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school and the effectiveness of support for middle managers, particularly those new to the school. Within the team of three, (headteacher, deputy head and senior teacher), one member has a significant subject responsibility and teaching load as well as administrative duties. This leaves the monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school being shared by the headteacher and deputy headteacher, with the headteacher also taking responsibility for staff development and oversight of the budget.

51. Governors have developed a greater understanding of their role since the last inspection, and have appropriately re-organised their committee structure to take account of this. However the governing body is not yet taking a strong role in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school and ensuring that all statutory requirements are being met. Requirements which are not being met include: the reporting of the progress of the OFSTED action plan in the governors' annual report to parents; a daily act of collective worship for all pupils; the implementation of National Curriculum requirements for information and communications technology at Key Stage 4 and the appraisal of teachers. The governing body did not fully assure itself that issues for action following the last inspection report had been fully addressed. The remit of the strategy group is good, but the group has yet to develop its skills in being able to set with confidence appropriate performance targets for the headteacher as part of the annual appraisal or to ensure that the school's targets for pupils' attainment are high enough. Also, though it recognises the need, it has yet to put in place a specific statement formally setting out the details of the agreed and well understood longer-term educational direction for the school and the actions planned to achieve the school's aims.

52. Individual governors make very significant contributions. For example, the governor with responsibility for special educational needs has regular contact with the special educational needs co-ordinator and is well informed of the work of the department. Other governors meet pupils in Year 11 each year. They find the practice job interview task a valuable and informative experience. The finance committee has had to ensure a number of budgetary requirements are being met since the audit last year, particularly regarding unofficial funds. It does not yet have a clear strategy to judge whether spending decisions are effective in relation to the standards being achieved by pupils.

53. Development planning in subject departments has improved since the last inspection and is now generally good. The headteacher has given clear guidelines to ensure that the number of targets is manageable and can be financed. All departments have to address two whole-school priorities this year, the raising of standards at GCSE and the development of provision for the most able pupils.

Departments are making good progress towards the achievement of the targets in their plans. However, the review and evaluation of success is not formally recorded, other than in a numerical analysis of the success rate and the targets are not part of a clearly formulated ongoing whole-school plan, which informs decisions and on which subject plans are based.

54. The school evaluates its performance in a number of ways, but the lack of a rigorous structure leads to some aspects of its work not being sufficiently covered. There are regular planned programmes of classroom observation, satisfactory systems for recording pupils' ongoing performance and a useful annual review of examination results. However, the outcomes are not yet sufficiently well analysed to identify clearly the school's strengths and weaknesses, and the specific actions needed to improve standards. There are no clear strategies for monitoring the effectiveness of the curriculum or departmental assessment procedures. This is reflected in the unequal access to French for all pupils at both Key Stages 3 and 4.

55. The monitoring of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. The need for such a programme was identified as a key issue at the time of the last inspection. A system of classroom observation focusing on the strategies used by teachers has only been in place for the last two years. It has helped some teachers to plan lessons more effectively and in some cases, appropriate steps have been taken to address weaknesses in teaching. As yet, there is insufficient evaluation and analysis of the impact of teaching on pupils' attainment and progress, and no systematic way of sharing effective practice. Heads of department are now being encouraged to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning within their departments. The success of this depends on the understanding and confidence of the heads of department. It is particularly good in English and history. In other subjects staff do not feel that they have been given sufficient skills to undertake the task, although they know and understand that this is an important aspect of their work and want to undertake it.

56. In the last year the headteacher has put in place a programme for the professional review of the performance of all teachers, support staff and non-teaching staff. This is in place of an appraisal programme, which was never fully implemented after the last inspection. Teachers are positive about the support this provides for their professional development. It is an appropriate measure given the proposed changes in assessing teachers' performance currently under discussion. A well organised programme supports newly qualified teachers, who speak well of the help they receive from senior staff and their heads of department. Although new teachers can join this programme, it is not always appropriate, especially for more experienced staff taking on management roles. The professional development of teachers is now closely linked to classroom observation and departmental development plans and appropriately supports developments.

57. The school has suitable systems in place to assess pupils' potential and to monitor standards and progress over time. However, evaluation and analysis are not yet sufficiently developed to ensure the setting of challenging targets in all subjects, both at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Whole-school targets, based on the testing of pupils' potential, do not aim high enough. The use of the data to identify whether pupils are doing as well as or better than expected, based on earlier attainment, is still at an early stage both at senior management level and head of department level. Some heads of department, notably mathematics, history and design and technology show skills in using this data. Annual reviews of examination results with heads of department identify points for action, for example, the comparison of the results of particular groups of pupils in other subjects. This is a strength, but follow-up through line management is inconsistent. The Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 learning managers, newly in post, are in the early stages of taking responsibility for overseeing the overall progress of individual pupils. Indications are that this will be an effective strategy.

58. Overall the qualifications, experience and expertise of teachers match the curriculum well. A shortage of teachers in modern foreign languages limits pupils' opportunities to learn French and affects adversely the standards achieved. Standards in drama have been adversely affected by staffing difficulties throughout the last year. High quality support by learning support staff, both teachers and learning assistants, significantly contributes to the good progress made by pupils with special educational needs. Technician support is adequate for science but not so for design and technology, especially with the short lunchtime for setting up practical activities.

59. Accommodation is adequate for the delivery of the curriculum. Most departments are housed together. There are adequate specialist facilities although the nature of the accommodation for teaching science is a weakness, with laboratories located in different areas. The library is well used by pupils to support their learning. Problems with outside surfaces, such as poor drainage on the field and an unsafe hard surface area, affect the range of activities that can be offered in physical education. There are plans to remedy the latter. Subject areas provide a bright and stimulating environment for learning. Resources for learning are satisfactory, and often good, for example, those produced by the modern foreign languages department. Deficiencies at the time of the last inspection have been addressed. Provision for information and communications technology is good, but the use of the four information and communications technology rooms is not sufficiently close to ensure this expensive resource is being fully used. During the week of the inspection the room was used for just over half the curriculum time available. The school runs well on a day-to-day basis.

60. Financial management is sound, with developments being clearly costed, for example, money in the budget to supplement government money for the development of information and communications technology. The headteacher, with the support of the school administrative officer, keeps tight control over spending, which is regularly reported to the governing body. Strategies to increase cost-effectiveness are satisfactory and have included removal of surplus staffing. Special educational needs funding is clearly spent for the benefit of pupils and provides good value for money. This year governors made up county cuts in special educational needs funding to maintain their current high level of provision. However, there is a clear awareness that provision needs to be reviewed for the coming financial year.

61. The school receives an average level of funding and makes appropriate use of its accommodation and resources. Overall pupils make good progress, entering the school at below average standards and attaining close to the national average at the end of both key stages. The quality of teaching is good and the standard of support and care for pupils is very good. Overall the school provides good value for money.

62. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory overall, though it was slow at first in implementing the key issues. The school has sound capacity to improve further, but this is dependent on more effective management structures being in place between senior management and heads of department and the pastoral team. A structured plan, clearly setting out future developments, is also essential to take full advantage of the high commitment and expertise of staff.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

63. The headteacher, senior management team and governing body need to attend to the following:

- Ensure the achievement of the school's aims and policies by:
 - putting in place an effective senior management structure in which responsibilities are appropriately delegated and laid out in clear job descriptions; (paragraphs 48 and 50)
 - ensuring that the role of middle managers is strengthened further and that there is a clear system of accountability; (paragraph 49)
 - increasing the effectiveness of the governing body in monitoring developments and fulfilling statutory responsibilities. (paragraph 51)
- Improve the planning of the curriculum, particularly at Key Stage 4, ensuring that all pupils have equal access to a broad curriculum. (paragraphs 28, 36, 97 and 98)
- Devise and implement consistently rigorous systems to assess pupils' attainment and achievements by:
 - ensuring that marking is consistently thorough and accompanied by clear guidance to pupils on how to improve their standards; (paragraphs 18, 79, 114, 130, 145 and 147)
 - using assessment data systematically to track and monitor individual pupil's progress; (paragraphs 3, 39 and 123)
 - setting individual targets and influence the planning of future work and raise their attainment; (paragraphs 3, 18, 39, 57, 87 and 101)
 - improving the quality of reports to parents. (paragraphs 47 and 148)
- Improve the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning by:
 - focusing on the outcomes for pupils' attainment and progress; (paragraph 55)
 - providing appropriate training and guidance for middle managers in lesson observation. (paragraph 55)
- Continue to raise attainment, particularly at higher levels of GCSE by ensuring:
 - greater consistency in levels of teachers' expectations and the challenge in the work set; (paragraphs 7, 8, 17, 22, 69, 96, 107, 111, 118 and 127)
 - individual teachers are well supported in addressing weaknesses in behaviour management; (paragraphs 8, 17 and 22)
 - homework is consistently valuable in extending and preparing for the work of lessons and in enabling pupils to develop study skills; (paragraphs 17 and 23)
 - the best practice in teaching and assessment is shared and built upon. (paragraph 55)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	158
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	57

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3.0	14.0	38.0	32.0	11.0	2.0	0.0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1068	-
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	110	-

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	30	-
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	160	-

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	3

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	24
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	37

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.4
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.3
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	1999	118	117	235

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	65	79	73
	Girls	92	70	65
	Total	157	149	138
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	67(49)	64 (52)	59 (51)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	33 (23)	31 (31)	26 (25)
	National	28 (36)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	62	77	77
	Girls	86	73	74
	Total	148	150	151
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	64 (50)	64 (53)	64 (53)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	29(19)	30(33)	32 (28)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	96	97	193

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	35	85	91
	Girls	52	90	94
	Total	87	175	185
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	45.1 (30.4)	90.7 (85.9)	95.9 (91.6)
	National	46.3 (44.0)	90.7 (87.5)	95.7 (93.4)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	35.4 (29.6)
	National	37.8

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	3
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	-
Indian	-
Pakistani	-
Bangladeshi	-
Chinese	2
White	1059
Any other minority ethnic group	3

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage	1	
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White		
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 – Year 11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	62.0
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Year 11

Total number of education support staff	21.0
Total aggregate hours worked per week	539

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Year 11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77.7
---	------

Average teaching group size: Y7 – Year 11

Key Stage 3	21.8
Key Stage 4	20.9

Financial information

Financial year	1998/9
----------------	--------

	£
Total income	2467492
Total expenditure	2453399
Expenditure per pupil	2369
Balance brought forward from previous year	149757
Balance carried forward to next year	163850

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1065
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.	33.7	56.9	6.2	3.2	0.0
My child is making good progress in school.	37.5	52.8	5.9	1.9	1.9
Behaviour in the school is good.	21.3	62.8	7.5	1.9	6.5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	22.9	56.1	14.8	3.5	2.7
The teaching is good.	33.4	58.0	2.7	0.5	5.4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	37.7	43.4	13.7	3.2	1.9
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	54.4	38.3	3.8	1.3	2.2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	56.6	38.0	3.2	0.8	1.3
The school works closely with parents.	32.9	48.0	14.6	1.6	3.0
The school is well led and managed.	38.0	50.9	3.8	0.3	7.0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	37.5	54.2	4.0	1.1	3.2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	55.5	35.0	3.2	0.5	5.7

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

ENGLISH

64. The attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 in the national tests in 1999 was close to the national average at level 5 and above and better than the national average at level 6 and above. These results were above average compared with schools with pupils from similar backgrounds. Taking the four years 1996-1999 together the performance of pupils in English was close to the national average. The performance of boys over that time span was close to the national average while that of girls was above the national average.

65. During Key Stage 3 most pupils, including higher attaining pupils and those with special educational needs, make good progress. Most pupils speak confidently and are increasingly able to adapt their language to different contexts. Year 9 higher attaining pupils discussing the vocabulary and symbolism of the witches' scene in *Macbeth* showed notable discussion skills and their comments were often perceptive and well-informed and some were extended. Pupils listen well to each other and to their teachers. In reading, pupils show understanding of increasingly complex texts and higher attaining pupils in particular reading aloud expressively - such as in a Year 8 lesson where a pupil read aloud to the class the poem *The Listeners*. Written work is above average overall. Year 9 pupils planning and drafting crime/mystery stories also showed a good grasp of the genre and were producing some convincing and well written stories. Some work throughout the key stage is very competently word-processed. By the end of the key stage pupils' written work shows increasing control and accuracy in a range of different kinds of writing, including effective note-making and drafting. Presentation is mostly good.

66. At Key Stage 4 pupils, including those with special educational needs and higher attaining pupils, make good progress in the development of their language skills. Listening skills are good and speaking shows increasing control of form and sense of audience and appropriateness. In a Year 11 lesson, higher attaining pupils, discussing materials provided by the examinations board, showed striking knowledge and understanding of issues concerning information and power and articulated their concerns very effectively within a lively discussion. Lower attaining pupils in Year 10 responded thoughtfully to *Of Mice and Men* showing good knowledge of the text and sensitivity to the characterisation. Written work at Key Stage 4 shows generally good use of note-making and drafting, increasing accuracy and sensitive response. Some work is very effectively word processed and attractively presented.

67. The department enters as many pupils as possible for both the English and the English literature examinations at GCSE. In both examinations in 1999 the percentage of pupils gaining the higher A* to C grades was close to the national average for all maintained schools. These results are an improvement on the previous year. Although the percentage of pupils gaining higher grade passes in the English literature examination declined slightly, all pupils who entered achieved a pass grade. Because of the much higher proportion of pupils who entered for the examination, these results represent an improvement on the previous year.

68. At both key stages most pupils have positive attitudes to their work, nearly always showing interest, responding enthusiastically to the tasks set for them and maintaining good concentration and focus - often thanks to skilful teaching and the good relationships between teachers and pupils. Pupils work well together when asked to do so and show respect for each others' ideas. They are supportive of each other and show appreciation for each others' efforts. They respond very well to their teachers and are orderly and considerate. When opportunities arise pupils are keen to take initiative or accept responsibility such as in feeding back from a group discussion to the class or in taking a leading role in group activities. Much of the effective use of computers for word processing work is undertaken on the initiative of pupils.

69. In most lessons teaching is at least satisfactory and in about half of the lessons observed it was good or very good. There is a small amount of unsatisfactory teaching where there is insufficient challenge to pupils, objectives are too modest, there is little progress and the attention of pupils is not sustained. The good relationships which teachers maintain with pupils and the high quality of much of the teaching contribute significantly to pupils' progress, their enthusiastic response to most lessons and their good behaviour.

70. Teachers use their good knowledge and understanding of the subject and present information and ideas effectively to pupils, enabling them to increase their understanding. Lesson planning is well grounded on the department's schemes of work and resource materials. Appropriate expectations of what pupils can achieve and the praise and encouragement with which teachers support their efforts encourage pupils to make good progress. Teachers' use of a variety of methods and a wide range of stimulating learning activities captures pupils' interest in their lessons. Good use of pair and group work and also some very good whole class teaching helps pupils to deepen their understanding through discussion. Pupils are managed well: the generally interesting, varied and demanding work, and the good relationships with teachers, contribute to the good behaviour. Learning resources - particularly materials produced and some effective use of video extracts - promote understanding. In nearly all lessons time is well used to keep pupils working productively to the end of lessons. A weaker feature of lessons is the inconsistent attention given to planning work for the variety of levels of attainment within each class.

71. Written work is well marked and annotated with comments which encourage pupils and usually offer good advice on ways of improving their work. In lessons teachers are good at assessing what pupils are doing and in suggesting directions for improvement. There is some self-assessment by pupils and the department is developing this and combining it with target-setting to make more systematic this important contribution to pupils' progress. Homework is used effectively to move learning on and to prepare for work to come.

72. The department significantly enhances the curriculum through opportunities for pupils to take part in extra-curricular activities such as theatre visits, activities for national book week and story-telling weekends. There are also weekly "drop-in" sessions after school for pupils who would like extra help with any aspect of their work. The environment for teaching English is improved by the attractive and helpful displays of pupils' work and other materials to support their ongoing work - such as vocabulary, spelling rules and National Curriculum descriptions of progress in language development.

73. The head of department provides good leadership and clear direction for the department, and is well supported by his colleagues. Teachers work well together and they work hard to maintain a supportive and effective learning environment to help all pupils reach their full potential. Development planning is good, directed to raising standards and regularly evaluated. Monitoring of the progress and work of the department is mostly very well done through both formal and informal procedures.

74. The department has made good progress since the last inspection in addressing most of the issues raised. Teaching has improved though more remains to be done to improve the small amount of unsatisfactory teaching. Many more pupils are now entered for both GCSE examinations. Long term planning is good and the monitoring of pupils' progress is more consistent and continues to develop along with target-setting. Pupils' individual reading receives good attention with opportunities for personal reading at the beginning of most English lessons and also in tutor time. Further development to encourage a wide range of reading is evident in the recent genre mapping initiative. The department recognizes that the introduction of more structured lesson observations with clearly defined outcomes and the setting of precise targets for pupils are areas requiring development.

75. Drama is taught to all pupils at Key Stage 3 for one lesson a week. At Key Stage 4 it is an optional GCSE subject. Changes in the management and staffing of drama over the last year affected GCSE performance and the 1999 results were well below national average levels although previous years had been close to the national average. Although the teaching of drama varies considerably and standards are inconsistent, the schemes of work and guidance for teachers provide a good structure for development. In a Year 11 drama lesson pupils showed that they could adopt and sustain a role, use movement and space effectively to convey meaning and they worked creatively together. Their evaluations of their own work and that of their peers showed sound understanding and were perceptive. Drama contributes in particular to the development of pupils' speaking and listening skills.

MATHEMATICS

76. At the end of Key Stage 3 attainment in the National Curriculum tests is close to the national average. The trend over the last four years is broadly in line with national trends, although in 1998 attainment was below average. There is no difference in attainment between boys and girls. Attainment is below the average for similar schools. The department has the capacity to improve now that the long term vacancy for a head of department has been filled. At the end of Key Stage 4 attainment in the GCSE is close to the national average for pupils achieving grades A* to C. Most pupils achieve at least a grade G and only a small minority are not entered for the examination. Attainment in mathematics is average in comparison to other subjects in the school.

77. Progress for all pupils through Key Stage 3 is good. By the end of it, pupils' achievements match the attainment seen in the test results. Average attainers, for example, come to understand Pythagoras' Theorem from their practical work with right angled triangles. They calculate correctly one side of a triangle given the other two. Progress towards National Curriculum higher level 7 is limited by a lack of rigour in the way in which pupils set out their solutions. Low attainers compute correctly areas of rectangles and composite figures, but they have difficulty in the recall of formulae used earlier in the year for the area of a triangle or parallelogram, for example. Pupils with special educational needs use a range of mental recall of multiplication facts in the mental work at the start of lessons, although not all facts are known. They make good attempts at three-dimensional models and have a sound knowledge of the net of a cuboid. Their attainment is below average at National Curriculum level 4. They respond well to the teaching and make satisfactory progress.

78. Progress through Key Stage 4 is satisfactory overall. The current Year 11 began from a lower base than other years, their attainment rising from below the national average at the end of Key Stage 3 to just below the national average now. The targets set by the department are appropriate and somewhat higher than those set by senior management. The higher attainers make good progress and have developed good study skills. They can calculate the gradient of a tangent to a point on a curve, determining acceleration from a velocity time graph, for example. The talented amongst them enter for GCSE statistics as well as GCSE mathematics at the higher level. Average attainers learn graphical skills well from the appropriate use of graphical calculators and have a good understanding of transformations. Low attainers and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress even though the attitudes to work of some pupils are unsatisfactory. They show little enthusiasm for classwork, and homework is seldom completed. These pupils can plot co-ordinate points on a graph and perform substitutions of numbers for letters in simple algebraic relationships. Most are likely to achieve at least a grade G, the exceptions being the regular absentees. Throughout both key stages, pupils' behaviour and overall attitudes are good, resulting in a good ethos for learning in many lessons.

79. Teaching is satisfactory overall and in each key stage. Nearly half the teaching is satisfactory and one tenth is very good. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. The strength of the teaching lies in the commitment of the staff and in the coherent approach to the good planning of lessons. The result is progress which is at least satisfactory and standards which are in line with national averages. Every lesson begins with prepared mental work such as 'countdown'. This whole department approach ensures that every lesson gets off to a good start. The work is an effective challenge to pupils to apply intellectual effort in their learning. It is also responsible for the satisfactory standards of numeracy. The weakness in the teaching lies in its unsatisfactory evaluation and development. This has had the effect of a loss of rigour in the presentation of pupils' work in the solution of problems, and a reduction in the acquisition of mathematical skills. The marking of pupils' work is also inconsistent. In the best practice helpful comments aid pupils' understanding; where practice is unsatisfactory incorrect answers are marked as correct. In some lessons the use of lesson time and the pace of learning is unsatisfactory. This leads to a loss of pupils' concentration and only moderate progress in some lessons. Lesson time is used well when the teaching is very good. The effective use of questions and answers combined with the good use of resources result in significant gains in pupils' understanding in these lessons. The good planning referred to above extends to the end of lessons, which finish on a good note through an effective summary of the aims of the lesson or further mental work. The arranged discussion between pairs of pupils at the end of one lesson emphasised its objectives well.

80. Since the last inspection attainment has improved at the end of Key Stage 4. Teaching has improved slightly. Mental skills have improved, as has the application of mathematics and problem solving. The improvements are reasonable and satisfactory. Management and leadership was not referred to in the last inspection report. The current head of department was appointed 18 months ago, following a long period of temporary arrangements. Leadership is good. The management of changes to the department's practices is satisfactory. The whole departmental approach to lesson planning is a success. Other initiatives are at an early stage of development and need a sharper focus if they are to succeed as well. A three year development plan taking one initiative at a time would enable the department to develop further. Evaluation and development of teaching is a priority.

SCIENCE

81. At the end of Key Stage 3, attainment in National Curriculum tests in 1999 at level 5 was close to the national average. A higher than average proportion of pupils reached level 6 and level 7. The average points score per pupil was better than the national average. On the basis of teacher assessment, which includes assessment of practical skills, attainment was close to the national average. Overall attainment is broadly in line with the average for similar schools. Significant improvement has been maintained over the past three years as a result of helpful schemes of work and better teaching.

82. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils have made good progress in acquiring a wide range of knowledge of life processes, materials and their properties and of physical processes. They can, for instance, compile tables of individual variations, their shoe size, and display these effectively. Most pupils can use word equations to describe simple chemical reactions such as acid-base reaction. A lower attaining group demonstrated a good understanding of simple electrostatic phenomena. Pupils can plan and carry out effective investigations. They have little opportunity to use computers to collect, store, retrieve and present scientific information.

83. At the end of Key Stage 4 pupils attained grades in GCSE dual certificate science broadly in line with the national average, although fewer pupils achieve the highest grades. The attainment of boys and girls is broadly comparable. Although the percentage achieving grades in the range A* to C has remained broadly the same, the number of pupils entered for the double subject has risen markedly and in 1999 nearly all Year 11 pupils were entered and of these nearly all obtained at least a grade G.

84. Towards the end of the key stage pupils have achieved well by acquiring skills and knowledge in all aspects of science. Lower attaining pupils can, for instance, determine the number of atoms in simple chemical compounds from the symbolic chemical formula. Higher attaining pupils can describe the manufacture of fertiliser, and discuss some of the environmental issues resulting from the use of chemical fertilisers. A Year 10 group planned and carried out, carefully and accurately, an investigation into the factors affecting an acid-alkali reaction. Pupils with special education needs make good progress because there are often appropriate, specially developed materials, such as enlarged worksheets for those with visual impairment, and individual support in the laboratory. Although able pupils are identified, they are not set high enough individual targets and so do not reach the highest levels.

85. Overall teaching is satisfactory. There is much good and some very good teaching in both key stages. Teachers use their good knowledge of their subjects to give clear explanations leading to satisfactory achievement by pupils. A Year 10 group made good progress in understanding the composition of inhaled and exhaled air as a result of a well planned demonstration in which they took part. Well planned lessons, based on helpful schemes of work, result in good use being made of the 50 minute lesson periods. Teachers often start a lesson by asking pupils to recall points from the previous lesson, while the roll is called, and this ensures that pupils are quickly switched on to the topic in hand. Teachers make good use of the library and the information and communications technology suite for research projects.

86. The good management of pupils and their responsible behaviour is manifest in the way in which pupils show respect for apparatus and materials. Pupils' interest and enthusiasm contributes to the good progress they make. A Year 8 group were very enthusiastic when preparing presentations to advertise planets of the solar system as holiday resorts. A Year 7 group which had already done the work in primary school was, however, not well behaved.

87. The department, including support staff, is cohesive and well led; teachers have a commitment to raise standards which is already having a positive effect. Since the last inspection, attainment at the end of the both key stages has improved through the adoption of the clear schemes of work introduced by the head of department. These now clearly state what pupils with various levels of attainment should be able to do. The overall quality of marking and comments on pupils' work has improved although there is still some unsatisfactory marking. Further improvements in the quality of teaching and the standards pupils attain would be supported by the setting up of systems for monitoring of all aspects of teaching; setting short term and long term targets for individual pupils and extending the use of information and communications technology particularly in the areas of data collection and modelling.

ART

88. Standards are just above national expectation by the end of Key Stage 3, and above the national average by the end of Key Stage 4. The proportion of GCSE A* to C grades has remained above the national average since the time of the last inspection. Girls achieve higher standards than boys at both key stages but the difference is not as great as that nationally. Overall, the art results compare very favourably with those of other subjects in the school, and departmental analysis indicates good progress through Key Stage 4, especially by lower attaining boys.

89. First hand inspection evidence of work at Key Stage 3 confirms the high standard of learning and achievement. The vast majority of pupils, including those with special educational needs, have a clear understanding of the basic art elements of line, tone, pattern, shape, and form, and are able to use this with a developing awareness of the styles of well-known artists, to produce original, exciting work. Drawing from observation is overall as expected for their age, and covers a wide range of competence; whereas pupils' knowledge of composition and perspective is above that expected by the end of the key stage. Year 8 pupils, having learnt about colour in Year 7, develop colourful abstract compositions from sections of drawings of objects in a glass jar. Their oil-pastel compositions, in the style of the American Expressionists, show good understanding of the use of complementary and supplementary colours. Year 9 pupils use aerial perspective well through a range of media, and are able to identify one- and two-point perspective, in selected photographs and works of significant artists. They also use computer aided design software to demonstrate a good working knowledge of perspective rules.

90. By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is above average. Pupils have good skills in using a wide range of two dimensional art media, and to a lesser extent in three dimensions, through the use of card, plaster and paper sculpture. Through research into the work of important artists, such as Magritte and Lowry, pupils understand different styles, techniques and forms of composition. Year 10 pupils research and document the development of their work in sketch books, before completing large scale finished pieces to set themes, such as 'Illusion' or 'Surrealism'. The work of Year 11 pupils, based on the work of Lowry, combines two and three dimensional work in an imaginative way to make large scale pieces that show good awareness of course aims and objectives. Although good standards have been maintained there has been little development in terms of greater individual initiative, and creative freedom, in exploring themes and processes. However, there is some evidence in improved schemes of work and in pupils' more mature approaches to set themes, that this is changing and that there is a developing improvement and diversity in project work.

91. Teaching is mainly good and never less than satisfactory. Teachers' subject knowledge is used well to stimulate interest and demonstrate the meanings and uses of the art elements. The introduction of Year 7 pupils to the intricate drawing style of Durer, and availability of given sections of natural turf for direct observational drawing resulted in drawings of a high standard which conveyed some of the vivid imagery and technical refinement of Durer's graphic work. Well planned, resourced and very well organized lessons result in very efficient use of lesson time which assists pupils' progress. A good balance of activities provides motivation. Varied strategies in lessons provide effective learning through a good balance of whole class discussion, written and group evaluations and timed target-setting. Minor teaching shortcomings include some lack of rigour in the teaching of observation drawing to Key Stage 4 pupils, and insufficient time or opportunity being given for pupils in question and answer sessions. Project structure, at both key stages, allows insufficiently for individual interpretation. Considerable use of photo-copied diagrams, for example, in colour theory work, is a constraining factor for the creativity of the artistically talented. Topic related homework is regularly set and constructively marked, classroom and corridor displays are informative, and extremely well presented. These celebrate pupils' achievements and provide an attractive and stimulating working environment. Strong working relationships are established between teachers and pupils who trust their teachers and respect their capacity to help them succeed.

92. The department is well led and managed. Team spirit is very positive, and there is a strong commitment to helping all pupils to raise their standards. Staff changes have constrained development since the last inspection. There are good opportunities now, to build on the positive attitudes of the pupils and their obvious enjoyment in creative effort. Priorities for improvement have been rightly identified in the department's development plans to raise standards further, through supporting all pupils in achieving their full potential. Teaching strategies are to be reviewed to develop more individual creativity through independent learning. Development of the use of National Curriculum level descriptors in daily and termly assessment procedures, together with policy development, especially an information and communications technology policy, is also required to guide departmental planning.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

93. In 1999, teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 showed that the pupils' attainment was in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher level 6 is above the national average and girls did better than boys. Attainment in lessons at Key Stage 3 is generally in line with national averages in designing and making and in some practical lessons it is above average. Pupils acquire a satisfactory range of skills in a variety of materials and produce quality items in both food technology and resistant materials. Their designing skills are sometimes less well developed. High attainers often produce good design ideas and pupils of all abilities produce detailed evaluations of their work when supported and guided effectively by their class teachers. Pupils have mastered the skills of shaping, drilling, soldering and attaching of light emitting diodes required to make an electronic badge. Pupils in Year 8 use a wide range of materials and skills to produce a quality balancing toy. In Year 9, pupils' good progress is reflected in the models of electronic cars which have been vacuum formed with aluminium chassis and a mechanism which helps the car to move aided by a computer controlled program. The finish of these items is of high quality and pupils benefit from the high expectations demanded by the class teachers. Skills in food technology are also of a high standard. In Year 7, pupils weigh and measure accurately, prepare a range of vegetables skilfully and produce a scone base for a pizza. Most pupils work confidently, observing safety and hygiene regulations effectively. Presentation skills are good and their evaluations identify areas for improvement. Year 9 pupils have mastered the art of bread making and recognise the important properties of the ingredients being used.

94. Attainment in the 1999 GCSE exams was slightly below national averages, though in food technology, it was in line. Results have gradually improved in the past three years and food technology has improved considerably since the last inspection. Pupils with special educational needs regularly do better in design and technology than in other subjects. Attainment in lessons at Key Stage 4 is in line with the national average standard. Some pupils attain above average standards when their creativity is challenged. Good examples were seen in Year 10 food technology, where pupils were creating dishes to be sold in a cook-chill cabinet in a supermarket. Pupils' attainment is below national averages when they are not sufficiently motivated to meet deadlines or keep up to date with their design folder work. Pupils do benefit from having the opportunities to use a wide range of good quality materials, for example, a Year 11 pupil using oak to make a jewellery box and mahogany to design and make a detailed desk fitment.

95. Pupils are generally keen to learn and are enthusiastic about what they have achieved in both resistant materials and food technology. Pupils with special educational needs are well motivated and show delight in their successful outcomes. Their folder work is often not of good quality but is improved when extra help is given to them. At Key Stage 4, several boys and girls, especially in food technology, are taking great care with the presentation of their work. Several use their information and communications technology skills for word processing and desktop publishing their projects. They also use computers to analyse the nutritive value of dishes. Pupils are keen to support each other and most show respect for the safe use of equipment. Only a few are lacking in motivation to complete projects, and most show initiative and responsibility for their work. Pupils in Year 11 value the after-school facilities and clubs which enable them to complete their coursework. Pupils are articulate about their ideas and are sometimes constructively critical about their outcomes.

96. Teaching at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 is good overall. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, expectations are not high and the higher attainers are under achieving. When teaching is very good, pupils are managed effectively, work is planned to match the different levels of prior attainment, assessment criteria are shared with pupils and areas for improvement are identified. All teachers support pupils' learning well and develop very good relationships. The behavioural modification programme is having a positive effect. Behaviour is managed effectively, without disrupting the continuity of the lessons. Occasionally, the design process is not given as high a priority as is making. Teachers have the necessary data to inform them of pupils' achievements and identify those who are under achieving. Though most staff know pupils' capabilities they do not use this information to set targets for pupils.

97. The curriculum at Key Stage 3 does not include textiles and at Key Stage 4, pupils have a limited option choice of resistant materials or food technology. However, the lack of graphics, textiles and systems and control give all pupils less choice, and the higher attainers in particular less scope to test their skills and knowledge. In Key Stage 3, all pupils have experience in control work, though this is not assessed or recorded against National Curriculum information and communications technology criteria. Control work at Key Stage 4 is currently not included because of the lack of hardware, software and training.

98. Improvements in attainment since the last inspection have been achieved through good leadership as shown, for example, through a consistent approach in planning and inclusion of a wide variety of skills which show progression through the key stages. Improved staffing and resourcing, including more use of information and communications technology, have also had a positive impact. There has been a concerted effort to improve designing, graphical and making skills. Food hygiene is now given a high priority. Behaviour has improved and teachers' management of problems is good. Cultural opportunities have been included in food, but this is an area for development within resistant materials. A revised formal assessment procedure helps teachers to monitor closely progress of all abilities but it is not yet effective in targeting areas for improvement. Technician support is very good and valued but insufficient technician time continues to affect standards adversely. The lack of choice at Key Stage 4 has not been fully addressed since the last inspection.

GEOGRAPHY

99. The end of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum assessments in 1999 indicated that pupils' attainment was below the national average. However, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels of attainment increased from 1998 to 1999. Girls' results were better than those achieved by boys. However, boys have improved their performance steadily during the last three years. Attainment in the General Certificate of Secondary Education at the end of Key Stage 4 was also below the national average and below the average for all comprehensive schools. Results were particularly low in 1998 but there was a considerable improvement in 1999 when boys' results almost reached the level achieved by boys nationally. Girls' results have fluctuated considerably during the last three years. In 1999 their results improved from a very low level the previous year but they were still lower than the boys' results and well below the levels achieved by girls nationally. Results in this subject at the end of Key Stage 4 are lower than for most others in the school.

100. In Key Stage 3, observation of lessons and the analysis of current work indicates that pupils' attainment and achievements are in line with national standards by the end of the key stage. The standards observed in lessons are higher than those reflected in the National Curriculum assessment, indicating that standards are continually rising. There was no noticeable difference observed in performance between boys and girls. Since the last inspection, standards of written work have improved. Higher attaining pupils develop their ideas, make informed decisions then produce a sophisticated written analysis of their findings. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in recording their preferred choice of action with the help of key words and a clear framework for their answers. Pupils acquire knowledge of the physical landscape and can understand the formation and development of specific features. In a very good lesson in Year 7, all pupils located coral reefs from map evidence then wrote accurate descriptions of them using a wide range of vocabulary that had been recorded on the board during an animated class discussion. Year 9 pupils use spreadsheets accurately in order to produce scattergraphs on aspects of development such as energy consumption and life expectancy. However, not all pupils are aware of how such information is to be used in subsequent lessons and so its value is reduced. Pupils can use statistics to create and use a wide variety of maps and diagrams, for example, to show population density and climatic patterns.

101. Most pupils in Key Stage 3 are keen to learn and concentrate well in lessons and this assists their progress. When the work is interesting and absorbing they participate readily, sharing ideas with their teachers and with each other. However, in a small proportion of lessons, poor behaviour by a minority of pupils disrupts the concentration of others and impedes progress. Other factors which influence pupils' progress positively include regular and thorough assessment of work which consolidates pupils' learning. Skilful marking challenges higher attaining pupils. Encouraging comments together with clear deadlines for completion of topics enables pupils with special educational needs to improve their work. However, the practice of relating all work to National Curriculum levels and setting individual targets, shared with pupils, is not yet complete.

102. In Key Stage 4, pupils' current work shows average levels of attainment. Higher attaining pupils in Year 10 understand the fragile nature of tropical ecosystems and the consequences of their exploitation in economically less developed countries. Lower attaining pupils have access to the same concepts through the use of appropriate resources and clear structures that divide the work into manageable elements. Careful planning of the syllabus enables pupils to develop their understanding gradually. Relationships between theoretical patterns of settlement and actual examples of urban growth are well understood in Year 10. The following year, pupils examine the complex patterns produced by aspects of global warming, relating their ideas to the precise nature of examination questions. Pupils are encouraged to be confident in their own opinions on environmental issues. Those with special educational needs are supported particularly well in this activity. Practical skills are emphasised both in the classroom and through fieldwork. Pupils practise and extend their map reading skills by relating their own knowledge of the local environment to maps showing the development of the area over time. They record their own statistics from the study of a local river valley, sometimes using information and communications technology to process and evaluate the data. Most pupils work hard, are committed to their studies and are keen to succeed. However, absence from lessons disrupts the progress of some pupils in Year 11.

103. Teaching is good. In Key Stage 3, nearly three-quarters of the teaching seen was good or better. In fact, one lesson was very good and another excellent. Only one unsatisfactory lesson was observed. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, the inability of the teacher to control some pupils' poor behaviour means that very little is achieved by the whole class. All the teaching seen in Key Stage 4 was at least satisfactory and three-quarters was good. Careful lesson planning, together with the use of a wide range of resources, stimulates pupils' imagination and helps them to acquire new knowledge and skills effectively. For example, in an excellent lesson in Year 9, the use of well-prepared information on possible ways of coping with a major oil spill in local coastal waters caught pupils' imagination and stimulated lively debate. Teachers create a stimulating working environment by the display of maps showing places in the news, and eye-catching topics of current interest. Pupils' knowledge of the world is thus increased and their interest in all aspects of the subject is encouraged. The department is increasing its use of information and communications technology to extend pupils' knowledge and understanding of some parts of the curriculum. The insistence on high standards of behaviour, together with very good management of pupils and the forging of excellent relationships within the classroom, enhances these processes.

104. Through strong but sensitive leadership and good management teachers work well together and have a shared commitment to improve the standards of work throughout the school. Opportunities for professional development are seized, although the monitoring and evaluation of teaching within the department has yet to be put in place. Teachers are keen to extend their expertise in the use and application of information and communications technology. The department is working hard to improve pupils' attainment especially in Key Stage 4. Initiatives such as the geography club for younger pupils and the provision of after-school support are indications of this. Teachers monitor pupils' individual progress carefully, specifically in the completion of their course work. The head of department is keen to improve the performance of girls by ensuring that topics within the syllabus are as attractive to girls as they are to boys. The department has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection and is well placed to continue this process. The extension of fieldwork experiences, particularly in Year 9, would help to stimulate enthusiasm for the subject and give it a wider appeal.

HISTORY

105. The standards being achieved by pupils towards the end of Key Stage 3 are above the national average and significantly better than the results of the end of the 1999 Key Stage 3 National Curriculum assessments which were below the national average. The 1999 National Curriculum assessment results represent an underestimation of pupils' attainment levels. Results at GCSE have improved significantly during the last three years rising to well above average in 1999. The performance of pupils currently in Year 11 indicate that high standards are being maintained even though more pupils, representing a wider range of attainment, are now studying history. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls.

106. Pupils progress and achieve well at both key stages. Their knowledge and understanding is sound and in the case of higher attaining pupils it is good and used increasingly effectively in discussion, making links and in providing descriptions and explanations. Historical skills develop well especially those of investigation, causation, chronology and empathy. Very good use is made of historical sources to gain information. Pupils' skills in the close analysis and judgement of the reliability of sources are also good but more variable. They are very well developed in the case of higher attaining pupils. This was particularly well illustrated in a Year 9 lesson where pupils discussed with confidence the reliability of evidence being used to investigate Hitler's rise to power, and in a Year 10 lesson where pupils argued and studied closely the limitations and reliability of evidence about the events of Bloody Sunday. Discussion is often mature especially in Year 11 and well supported by pupils' well developed speaking and listening skills. Reading skills are also good and very good progress is made in the development of well structured extended writing.

107. Pupils with special educational needs, those with English as a second language, together with higher attaining pupils, all make good progress. Their needs are well known and teaching and materials are well targeted and matched to their learning requirements. The most able relish the challenge and high expectations of most of the teaching. It is only occasionally at Key Stage 3 that their progress is slowed because the work is not sufficiently demanding.

108. The great majority of pupils respond very well to high levels of challenge engaging closely with their work. They concentrate well and work hard in all lessons, even where the work is less demanding. For example, Year 10 pupils sustained their concentration very well during the second half of a long double period when there was little challenge for them in terms of their active participation in learning. Year 7 pupils worked hard and took as much initiative as possible in a lesson which did not encourage their active involvement. Good relationships and behaviour contribute strongly to the positive learning ethos in all lessons.

109. Teaching is of very high quality overall. In the majority of lessons seen during the inspection teaching was very good and often excellent. None was unsatisfactory. Pupils' positive response and good progress are strongly promoted by the teachers' good and skilfully shared subject expertise. Pupils are often inspired to share their teacher's enthusiasm for the subject and the strong emphasis placed upon the development of historical skills enables them to work accurately as historians from Year 7 onwards. It is only in few lessons that progress is slowed by over-control by the teacher and the consequent lack of opportunity for them to work at full stretch. In all lessons progress is very well supported by good lesson planning which provides clear objectives, tasks which are well sequenced and matched to learning requirements and the use of well chosen resources. Learning is also very well supported in all lessons by the skilful management of pupils through high expectations for good behaviour and a brisk pace of work. The development of literacy and numeracy skills is strongly supported by their systematic use in accessing, processing and presenting historical information.

110. The appropriately high expectations and level of challenge in the work in most lessons results in pupils applying good intellectual effort in their work. This was evident, for example, in a Year 8 lesson when pupils were deeply engrossed in their work drawing on their knowledge and understanding and applying their skills in preparation for reporting on the French Revolution, and in Year 11 when pupils initiated discussion demonstrating considerable insight and the ability to think deeply about issues relating to the lives of the North American homesteaders making links across periods and with their own experiences.

111. Where the work is less challenging, pupils' learning is more passive and less demanding intellectually. For instance, over-domination by the teacher results in too little opportunity for pupils to contribute and refine their ideas and knowledge. For example, in a Year 7 lesson and in another in Year 9, over concern by the teacher to control the lesson together with teaching at too superficial a level, reduced the challenge to pupils and led to higher attaining pupils especially not achieving the standards of which they were capable. Similarly insufficient stimulus in a Year 10 lesson for pupils to engage in discussion of issues slowed the rate of progress.

112. At best questioning is used very effectively to challenge and develop pupils' thinking and understanding. On other occasions, while it is used well to test understanding, it is insufficiently probing to challenge pupils to develop and substantiate their replies. Group work is often a strong feature in enabling pupils to challenge and support each other in their learning. It is particularly effective in allowing pupils to work in appropriate depth and the teacher to provide well targeted guidance and tuition. Its use, however, is not consistent across the department.

113. Good levels of concentration and interest are well fostered in the great majority of lessons by a good pace and variety of work. Time is used to the full and pupils' interest is engaged from the outset by brisk and purposeful teaching. At best, excitement and momentum in the learning is sustained by high levels of challenge and well timed activities throughout the lesson.

114. Pupils' interest, involvement and understanding of their work is strongly supported by homework being used effectively to extend work in lessons and to prepare for the next stages of learning. Homework is especially valuable in facilitating the development of research and personal study skills as is the growing emphasis on the use of information technology. The great majority of pupils are keen to do well. Most understand how well they are achieving, especially at Key Stage 4, where they are involved in target setting for attainment at GCSE. Their work is regularly marked throughout both key stages and clear records are kept of their progress though there is some inconsistency in record keeping. Most marking is accompanied by written comments, but these vary in the extent they provide useful guidance for improvement, especially in the case of higher attaining pupils.

115. The head of department inspires his colleagues with his very clear and practically founded vision for the work in history. Their work is very well supported and all work very closely and purposefully together in the pursuit of ever higher but realistically attainable standards. The monitoring of all aspects of the department's work is systematic but in some instances follow-up procedures are insufficiently rigorous especially in terms of addressing weaknesses in teaching. Resources and the accommodation are used exceptionally well to arouse interest, establish high expectations and to provide the best possible conditions for the study of history. Very good improvement has been made in all aspects of the department's work since the last inspection. It now remains for the department to ensure consistency in the quality of teaching.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

116. The Key Stage 3 National Curriculum assessments in the past three years have declined steadily. This is accounted for by the introduction of new information and communications technology rooms, which resulted in less effective monitoring across the curriculum and pupils being taught by non-specialists at a more superficial level. The Key Stage 3 teachers' assessments in 1999 were in line with the national averages. Boys attained slightly better than girls. Standards in lessons reflect this picture of attainment. By the end of Key Stage 3, most pupils have good keyboard skills and can use a variety of applications confidently. Pupils are developing a wider range of skills using a variety of software. Word-processing and desktop publishing skills are used well in English. For example, in English, pupils produce a pamphlet on a subject of the pupils' interest. In mathematics, pupils learn to use databases and spreadsheets. In other curriculum areas, skills in using CD-ROM, for example, in science are developed. In geography, pupils use spreadsheets to collate information on energy uses; use the intranet to produce postcards from Italy which give information about tourism and specific features of cities and explore environmental issues through programmes about the rainforest. In history, databases, desktop publishing and word processing skills are used for research, drafting and simulation work. Art uses CD-ROM for research into the lives and works of well known artists and computer aided designing is used for perspective work. Control work is successfully used in Year 9 in design and technology within the designing and making of electronic cars. In modern foreign languages pupils use language games to enhance their vocabulary and in religious education, pupils have access to their own website.

117. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, results were slightly below the national average. Boys did better than girls. The option group taking the exam in 1999 was not from the two top sets of mathematics. Those in the top sets had the option of taking a GCSE short course in information and communications technology in their own time. There were five entries and four passed, gaining A/B grades. Two dyslexic pupils gained high grades. This was the first year the examinations had been taken. At Key Stage 4, not all pupils take a GCSE course. Progress is good for those taking GCSE courses, but for others their experiences in using information and communications technology in subject areas is not as extensive as in Key Stage 3. Many pupils use information and communications technology to help in research activities for individual project work and word processing and desktop publishing are used extensively in homework and project work in a variety of subjects. Good use is made of the open access to information and communications technology suite of rooms after school.

118. Pupils generally respond positively in lessons. They are mainly attentive and follow instructions carefully. Respect is shown for equipment and they can be trusted to use the facilities independently. Good peer support exists and most pupils show good concentration. Pupils are less excited and less focused when the tasks are less challenging and the pace of the lessons is slower. Pupils with special educational needs are particularly enthusiastic about their information and communications technology achievements.

119. Teaching is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4. The capability of the teaching staff is improving steadily with the help of in-house training and good lesson support. Teachers in several curriculum areas are fully competent and confident and now take subject specific information and communications technology lessons without support. Shared lessons do help pupils to resolve any difficulties quickly and most make good progress. Teachers' knowledge is generally good and most plan thoroughly and have high expectations. However, the quality and use of day to day assessment is less effective except in English. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported in lessons by the class teacher and support teachers and they generally make good progress, especially at Key Stage 4. Gifted pupils make very good progress, especially when given the opportunity to use a wide range of software.

120. Information and communications technology is a great asset within the Dyslexic Resource Unit and learning support unit. All teachers have competent expertise and use a variety of software and hardware to support pupils' learning. Statemented pupils, where appropriate, have their own laptops, or access to one, for use in lessons. Pupils can use spellcheckers and dictation equipment to aid their learning. 'Success Maker' is used effectively and skills in word processing and desktop publishing are benefiting pupils' understanding and presentation of work. The special educational needs co-ordinator has developed a website for the intranet on helping children to read with the aim that eventually, parents will be able to access the programs at home. All the special educational needs teachers are committed to helping pupils to progress through planning and using appropriate information and communications technology for their pupils.

122. Most departments do plan within their schemes of work for the delivery of information and communications technology and planning is done carefully with the help of the information and communications technology co-ordinator. However, the monitoring of delivery across some areas of the curriculum is not carefully audited for the National Curriculum information and communications technology coverage or when and where it is used. The tasks covered during the information and communications technology lessons are, in the main, effective in teaching skills and knowledge within the subject area.

122. The previous inspection identified that statutory requirements were not met for all pupils at Key Stage 3 in measurement and control. Though this requirement is met at Key Stage 3, pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to use data-logging software at Key Stage 4. Developments are being made in both areas to introduce new equipment, software and training in the near future. Since the last inspection many improvements have been made. GCSE information and communications technology courses have been introduced at Key Stage 4 to a growing number of pupils. The development of literacy and numeracy skills has been assisted by the use of spellchecker in word processing work, and graphical presentations when using spreadsheets. The facilities and software have improved and grown considerably.

123. Pupils' progress in information and communications technology is not formally monitored. The departments do not, as yet, contribute to pupils' information and communications technology assessment formally, though currently, the English department is trialling a good system which links National Curriculum information and communications technology skills with the English National Curriculum requirements. There is no specific target setting designed to raise pupils' levels of attainment. These developments are an important next step in raising pupils' attainment further.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

124. In 1997, attainment in the Key Stage 3 teacher assessments was very good but fell considerably in 1998, following staffing problems. In 1999 there was an improvement but the level is still below the national average. There are indications that standards will continue to rise in the year 2000. In Key Stage 4, results have followed the same pattern. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A* to C was significantly above the national average in 1997. The following year the proportion almost halved. In addition to staffing problems, the entry policy was changed so that a much higher proportion of the cohort took the GCSE examinations. In 1999, there was a rise in the proportion of higher grades, to close to national averages. The actual number of pupils who obtained higher grades was greater than in 1997, an indication that standards are close to those previously obtained. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A* to G is now higher than the national average. Boys perform worse than girls, but the difference is no greater than it is nationally.

125. Work seen during the inspection confirms the picture given by the examination results, and in some cases it is better. Listening and speaking skills are generally good. Year 7 pupils can describe each other's personality using the correct form of both the verb and the adjective. Exceptionally good was the performance of a group of average attaining Year 9 pupils who were able to describe a holiday in the past tense, containing a number of elements. They spoke fluently and correctly. This skill is insufficiently well developed in Key Stage 4 where the emphasis is still on vocabulary and short utterances, rather than on making complex and extended sentences. Some higher-attaining pupils in Year 11, dealing with a topic on the environment, were able, using pictures as prompts, to identify an ecological problem, suggest its cause and suggest what steps should be taken to overcome it. Lower achieving pupils learnt vocabulary, understood French spoken clearly, and made simple utterances on the same topic. Much depended on the enthusiasm and expectations of the teacher. Good listening skills were observed in a Year 10 class where pupils had to listen to a tape, with different voices speaking at normal speed, and distinguish five sets of accommodation requirements. Reading is less well developed, as a result of few opportunities to read continuous passages of French below Year 10. In Key Stage 3, writing is limited to copying and illustrating vocabulary, and to writing short sentences to reinforce grammatical patterns, with only a few opportunities to write a short passage on, for instance, the home or the family. In Key Stage 4, vocabulary and grammar and comprehension exercises dominate, although there are some opportunities to write at length on coursework topics, such as the environment and travel, and to redraft using a word processor. The standard of some of this writing is very good.

126. The majority of pupils come to French lessons keen to learn, particularly in Key Stage 3. They are absorbed when the material is interesting, the task challenging and the teacher enthusiastic. When the task is uninteresting or too difficult and expectations are low pupils become restless, and at times disruptive, particularly when class control is weak.

127. Overall, teaching is unsatisfactory. A quarter of the lessons seen were good or very good, nearly a half were satisfactory but more than a quarter were unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, the teaching has many strengths. Almost all teachers use French as the means of communication in the classroom. To aid communication and to avoid the need to speak English, teachers make very good use of flash-cards and the overhead projector. Expectations are high, as in the Year 10 lesson on hotel booking in which pupils had to read and understand five hotel brochures in order to be able to match the requirements of different visitors. Teachers use high quality materials which they have prepared co-operatively and which catch the interest of their pupils. The materials produced on the themes of 'Tourism' and 'The Environment' were particularly good. Teachers work at a good pace and provide activities for pupils from the moment they enter. They are aware that pupils have different needs and provide additional or alternative tasks. Unsatisfactory teaching is characterised by insufficient and inconsistent use of French, low expectations, unclear explanations, a failure to involve the whole class and poor classroom management. A Year 8 class, shared between two teachers, made much better progress with the teacher who insisted that they respond to French and who set a demanding pace, than with the teacher who spoke virtually no French and who had low expectations and poor class control.

128. Curriculum arrangements for modern foreign languages are unsatisfactory. The minimum recommended time is allocated throughout. In Year 9, however, some groups have their allocation reduced from three to two periods and yet others have only one. The result of this arrangement is to make it impossible for the affected pupils to take French in Year 10. Other pupils in Key Stage 3 are withdrawn from French to work with the Dyslexia Resource Unit or the special educational needs team, with the result that they have difficulty in keeping up with the rest of the class. The arrangements for the second foreign language are also unsatisfactory. There is a taster course in Spanish for some pupils in the spring term of Year 9 but, unsurprisingly, it is inadequate for attracting sufficient numbers to make a course viable in Year 10.

129. The French course itself is broad balanced and relevant and the materials produced by the department are very good. Information and communications technology is being integrated into the course and pupils use the new facilities every week with materials that parallel the course. The department runs a very lively French club attended by more than 30 pupils every week. In addition, pupils take part in visits to France which reinforce their social skills and enhance their cultural experience. The department is well led and the head of department provides a positive vision for modern foreign languages in the school. Teamwork is good and there is effective monitoring of the work of the department.

130. Although books are marked regularly, there is little in the way of analysis and helpful comment; nor is the marking related to National Curriculum levels. There is, however, a good system of recording standardised assessments which enables the department to predict the eventual grades of pupils and set demanding but attainable individual targets.

131. The department has passed through a difficult period but standards are again rising. There are obvious strengths to be built on and consideration should also be given to assessment and its use in planning and to the development of reading and writing and higher order oral skills.

MUSIC

132. No National Curriculum assessments were available for scrutiny but standards observed in music were in line with national expectations at the end of Key Stage 3. GCSE examination results in 1999 were in line with the national average and first hand inspection evidence confirmed this level of attainment. This marks an improvement since the last inspection, when standards in Key Stage 4 were below the national average. The pupils' achievement is satisfactory overall in Key Stage 3, with good achievement in the higher ability Year 9 class. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Pupils used classroom percussion and keyboard instruments competently to create a range of effects in their practical composing and performing. Most pupils understand the basic principles of traditional notation. Where achievement is good, pupils use orchestral instruments skilfully in their classroom work. They listen with care to other performers in their groups and produce thoughtful, sensitive compositions. In one Year 9 composing session inspired by "Scott of the Antarctic" a trumpeter played a fragment of "The Last Post" at the end of his group's piece, evoking the poignancy of the story most effectively. Singing is less than satisfactory in class as a result of the songs being mostly inappropriate and too few pupils participating. In Key Stage 4 achievement is good overall, with some very good achievement in Year 10. Instrumental skills are well developed and used expressively in performance. In very good lessons the composing is of high quality; the pupils' pieces show a thorough understanding of harmonic and structural elements, are imaginative and are accurately notated.

133. The pupils' response to music lessons is good overall in both key stages. They are enthusiastic and behaviour is generally good; unsatisfactory behaviour was observed in only one lesson, and this was from a minority. When working independently, in groups or alone, pupils sustain concentration and listen to each other's ideas. The support that they give each other is a particularly positive feature of their learning. Relationships with teachers are constructive and cordial.

134. In both key stages the quality of teaching is good overall. As a consequence of good planning objectives are appropriate and achievable. Lessons are mainly practical and contain a good balance of individual, group and whole-class work. Because work is clearly introduced and set in context pupils understand the purpose of the tasks and know what is expected of them. While practical work is in progress the teachers give thoughtful advice which helps to move pupils of all abilities forward. In one good Year 8 lesson pupils were challenged by a succession of tasks of increasing difficulty and met the challenges with excitement and enjoyment. The teaching of singing is unsatisfactory; the practice of encouraging pupils to sing with CDs produces singing of poor quality. The unsatisfactory behaviour of a minority of pupils in one Year 8 class was not met with sufficient firmness to minimize disruption. In Key Stage 4, the assignments and teaching are carefully matched to pupils' capabilities so that they can all experience a sense of achievement. Assessment procedures ensure that pupils are presented with clear targets for improvement.

135. The instrumental teaching is well organised and of good quality. Because tuition is paid for by the school, access remains open and unencumbered by charging systems. Extra-curricular activities include a school band and smaller groups and ensembles. Productions are well supported by the school; the recent Christmas concert was highly successful.

136. The newly appointed head of department has a clear vision for the subject's development within the school and is articulate about her aims and aspirations. Expertise gained in MA study brings benefits to the department. Satisfactory progress has been made since the last inspection. Documentation is carefully maintained and regularly up-dated. The department should now consider how it can build on its strengths to achieve a greater breadth and variety in its teaching styles and more consistency in quality. The formation of closer links with other schools would provide staff with opportunities to observe a broader range of music teaching techniques.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

137. Teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 indicate that the proportion of 14 year olds achieving at or beyond national expectations is just below the national proportion with boys attaining better results than girls. In lessons, the majority of 14 year olds attain national age-related expectations. There are no significant differences between boys and girls. Both boys and girls have a secure grasp of the skills and techniques required for playing a range of invasion games such as basketball and netball. In other activities, girls, for example, understand the principles and procedures for orienteering. Using the school grounds they take bearings to plot their own course using ten or more control points. Boys meanwhile understand factors such as body tension and clarity of shape and the influences these have on the quality of their movement over boxes. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of the need for appropriate warm-up specific to the activity to be undertaken is inconsistent across the key stage.

138. There is no teacher assessment data at the end of Key Stage 4 in 1999 for the course that all pupils follow. In lessons, the majority of 16 year olds attain the age-related expectations with a significant number achieving beyond. Higher individual skill levels and the knowledge and understanding of those pupils following the GCSE physical education course are having a positive impact on standards in the course that all pupils follow. Pupils have a good understanding of the need for appropriate warm-up before physical activity and in invasion games, such as basketball, they use strategies and different tactics for defence in competitive play. They then adapt these to the strengths of the opposing team by, for example, choosing between zone and one-to-one defence tactics. Most pupils have a secure grasp of the rules of the game. In one practical lesson, in the course that all pupils follow, a pupil with physical and co-ordination needs was making good progress with the help of a learning support assistant. In other lessons no pupils identified as having special educational needs were observed to have additional help. However, they are well supported and integrated into lessons and make progress in line with their capabilities. In a Year 9 gymnastics lesson the more talented performers, for example, were catered for by the way the teacher organised the class and deployed his support staff. This enabled them to make the progress expected of them.

139. In 1999, the proportion of pupils achieving A* to C grade passes was above the national average. In terms of points score they were not significantly different. Although this represents an overall improvement since the previous inspection there is no consistent pattern of improvement from year to year. Meaningful gender comparisons are not possible because of the small number of girls who take the course. The target for A* to C grade passes was well exceeded in 1999 and an even lower target grade for 2000 suggests the department is not setting sufficiently high expectations. In their GCSE theory lessons the majority of pupils are making sound progress in developing their knowledge and understanding of, for example, human physiology as a result of, in some groups, well structured and focused teaching. As a result of appropriate in-class support, pupils with specific learning difficulties make good progress in relation to the demands of the syllabus requirements. In their practical lessons, for example, badminton, the majority of Year 11 pupils are achieving the higher syllabus assessment levels required to achieve higher grades in the final examination.

140. Most pupils arrive on time, change quickly and are keen to start their lessons. They work well together in pairs and small groups and are supportive of one another. They also show respect for the capabilities of one another. Pupils' positive attitudes and good standards of behaviour, together with their response to the teachers' consistent high expectations in this respect, mean that the atmosphere in lessons is positive thus enabling secure learning to take place. This was also the case at the time of the previous inspection. Many pupils are keen, enthusiastic and support the provision of extra-curricular activities both before and after school. Indicative of this, for example, was a mixed age and gender group of 18 pupils who arrived one morning at 07.40 to play tchoukball.

141. The overall quality of teaching is sound. It is never less than satisfactory and in 40 per cent of lessons the quality of teaching is good. The quality since the previous inspection has improved, in so far as there is now no unsatisfactory teaching or learning. The overall planning and structure of lessons is indicative of teachers' good knowledge and understanding of the games and activities being taught. All lessons have a clear structure and focus and aims are shared with pupils at the start. This ensures that pupils are aware of what is expected of them. There are, however, insufficient opportunities in some lessons for pupils to take responsibility for aspects of their own warm-up. The tasks and level of challenge set in lessons are well matched to the range of physical capabilities of pupils and thus all are able to make progress. The pace of this progress is, though, somewhat slow in the long double periods for younger pupils. In a Year 9 netball lesson, for example, pupils spent rather more time than they should have on pair work feint and dodge drills in the middle part of the lesson. In the good quality lessons, skills are clearly demonstrated and broken down, and pupils are made further aware of what is expected of them and what they have to do in order to make progress. In a Year 10 trampoline lesson, for example, this was done effectively when teaching the techniques required for swivel hips.

142. Where for example in a Year 11 basketball lesson, they were responsible for choosing defence tactics, they all gained a greater insight into what they were doing and were challenged to develop a deeper understanding of the activity being taught. A group of Year 7 pupils were also making progress in this respect by being involved in pair work evaluation of short sequences, including the use of levels using small apparatus.

143. Effective questioning by teachers in lessons not only allows them to establish the extent of pupils' knowledge and understanding, but also encourages their speaking and listening skills as well as their correct use of appropriate terminology. This is reinforced by the effective and informative displays in and around the department that also include key words.

144. All teachers successfully convey the expectation that all can have success in practical lessons thus boosting confidence and motivation. Non-participants, though, are not always as fully involved as they should be. Sometimes they are not part of whole group introductions, demonstrations or whole group summative sessions. This means they are not fully prepared for participation in the next lesson. Teachers circulate well in lessons offering effective and timely intervention thus ensuring pupils are making progress and understand further what is expected of them. Adept use of praise, encouragement and constructive criticism ensures pupils become aware of their capabilities. Sometimes, at the end of lessons, evaluative opportunities tend to be created mostly by the teacher comments and directed questions as opposed to pupils being asked to explain their perceptions of what they have learned.

145. Appropriate homework is set and marked for those pupils following the GCSE course. However, there is inconsistency in the quality of marking of both homework and class work. Not all pupils are being made aware of the progress they are making or of what they need to do to improve.

146. The curriculum is broad and balanced but in Year 11 there remains a lack of clarity as to the two activities to be studied in depth. The provision of the option to study GCSE physical education at Key Stage 4 contributes further to the breadth of pupils' learning experiences. A very good range of extra-curricular activities further enhances the learning experiences of pupils. These include recreational activity as well as inter-school competitive fixtures. The continuing dedication of staff, some of whom are from other departments, is as strong as at the previous inspection and as a result of this individual pupils have gained representative honours at area and county level in athletics, cross-country, football and rugby. The problem of drainage on the field means that it cannot be used effectively for much of the time throughout the school year. This is having a negative impact on curricular provision, particularly of traditional winter teams games as well as summer games and activities. It is difficult, therefore, to raise further present standards of attainment in these areas of the curriculum.

147. Since the previous inspection the head of department has successfully integrated three new teachers into the department, two of whom have less than one year's experience. At the same time overall standards in the course that all follow have been maintained and the proportion of pupils achieving A* to C grade passes at GCSE has improved over time. The issue of curriculum breadth and balance has been addressed across the key stages and the department is well prepared for the forthcoming changes in the physical education curriculum and change in assessment procedures in September. The problem as to the quality of marking of GCSE theory work remains. There are still inconsistencies. In some instances comments about missing work are simply not followed up and the lack of formative comments for some groups means pupils are not being made aware of what they need to do to improve the quality of their work.

148. Although the priority for the department has to be preparation for the new curriculum and assessment levels to be introduced in September, there are other areas for improvement. There is, at present, no formal programme of evaluation and development of teaching to ensure the sharing of consistent good practice within the department and thus raise standards of attainment further. A lack of flexibility in the choice of activity during the long double periods means that in some lessons the pace for younger pupils is often somewhat slow and pupils are thus not making the amount of progress they would in shorter lessons. Reports to parents are somewhat bland and lack informed comments as to pupils' attainments and the progress they make. However, the introduction of new assessment levels should enable the department to produce reports that are clear and informative to all concerned.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

149. Pupils reach levels expected by the Hampshire Agreed Syllabus at the end of Key Stage 3. They have very good knowledge and understanding, particularly of Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism. They understand special beliefs, for example, about God and the after life. Pupils appreciate some of the rich ways in which different believers express their faith, through prayer, worship and festival. They reflect on religious questions and have insight into different beliefs.

150. At Key Stage 4, numbers taking the optional full course GCSE are too small for valid statistical comparison. However, in 1999, almost all achieved Grade A* to C. In 1999, attainment for the certificate course was in line with course expectations and shows similar levels for the current Year 11. Last September, the majority of pupils in Year 10 began a short course GCSE. Here, pupils have good understanding of Christian and Buddhist beliefs and teachings. Higher ability pupils apply these in depth to questions such as abortion and develop skills to evaluate different standpoints, as well as explaining and justifying their own views.

151. At both key stages, most pupils, including the more able and those with special educational needs, achieve well. Very good curriculum and lesson planning, together with rigorous assessment, all support this good achievement. Pupils build rapidly on prior learning, extending particularly well their understanding of different religions, specialist language and common features of religion. Many pupils show interest, and take initiative and pride in their work. Year 7 pupils, for instance, worked very productively in groups researching special aspects of Jewish beliefs. Pupils at both key stages achieve especially well in lessons where they are provoked to ask curious questions or make links for themselves. For instance, able pupils in Year 10 initiated the thinking about practical implications for life at work, raised for Muslims living in Britain, by Muslim prayer rituals. However, there is occasional under achievement for pupils of all abilities in isolated lessons at Key Stage 3, where behaviour management is not fully satisfactory in large mixed ability classes. Nevertheless, the vast majority of pupils make good progress, largely because of the intellectual rigour provided by the teaching, which is especially effective in insisting that pupils think about underlying meaning behind religious ideas and expression.

152. Overall, the teaching is good. Much is very good or excellent in successfully promoting effective learning. At best, the teaching consistently challenges all abilities to think and respond. Planning is a major strength. It is particularly effective in providing sequenced activities, which clearly succeed in moving pupils of all abilities on in their understanding. Although methods planned are sometimes routine, lessons are highly structured, with briskly paced activities, which succeed in stimulating pupils' interest. At best, very good subject expertise is then used to probe pupils' understanding by clearly focused questions, as in a Year 8 class where pupils of different abilities were challenged to refine their ideas about reasons why Christians worship, with the more able expressing insight into denominational differences. In a small minority of lessons where learning is more teacher-led and questions are less searching, lower ability pupils do not reach such clear levels of understanding. Relationships are mostly very good, so that in almost all lessons there is a highly positive learning atmosphere. Assessment practice is consistently very good. Work is marked clearly, with praise and much useful guidance for further improvement. Regular assessment tasks have been very well devised to give pupils of all abilities effective opportunity to show their understanding and develop their skills. In these ways, all know that their efforts are valued and high achievement is encouraged. Homework is also used well to extend and support pupils' learning.

153. Since the last inspection, provision has improved with the introduction of the GCSE short course. This course supports higher standards of attainment and achievement. Departmental leadership and management is very good. The result is shared commitment to high standards. There is on-going review of teaching, assessment and learning activities but not full systems of formal monitoring of the work of the department. This is an area for improvement. The subject makes a very good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils gain positive attitudes of respect for different faiths and an understanding of how religion affects life.