

## INSPECTION REPORT

**THE CEDARS UPPER SCHOOL AND  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire

LEA area: Bedfordshire

Unique reference number: 109650

Headteacher: Mr John Mitchell

Reporting inspector: Mrs Val Lynch  
1475

Dates of inspection: 4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> December 2000

Inspection number: 188448

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 13 -18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Mentmore Road  
Leighton Buzzard  
Bedfordshire

Postcode: LU7 7PA

Telephone number: 01525 219300

Fax number: 01525 850864

Appropriate authority: Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr David Lawrence

Date of previous inspection: 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
V Lynch (1475)	Registered inspector	Special Educational Needs	What sort of school is it?
			How high are standards?
			How well is the school led and managed?
H Barter (9052)	Lay inspector		How high are standards?
			How well does the school care for its pupils and students?
			How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
A Nicholl (2473)	Team inspector	Design & Technology	
J Costello (7655)	Team inspector	Mathematics	
J Glennon (21971)	Team inspector	English	
A Fraser (10561)	Team inspector	Science	
K Smalley (3960)	Team inspector	Geography	How well are pupils and students taught?
D Nicholl	Team inspector	Modern Foreign Languages	
S Jones	Team inspector	Music	How good are curricular and other opportunities?
J Laver	Team inspector	History	
J Sheffield	Team inspector	Art	
D Wasp	Team inspector	Religious Education	
		Equal Opportunities	
M McGregor	Team inspector	Information Technology	
D Gutmann	Team inspector	Sixth form and GNVQs	
Barry Simmons	Team inspector	Physical Education	

The inspection contractor was:

TWA Inspections Ltd  
 5 Lakeside  
 Werrington  
 Peterborough PE4 6QZ

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 Alexandra House, 33 Kingsway  
 London WC2B 6SE

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

The Cedars School is one of two upper schools serving the area in and around Leighton Buzzard. It is a community comprehensive school that provides education for pupils and students from 13 to 18. It attracts up to 20 per cent of its pupils from the neighbouring local education authority. It is larger than other secondary schools and has grown slightly over the last five years. More parents want to send their children to the school than there are places available.

The school has a small percentage of minority ethnic pupils and pupils with English as an additional language. There is a similar number of boys and girls in each year. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is 2.5 per cent, which is well below the national average for secondary schools.

The attainment of pupils when they join the school is above the national average.

Twenty-four pupils, 1.8 per cent of the school population, have a statement of special educational needs. This is below the national average. A further 16.6 per cent of pupils is on the special educational needs register making a total of 18.4 per cent. This is nearly double the figure for 1997, but is in line with the national average.

The school is seeking specialist college status for modern foreign languages with its partner schools.

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

The school is, as at the time of the previous inspection, a very good school. GCSE results are well above the national average and teaching is very good. There is very good strategic leadership from the headteacher and the senior management team. The school provides very good value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- Attainment in GCSE exams and in GNVQ courses is well above average.
- Teaching is very good.
- Pupils and students have very good attitudes to school.
- There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities, particularly in music, drama and PE.
- All pupils and students are cared for and welcomed regardless of their difficulties.
- The experiences offered to students in the sixth form are very good.
- The headteacher and governors have a shared view of the school as a learning community.

#### **What could be improved**

- Attainment in English in Key Stage 3.
- Consistency in the teaching and development of literacy skills.
- The use of assessment information available on pupils.
- The opportunities for pupils to use information and communication technology in Key Stage 4.
- The involvement of all staff in the school's approach to improvement.
- Provision for a daily act of collective worship.

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

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION**

Overall, test and examination results are very similar to those at the previous inspection, despite there having been an increase in the number of pupils joining the school who have special educational needs. There has been satisfactory progress on all the key issues from the previous report. Processes have been introduced in order to monitor and evaluate the work of the school but there has been very little systematic observation of teaching. There have been changes in the senior team, which now works in a spirit of collaboration. Heads of department are held accountable for assessing the progress of their department. There have been improvements in the management of information and communication technology. There has been very good progress in ensuring greater consistency in examination results in the sixth form and in the school's provision for religious education.

## STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
Key Stage 3	A	B	B	D
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	B
A-levels/AS-levels	C	B	C	

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

Results in the national tests taken by pupils when they are 14 have been consistently above the national average with the exception of English in 2000. However, these test results are below those in similar schools and have been in decline until this year. In Key Stage 4, the school compares well with schools nationally and similar schools. Results in all subjects were significantly better than the national average with the exception of systems and control within design and technology, German and Spanish. Over the last five years the percentage of pupils gaining five or more passes at grades A\*-C in GCSE examinations has been consistently well above the national average. Results vary year on year and because of these variations the improvement in results over the last five years has been below the trend in improvement nationally. The results in 2000 for students in the sixth form were broadly in line with the national average for students taking the equivalent of two or more A-levels. GNVQ results are also above the national average.

Standards of work seen in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 are broadly in line with or better than expected in most subjects. Standards in German and Spanish are lower in Key Stage 3 because pupils have only just begun to study these languages. Standards of work seen in Spanish in Key Stage 4 were unsatisfactory. In the sixth form standards of work in nearly all subjects are good.

The school set and achieved its targets set for 2000. Targets for 2001 are set at a lower level than in 2000. Both are realistic but are not sufficiently challenging. Targets for 2002 are more challenging.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good: pupils and students clearly enjoy coming to school and have very positive attitudes towards their learning.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good: pupils and students behave well in lessons, at lunchtimes and around the school. The school is harmonious and orderly.
Personal development and relationships	Good: pupils show good levels of initiative and personal responsibility. All have very good relationships with one another. Students in the sixth form set a very good example to younger pupils.
Attendance	Good: above the national average with little unauthorised absence.

Standards of behaviour and the relationships that pupils have with each other and with adults in the school are very good. The attitudes, behaviour and personal development of students in the sixth form are particularly strong features of the school. The role models set by these students make a very positive contribution to the harmonious environment and to the positive working atmosphere that pervades the school. Pupils' attendance is still above the national average and there is a low incidence of unauthorised absence. This means that pupils have every chance of succeeding in their examinations.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

Since the previous inspection teaching has improved and is now very good overall. Teaching is good or better in over four-fifths of lessons and very good or better in four lessons in ten. It is only very rarely less than satisfactory. Teaching is a strength of the school. Teaching in English is good in all years. Teaching in mathematics is good overall, very good in the sixth form and also very good with able pupils throughout the school. Teaching in science is good, with a number of very good lessons.

Teachers have high levels of subject knowledge. They plan their lessons carefully and provide challenging activities. They have high expectations. Homework is used effectively to build on what has been learnt in lessons. Classroom management is very good. Teachers encourage independence as pupils move through the school. Because of this very good teaching pupils learn very effectively and make good progress. Within this overall very good picture, the teaching of the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology are less well developed. There is insufficient feedback to pupils about their progress. Pupils with special educational needs make better progress when supported by learning assistants. Some teaching lacks variety and is insufficiently matched to the needs of pupils.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good: the learning opportunities the school provides at all key stages are good. The statutory requirements for information and communication technology in Years 10 and 11 are not fully met.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory: pupils and students often have good support in lessons. The foundation studies programme is not planned sufficiently well to meet the specific needs of all pupils on the course.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Satisfactory: The school does all it can to make sure that pupils have the full range of experiences and receive appropriate support.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good provision for moral and social development. Good provision for cultural development and satisfactory provision for spiritual development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good support for their welfare, personal development, behaviour and attendance. More use could be made of assessment data by providing opportunities for all pupils to set and review academic targets.

The school's links with parents are effective and result in parents giving good support to the work of the school and to their children's learning. Extra-curricular activities in music, drama and physical education particularly are very good. In Year 9, arrangements for modern foreign languages are particularly good because pupils have a choice from two second languages. The school cares very well for all its pupils and students because it successfully creates a welcoming, well-supervised and orderly community in which pupils are encouraged to learn and to get on with one another.



## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good: the governors, the headteacher and the senior team provide very appropriate strategic leadership and vision. Management at all levels is good.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The work of the governing body is very good. They are appropriately involved at a strategic level and take matters such as looking at performance data and setting targets very seriously.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory: there is a wealth of data and information available to identify how much the school contributes to pupils' and students' attainment in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. What is lacking is accurate information on pupils' attainment when they join the school so that challenging targets can be set and the school improve still further.
The strategic use of resources	Good: financial planning and monitoring at all levels ensure that resources are used to achieve the school's priorities.

There is a strong commitment from the headteacher to ensuring that the school's approach to monitoring and evaluation is one that will sustain long-term school improvement. However, there are not enough links with middle managers to ensure that all departments systematically use activities, such as lesson observation, to develop an informed judgement about their work.

There is a good match of teachers and support staff to the needs of the curriculum. This is a key feature in the successful teaching and learning within the school. The standard of accommodation is very good and provides a very pleasant learning environment.

The governors and the senior management team have a very good understanding of best value principles and apply them in many areas of their work.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school has high expectations for its pupils and students.</li> <li>• Teaching is good.</li> <li>• Pupils and students make good progress.</li> <li>• Behaviour is good.</li> <li>• The school is well managed and led.</li> <li>• The school is approachable when there are problems or questions to be asked.</li> <li>• Pupils and students are helped to become mature and responsible.</li> <li>• Pupils and students like school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The information provided to them about pupils' and students' progress.</li> <li>• The range of activities outside lessons.</li> </ul>

The inspection team fully supports parents' positive views of the school and agrees that pupils and students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching and high expectations for their work and behaviour. The school has effective links with parents and seeks to resolve any problems that may occur. Parents are provided with good information about the work of the school through its documentation and the school website. The inspection team agrees with parents that pupils' annual reports do not always give sufficient information about pupils' levels of attainment based on the assessment data that is available to teachers. These reports do not clearly identify what pupils need to do next in each subject in order to make improvement, so that parents can support their child's learning at home. Inspectors do not agree, however, that extra-curricular activities need to be improved and judge, overall, that the range and quality are very good.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

- 1 Results in examinations are better at age 16 and the sixth form than they are in tests at the age of 14 years. This is because pupils have only been in the school two terms when they take the tests and teachers therefore look to three years ahead and set their targets for good results in GCSE examinations. This they achieve.
- 2 Results in the national tests taken by pupils when they are 14 have been consistently above the national average with the exception of English in 2000 when the percentage of pupils gaining Levels 5 and 6 fell to below the national average. In contrast, results in 2000 in maths and science were well above the national average and were an improvement on those in 1999. In mathematics, the percentage of pupils gaining Level 5 or higher, the level expected for pupils at the age of 14, showed substantial improvement. In both science and mathematics, there was a marked increase in the percentage of pupils gaining the higher Level 6+ and in both subjects this percentage was well above the national average.
- 3 Although these results in 2000 in mathematics and science show an improvement on those in 1999, the overall average points score was very slightly less than in 1999. Between 1997 and 1999, whilst results have been above the national average, in all the three core subjects they were declining. Results in English have been falling since 1997. The trend in improvement in the core subjects is below the national trend.
- 4 These results at age 14 can be compared with schools nationally that have a similar percentage of free school meals. This comparison shows that overall the test results were well below similar schools. The percentage of pupils gaining Levels 5+ and 6+ in mathematics was broadly in line with similar schools. In science, the percentage was well below at both levels and in English it was very low. During the inspection although work in English was not as good as in science and mathematics the difference was not as great as the national data suggests.
- 5 The inspection team thinks that the comparison with similar schools should be described as below rather than well below. This is because there is bound to be some regression in pupils' work when they transfer from their middle schools, recognised nationally when transfer takes place at age 11 years. The quality of work seen during the inspection was in line with what would be expected in similar schools. Teacher assessments in 2000 in art, design technology, geography, music and physical education are above the national average. In history, modern foreign languages and information technology they are well above. The inspection team therefore think that the very low grades for English and science, which affect the overall grade for comparisons with similar schools at the end of Key Stage 3, do not reflect accurately the quality of the work of the school.
- 6 Because pupils join the school at the start of Year 9 there is no nationally recognised information on their levels of attainment other than results from tests taken at the end of Year 6. Reading ages tested at the end of Year 8 show that just over half the pupils in the current Year 9 have reading ages above their chronological age. The school has little assessment information, other than teacher assessments from the middle schools, to establish pupils' attainment levels when they join the school. It is

therefore not possible for the inspection team, nor the school, to make accurate judgements about pupils' progress in Key Stage 3.

- 7 The picture is different in Key Stage 4 where the school compares well with schools nationally and similar schools. The percentage of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A\*-C and five or more grades A\*-G was well above the national average. In 2000 the average points score<sup>1</sup> was well above the national figure, despite a lower percentage of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A\*-C than in 1999. This indicates that the performance of lower and average attaining pupils was at least maintained. In 2000, GCSE results in English, mathematics and science were all well above the national average. Results in all other subjects were significantly better than the national average with the exception of systems and control within design and technology and Spanish, which were below the national average. Results in German were in line with the national average.
- 8 When the school's results are compared with similar schools they are doing well. The average points score is above that in similar schools and the percentages gaining five or more A\*-C and five or more A\*-G are broadly in line with the figures for similar schools. In the core subjects, results in English are above, in mathematics they are in line and in science they are below results in similar schools.
- 9 Over the last five years the percentage of pupils gaining five or more passes at grades A\*-C in GCSE examinations has been consistently well above the national average. Results in 2000 were not as good as in 1999, but were still better than in 1997 and 1998. Results vary year on year and because of these variations the improvement in results over the last five years has been below the trend in improvement nationally.
- 10 The results in 2000 for students in the sixth form were broadly in line with the national average for students taking the equivalent of two or more A-levels. GNVQ results are also above the national average. Many students take the examination for general studies in Year 12 and if these results were included the average points score would be higher. The school ensures that all students who wish to take their A-level examinations do so and are paid for by the school. This means that less successful candidates who in other schools might be asked to pay privately to secure their entry are included in the school's figures.
- 11 By the age of 14 girls do better than boys in English whereas boys do better than girls in mathematics and science. The gap between boys and girls is narrower than the gap nationally. In GCSE examinations, girls also do better than boys and again the differences are less than the differences nationally. This is because boys are doing much better than boys nationally. Girls generally have done better than boys over recent years. Boys do particularly well in modern foreign languages.
- 12 Pupils with special educational needs do well and many gain GCSE accreditation. A few pupils who are designated as having English as an additional language are in fact bi-lingual and do well, as do the very small number of minority ethnic pupils, keeping up with and achieving as well as their peers. Two pupils who are genuinely pupils with English as an additional language were hardly in school during the inspection so it is not possible to comment on the standards they achieve.

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<sup>1</sup> The average points score provides schools with a single statistic to compare the overall grades attained by their pupils with the grades attained by pupils in another school.

- 13 Standards of literacy across the curriculum are good. Oral skills are particularly good. When given the opportunity students respond well to questioning, volunteer information and perform well in discussions. Year 13 history students showed good debating skills. However, in some subjects such as mathematics teachers do not place enough demands on pupils to respond other than through giving explanations. In all subjects, pupils listen well to teachers and listen with respect to the views of their peers. Standards of reading are good and often very good, thus helping learning. Pupils who experience difficulty with reading can read texts in lessons when they are helped by learning support assistants. Teachers generally, however, do not make sufficient adjustments to texts to help these pupils. Teachers in mathematics are an exception, carefully tailoring their demands to the pupils' abilities. In many subjects, pupils are not given enough opportunity to write at any length. When opportunity is given, as in geography, history and religious education, their standards are very good. There is no literacy policy either for the school as a whole or for individual departments. Consequently, in many subjects, teachers do not give enough importance to standards of literacy. There is insufficient work done to build on experiences of pupils in the partner middle schools. This is a significant contributory factor to the poor results in English at the end of Key Stage 3 and to the slower than expected progress of pupils with literacy difficulties.
- 14 Standards of numeracy across the curriculum are much in line with the broader standards in mathematics within the school and are good. The use of purely numerical skills in non-mathematics subjects is good. There is considerable and successful emphasis placed upon correct use of appropriate mathematical language. The use of measurement ideas and skills, mainly developed in mathematics lessons, is well and successfully used in a range of subjects, such as design technology, science and food technology. Statistical skills are very heavily and successfully used in geography, science and some sixth form subjects like economics. Whilst the majority of subjects have yet to undertake a numeracy needs analysis, the one done for geography is a model on which to build.
- 15 Standards in information and communication technology show great variation across the school with competency often being more a product of individual use of a computer at home. The taught course in Year 9 ensures that all pupils can use a range of software and are given a common range of experiences and skills. Pupils in Key Stage 4 studying GCSE information and communication technology, along with those studying business-based courses, receive regular teaching and application of skills and this results in good standards. Pupils are given regular opportunities within mathematics, for example, to apply and develop their use of spreadsheets and there are opportunities within design and technology and science. In Key Stage 4, lack of regular access to computers to develop and support work in other areas disadvantages many pupils and they make limited progress. In the sixth form, all students develop appropriate knowledge and understanding to support their work in other subjects.
- 16 Standards of work seen in Key Stage 3 in English, art, music, information technology and religious education are satisfactory and in all other subjects they are good. There was no unsatisfactory work in any subject, although standards in German and Spanish are lower because pupils have only just begun to study these languages. The achievements of pupils in lessons were judged to be satisfactory in nearly all lessons and were often good or very good. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory and sometimes good progress in lessons when they have the help of a learning support assistant.

- 17 In Key Stage 4, standards of work seen were very good in science and geography and were good in all other subjects. Standards of work seen in Spanish were unsatisfactory. Achievement in lessons in Key Stage 4 was always satisfactory and often good or very good as in Key Stage 3. In 2000, and on the basis of what pupils achieved at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1997, the progress that pupils made was well above the progress made in schools with similar Key Stage 3 results. Pupils with special educational needs do well because of the support provided to them in lessons.
- 18 In both key stages, a small proportion of lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs who are on the foundation course do not make sufficient progress in their basic literacy skills. This is because that element of the foundation course is not well planned, teaching is not as up-to-date as it might be and there is not enough use of computer-based learning programmes.
- 19 In the sixth form, standards of work in history and geography are satisfactory and in all other subjects standards are good. In all subjects, students are making good progress and in information technology they are making very good progress. The school collects and analyses data and knows that all pupils make at least satisfactory and often good progress based on the predictions made from their GCSE results. In some subjects, such as advanced level GNVQ business and intermediate level engineering, the rate of progress is often above expectations. Progress in the new key skills course is encouraging.
- 20 The school recognises that it does have some very able pupils and makes good provision for these pupils in lessons. It has not, however, identified pupils who might be gifted or talented. Departments recognise the talented pupils in their subjects as the higher ability pupils, but the school does not identify pupils who might be gifted because they are exceptionally able in all areas of the curriculum.
- 21 The school set and achieved the targets set for 2000. The targets for 2001 are set at a lower level than those in 2000, although those for 2002 are set at a more appropriate level. The school now has detailed information on individual pupils on which to base these overall targets. There are improvements that can be made in the teaching of literacy skills and in monitoring pupils' progress. There is no reason why, with these improvements, more challenging targets should not be set.

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

- 22 The previous report made very positive comments about pupils' attitudes to school life and to their learning and this continues to be the case. The standards of behaviour and the relationships that pupils have with each other and with adults in the school are very good. The attitudes, behaviour and personal development of students in the sixth form are particularly strong features of the school. The role models set by the students make a very positive contribution to the harmonious environment and positive working atmosphere that pervades the school. Pupils' attendance is still above the national average and there is a low incidence of unauthorised absence. As a result, pupils' learning does not suffer from any significant disruption.
- 23 In the questionnaires completed before the inspection, nearly all parents agreed that the standard of behaviour in the school is good and that their children are helped to become mature and responsible. At the meeting with the registered inspector, parents felt that overall behaviour was very good even though a very small number of pupils sometimes spoil this perception of the school in the local community. Parents

report that pupils have good attendance levels and that it is rare for pupils to be seen out of school during the day. Most parents say that their children like coming to school. The inspection confirmed these very positive views.

- 24 Pupils and students enjoy school and their lessons. Their enthusiasm and interest in learning means that they make very good progress. They are well motivated to learn, play a full part in their lessons and concentrate very well on tasks set for them. In many lessons there is an industrious atmosphere where pupils and students work hard either independently or in groups. They are keen to talk about their work and to discuss it with their teachers and peers. They participate fully in discussions and listen carefully to instructions and questions. In a Year 9 English lesson, for example, the teacher's reading of a text captivated pupils. Their willingness to respond and their ready contributions to the ensuing discussion led to high quality learning. Overall, pupils' and students' interest and attention in nearly all lessons are very good. The very isolated instances of inattention occurred as a result of some unsatisfactory teaching when pupils did not settle and produced little work. In other lessons, a few pupils, particularly in Year 9, need occasional reminders to stay on task and not to talk when the teacher is talking.
- 25 Pupils' and students' behaviour is very good. They understand, accept and respond very well to the school's code of conduct and are fully aware of the standards expected of them. Almost no unruly behaviour was seen either in class or around the school site. The behaviour of pupils in their social areas was typical of their ability to get on with each other and behave sensibly in a busy, crowded environment. They are friendly and courteous and very helpful when teachers or visitors ask for their assistance. There is very little evidence of graffiti or large quantities of litter around the school and pupils treat the school environment with respect. The school encourages very good levels of independence and responsibility and as a result pupils and students behave sensibly when using the library, computers and art areas outside lesson time. Apart from some inappropriate behaviour seen in one lesson, there are few incidents of aggressive, sexist or racist behaviour or bullying. In discussion with pupils during the inspection, they said that they feel safe in school and that although there is sometimes some tension between individuals, there is no physical bullying.
- 26 This year there have been three permanent exclusions and 36 pupils having fixed-term exclusions. Although this is an increase on the previous inspection, the school has recognised the slight change in its pupil population and has already put in place very good measures to support pupils who are at risk of being excluded.
- 27 Pupils' and students' personal development is good. Teachers are very good role models in their relationships with pupils and, as a result, pupils get on very well with each other. There is a very good atmosphere around the school, which ensures that all pupils feel part of the community. They help each other in lessons, share materials, discuss each other's work and listen carefully to the views of others. There is particular strength in the way pupils and students work together when studying modern foreign languages, for example, when taking part in role-play. In an English lesson, Year 11 pupils used their initiative well when organising an improvisation. This is an improvement since the last inspection when many pupils were said to be passive with limited opportunities for choice in how to approach a task.
- 28 In some subjects, pupils are developing a good understanding of what they need to do to improve and to achieve better grades in their examinations. Through assessment and discussion with individual teachers, some pupils are developing an

understanding of their strengths and areas for development. However, because this feature is underdeveloped and inconsistent across the school, most pupils are only making satisfactory progress in developing an understanding of their own learning. Pupils and students are developing good study and organisational skills, take responsibility and are preparing themselves well for the move to higher education or work. They make a good contribution to the organisation of the school through membership of the year group councils and the school council. They welcome the opportunity to help others and to take part in charity fundraising such as the recent 'Help Week' event.

- 29 Students in the sixth form are mature and confident young people. They value the opportunity to work to support Year 9 tutor groups and to develop the younger year group councils. They say that this work helps younger pupils to settle into school and develops positive and supportive relationships across the age range. They are active participants in many areas of school life; for example, working in teams for drama productions, running charity events and leading the school council. Some students develop their interest in citizenship through participation in the Bedfordshire Youth Forum and recently two members of the school have been elected to represent Bedfordshire on the Youth Parliament.
- 30 During the inspection, pupils and students were very keen to give their views on school life. They are particularly appreciative of the improvements that have been made to the accommodation and facilities since the last inspection. They say that the school has high expectations of them and treats them as adults. They feel that they learn well particularly when teachers help them to learn independently rather than being passive listeners in the lesson. They say that the school motivates them to do well and that they would recommend it.

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

- 31 Teaching has improved since the previous inspection. Teaching is good or better in over eight lessons in every ten and very good or better in over four lessons in ten. Teaching is a major strength of the school and leads directly to high levels of attainment. During the inspection only four unsatisfactory lessons were observed. In the sixth form teaching is very good or excellent.
- 32 Teachers have a high level of knowledge of the subject they teach and this enables them to provide an appropriate intellectual stimulus for pupils and students. In many language lessons, for example, pupils learn to use the language well because their teachers use it throughout their lessons. In science, high calibre teachers who love their subject inspire pupils to very high levels of attainment particularly in Year 11.
- 33 There is good long-term planning and effective schemes of work in all subjects that ensure pupils make very good progress in their learning. Individual lessons have clear objectives, often shared with the pupils and students at the start of a lesson, so that they know exactly what they have to do, how the different parts of the lesson build up and what they are going to learn. Carefully planned activities ensure that difficult topics are presented so that pupils can understand them. In a Year 11 lesson, lower-attaining GNVQ pupils used a computer programme to understand relative frequency and to predict probabilities. This prompted pupils to use subject-specific vocabulary and to acquire skills, knowledge and understanding. Purposeful summaries at the end of lessons identify and re-enforce the learning that has taken place.

- 34 Lively and stimulating approaches that capture pupils' interest and make them want to learn are a feature of many lessons. Pupils respond by showing interest and concentration. In some subjects, high quality discussion helps pupils to understand difficult concepts. In religious education, the concept of free will and the nature of a God in permitting evil and suffering. There is also good use of time and resources so that pupils work productively.
- 35 Teachers use methods that enable pupils to learn effectively, including selective use of video and investigative work. Teachers' crisp questioning initiates lively discussion and allows sixth form students to make confident and clear statements about complex issues. In a French lesson, the teacher discussed key vocabulary with the class and then divided students into groups to debate the arguments for and against immigration, all in French. In a GNVQ advanced business lesson, following a visit to a sales department in a local company, students used role-play to consolidate their knowledge and understanding. In all these and other very good and excellent lessons there was a variety of activities provided, with a speedy transition between them. Pupils and students are interested in their work. They acquire knowledge and skills very effectively, make very good intellectual and creative efforts, concentrate well, work very hard and have a good understanding of their progress in lessons.
- 36 In most lessons teachers have high expectations of pupils and challenge them to improve. In many lessons the quality of teachers' questions stimulates learning. In a Year 11 maths lesson about sequences, pupils worked at pace, learning how number sequences develop and how to express the  $n$ th number as a formula. The teacher showed a good level of subject knowledge and so had high expectations both of the work and behaviour. Pupils responded to the challenge with much interest and thought. In a Year 10 lesson on the school's indoor climbing wall, the teacher showed a high level of expertise in demonstration and ensured pupils worked safely and supported each other. Pupils gained in confidence and showed much physical effort and left with a good sense of achievement.
- 37 Homework is well used to support and extend pupils' understanding of work begun in class. In art, for example, good use is made of homework for pupils to practice their skills and develop their ideas
- 38 Classroom management is very good. Teachers ensure that high standards of behaviour and attention are maintained. In a Year 10 personal, social and religious education lesson, two teachers debated whether drugs should be legalised and then involved their combined classes by challenging them to present their arguments. Skilful teachers ensured a large group was effectively managed. Teachers know their pupils very well, relationships are friendly and teachers offer good support to individuals.
- 39 Many teachers encourage pupils to work with increasing independence as they move through the school and they provide good opportunities for pupils to show their capability in coursework. In English, the teacher's love of language and willingness to let pupils show initiative helped pupils reach a very high standard of analysis of a Victorian poem about Romney Marsh. In the best science lessons, teachers help pupils take responsibility for their work. In the sixth form, students are generally treated as adults and trusted to be responsible for organising their own learning and volunteering ideas. However, in weaker lessons in the sixth form, teachers exert too tight a control and teach in a didactic way, not allowing all students to respond fully. Some students then lack confidence and are reluctant to contribute to debate that is based on closed rather than open questioning. Some teaching in the sixth form



misses opportunities to challenge students' misconceptions and explore critical issues to develop evaluative skills.

- 40 Within this overall picture of very good teaching there are some elements that are not as good. Marking of pupils work is regular and other day-to-day and periodic assessments give useful information about what has been learnt to both the teacher and pupils. However, teachers do not give enough feedback to pupils about their attainment and the progress they are making in a subject. This is particularly the case in Year 9. As a result pupils' own knowledge of their learning is limited.
- 41 Whilst some teaching contributes to the development of pupils' basic skills of literacy, numeracy and the use of computers, there is no whole-school approach that would ensure that all opportunities are used. Whilst teachers give good attention to the development of pupils' vocabulary through the use of word lists and glossaries, they give less attention to the development of pupils' writing capability, particularly the writing of the lower prior attainers. In many subjects, teachers do not sufficiently help pupils to develop these skills. In some subjects, pupils develop their listening and speaking skills, but not all teachers provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to learn through discussion and so help them to articulate their thoughts. Strategies for teaching literacy skills are good in religious education and very good in English.
- 42 Strategies for teaching numeracy skills are satisfactory and there is good practice to build on in geography, information and communication technology and mathematics. In some subjects, teachers show sound awareness of the help pupils need with numeracy skills. There are examples of good liaison between subject teachers and teachers of mathematics as to when and how certain number ideas and techniques should be taught. However, the teaching of numeracy across the curriculum is not sufficiently developed because not all departments have identified how they can contribute to the development of these skills.
- 43 There are examples of pupils using computers in their work across the curriculum, but overall teachers provide insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop these skills. The level of challenge in some work using computers at Key Stage 3 means that the most able consolidate their skills but are not always sufficiently stretched. Across the curriculum teachers in Key Stage 4 do not offer pupils enough opportunities to use computer skills in their learning at an appropriate level of challenge.
- 44 Pupils with special educational needs are sometimes placed in specific teaching groups so that learning support assistants can effectively support a number of pupils in a lesson. These pupils make good progress because learning support assistants are unobtrusive and help a number of pupils to understand what is required of them. They ensure that pupils do the work by asking them questions rather than giving them answers. In lessons where there is no support, teachers help pupils in the lesson, but in many cases they are given the same work as their peers. In these lessons, they make only satisfactory progress because teachers are not providing activities and materials to match their needs.
- 45 One of the main elements of the provision for pupils with special educational needs is the foundation studies programme where teaching is of variable quality. The teaching of modern foreign language within this course is very good because there are high expectations and a determination that pupils will use the target language as far as they are able. Pupils respond to this, are prepared to be involved and to use the language. Teachers use a variety of tasks that pupils enjoy and make language learning fun. One-to-one support for pupils with literacy difficulties is satisfactory,

although teachers do not use the range of individual learning schemes now available using computers. Teaching in the literacy element of the foundation studies programme is sometimes unsatisfactory because pupils have a wide range of abilities and lesson planning takes no account of these. Pupils, therefore, do not make the intellectual effort needed to improve their basic skills. Where they are required to bring coursework to these lessons few do this and so time is wasted while they wait for some work to be set.

- 46 Although teaching is very good there are still some examples of lessons where there was a lack of variety in teaching method. The school's teaching and learning working group is encouraging the use of a broader range of teaching and learning strategies by helping teachers to provide for different styles of learning. Particular examples where work was not sufficiently matched to the learning needs of pupils were seen in some lessons in English, information and communication technology, science, history, geography, and music. In some mixed-ability groups, planning, activities and resources do not cater well for individual needs. As a result the pupils with low levels of attainment sometimes make less progress in the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills.
- 47 Within the overall picture of good and very good teaching there were occasional lessons observed which showed important shortcomings. The features that were evident in these lessons were poor planning and unsuitable teaching methods. In these lessons few worked productively and there was poor behaviour and little concentration.

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

- 48 The quality and range of learning opportunities the school provides at all key stages are good, but the statutory requirements for information and communication technology in Years 10 and 11 are not fully met. In Year 9 arrangements for modern foreign languages are particularly good because pupils have a choice from two second languages. Pupils may take an internally designed foundation studies course as an alternative to a second language.
- 49 In Years 10 and 11 the curriculum is generally good and meets the needs of a wide range of pupils. In addition to the legally required subjects, pupils can choose four additional GCSE courses. Some pupils take a course in building construction that leads to the award of an Institute of Carpenters Pre-vocational Certificate. Eleven Year 11 pupils have an alternative vocational programme, following lessons in school on two days, which can lead to success at GCSE and work placements for the other three days. The course in foundation studies enables pupils with special educational needs to receive extra literacy lessons and to achieve a nationally recognised Certificate of Achievement in a modern foreign language. The provision of taught information and communication technology courses is good, but a large proportion of pupils are not receiving their entitlement because of their lack of experiences in using computers in other subjects.
- 50 The sixth form curriculum is broad and balanced with a good range of A-level and AS-level courses and GNVQs covering over 20 subjects. Students who have less than 4 GCSE passes at grade C when they come into the sixth form, take intermediate GNVQ courses in engineering or health and social care, and can progress on to advanced courses. The choices offered to students have increased with the new sixth form curriculum where students can build up the number of points required by universities through a flexible range of one and two year courses

supplemented by a key skills and general studies programme. Students following GNVQ courses go on work experience as part of their course. At intermediate level this is a one-day-a-week placement, which has proved very effective at linking students' learning with the needs of industry. Students participate in other activities including supporting younger pupils in school, raising funds for charity and organising social events. The Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, sixth form quizzes and competitions broaden their social experiences. Tutor time and general studies are used to deliver aspects of the personal, social and religious studies programme. This has been extended this year by the opportunity for students to use their communications key skills presentations to debate issues of concern such as asylum seekers and the issue of the Siamese twins. Statutory requirements for religious education that were not in place at the time of the previous inspection are now met.

- 51 Pupils with special educational needs have access to a full curriculum. Elements of the foundation course provide good learning opportunities for pupils in modern foreign languages. However, the rationale for participation in the course is not clear. More able pupils who only do one language and pupils who find other subjects difficult change the nature of the group and the course, as currently structured, does not necessarily meet their needs. The introduction of a national youth award scheme in Year 11 is helpful as it is designed to meet a wider range of needs. The school does not have a literacy policy and because of this there is no clear understanding of how this course will improve literacy skills and build on the literacy work in partner middle schools.
- 52 Provision for extra-curricular activities is very good. There is an extensive range of activities and experiences, especially within music, drama, physical education, modern foreign languages, art, science and mathematics. There is a very wide range of music activities at lunchtime and after school, such as choir, jazz band, percussion ensemble, and strings sinfonia. There are many performance opportunities for pupils throughout the school year, which involve a large number of pupils. The physical education department provides a very wide range of activities that are well supported. There are exchange visits to France, Germany and Spain and the art department arranges visits to galleries, museums and field trips to Wales. Other lunchtime activities include computer club, study groups in science and help sessions in mathematics, supported by a team of 5 or 6 teachers. Many pupils in Years 10 and 11 are working towards the bronze award of the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. Pupils also make very good use of the school library before and after school as well as during break and lunch times.
- 53 The school demonstrates a very strong commitment to providing equality of opportunity and access with an emphasis on social inclusion, both in policy and in practice. Elements of the school inclusion policy include open access to the sixth form and the recent provision of a pastoral support tutor for those pupils most seriously at risk of exclusion. Public examination results are monitored closely in terms of gender. There are a small number of pupils with minority ethnic backgrounds and their needs are met fully. The anti-bullying policy has been revised recently and includes a strong statement on dealing with racist incidents.
- 54 The provision for personal, social and health education is good. The programme covers bullying, drugs education, sex education, marriage and relationships. Very effective teaching of the drugs education programme was observed in Year 10 lessons. Provision for careers education is good and includes work experience for all Year 11 pupils. Pupils have access to an extensive careers library and some useful careers computer software. An external careers guidance company provides careers interviews and guidance for pupils and students who need help. There are

opportunities for pupils to visit careers conventions and higher education establishments.

- 55 There are good links with the community. The school has excellent relationships with the police and strong links with the local sports club. There are good business links through Bedfordshire Education Business Partnership and over 40 businesses were involved in the Education and Industrial Understanding induction day for Year 9 pupils. Concerts are held in the local church at Christmas. Sixth form students have been trained to support and supervise wheelchair users who participate in community sports events.
- 56 Relationships with partner schools and colleges are good. A number of departments have good links with local middle schools, but these are not sufficiently focused on the issues that will improve learning across the key stage, for example attainment in English and literacy. The school has an e-mail link with the other local upper school for work on information and communications technology in Year 9. The school also has effective links with Chiltern Training Group for initial teacher training.
- 57 Provision for the spiritual development of pupils is satisfactory. The school has made efforts to address the issue highlighted in the previous report concerning the need for a clearer approach to this issue. There is now a more consistent approach to assemblies and collective worship and planning is co-ordinated by a staff working group. A particularly effective and moving assembly was seen during the inspection in which two sixth form students recounted their experiences of a visit to Auschwitz. Their presentation had a visible effect on the sixth form audience. Elsewhere, opportunities for spiritual development are more limited. Form tutor times, for example, are mainly used for social and administrative purposes and the school stills fails to comply fully with the requirements for a daily act of collective worship. Within the curriculum, the personal, social and religious education programme makes a very strong contribution to the spiritual dimension of the school with a focus on personal reflection and full discussion of spiritual issues. Other opportunities are provided in drama, where groups have been involved recently in a religion and arts initiative, in geography, English and in information and communication technology.
- 58 The school makes very good provision for the moral development of pupils. There is an effective system of rewards and commendations with an annual awards ceremony to celebrate achievements over the year. The concept of the school as a moral community is stressed in documentation and in practice, and there are firm but fair disciplinary procedures that help pupils to distinguish right from wrong. There are numerous initiatives to sustain the moral development of pupils and students, such as the Raleigh expeditions, an Amnesty International group, the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme and World Challenge. Through this latter initiative, a group of students will be going to South Africa this year to help refurbish a school. Sixth form students provide excellent role models for younger pupils through their involvement in the 'buddy system' in Year 9, and through their organisation of an annual charity 'Help Week', which recently raised nearly £6,000. The moral development of pupils is also sustained well in subject areas, notably in personal, social and religious education, where a very interesting and informative debate took place in Year 10 on the issue of drugs legalisation. Moral development is also sustained in physical education, art and design, modern foreign languages, history, English and science.
- 59 The provision for social development is also very good. The year and school council system encourages pupils and students to take responsibility. A very effective meeting of the school council was observed during the inspection in which a wide range of issues was discussed by a very mature and committed group of year

representatives. Sixth form students are involved in a number of activities within the local community and are proving themselves to be fine ambassadors for the school in initiatives such as the Mencap Youth summer camp and the local youth forum and parliament. There are numerous lunchtime and after-school activities to enhance the social development of pupils and students and, in addition, many pupils are involved in community work with senior citizens through music and drama. Relationships between teachers and pupils are a strength in the school and there is a palpable sense of community both in lessons and during break and lunch times. Within the curriculum, there are many opportunities for social development and for pupils to take personal responsibility. There is an emphasis on group work and pupil participation in many subjects, notably in personal, social and religious education, GNVQ subjects, physical education, art and design, English and drama, where there is a strong emphasis on teamwork.

- 60 The cultural development of pupils is good. There is a commendable programme of visits, exchanges and other extra-curricular activities to enrich the knowledge and experiences of pupils and students. As well as having exchanges with French, German and Spanish schools, the school has also recently played host to a group of Swedish students. Cultural awareness is also fostered through various clubs and activities, such as sports clubs, art clubs and music and drama productions. Cultural development is fostered in art and design, English, drama, music, modern foreign languages and science. There are also opportunities for pupils to celebrate the cultural diversity of British society and that of the wider world in personal, social and religious education and in English. This area of cultural development, however, is not so strong in other subject areas.
- 61 Overall, the school has maintained and built well on the achievements noted in the previous report and there is an impressive sense of shared purpose throughout the school community.

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

- 62 The school cares very well for all its pupils and students because it successfully creates a welcoming, well-supervised and orderly community in which pupils are encouraged to learn and to get on with one another.
- 63 Arrangements for pupils' and students' well-being are very good and there are good procedures to support pupils' personal development, including their behaviour and attendance. The school has good procedures to assess pupils' attainment and progress. However, across the departments there is inconsistent use of the data available to monitor and support pupils' academic progress and to involve pupils themselves in setting and working towards targets for improvement. There is better use of data to monitor and support students in the sixth form than there is in Years 10 and 11, which in turn is better than what is done on entry and in Year 9. Although staff know pupils well and have very good relationships with them, the quality of educational and personal support and guidance provided is weakened because there are insufficient opportunities for pupils and tutors to regularly discuss academic progress. This is particularly important in Year 9. Not only do pupils have to manage a change in school, they are also re-grouped in mathematics and science after a period of time and have to come to terms with yet another change in teachers and pupils with whom they are working.
- 64 The school has very good procedures for child protection and ensuring the care and welfare of all groups of pupils, including those who are in care. There are clear procedures in place for the systematic monitoring of health and safety requirements.

The health and safety concerns raised at the last inspection relating to the temporary accommodation no longer exist. There are very good arrangements for the care and support of pupils who are taken ill at school, including very good first aid facilities, knowledgeable staff and carefully maintained accident records.

- 65 The school has systematic procedures for monitoring attendance, effective support from the education welfare service and good arrangements to promote regular attendance, punctuality and good behaviour. The behaviour policy is well understood and conscientiously and consistently applied by all staff. A very important aspect of the provision is the example set by adults and by students in the sixth form. There is a strong emphasis upon the promotion of self-discipline and personal and social responsibility. There are good procedures for dealing with anti-social behaviour and any bullying, should it arise. Sixth form students give good support to younger pupils through supporting tutor groups. They are going to train as peer counsellors so that they can help pupils who are having difficulty in school, for example, with bullying.
- 66 The school has been very pro-active in supporting all pupils, whatever their difficulties, to continue their education, including into the sixth form. The recent appointment of a pastoral support teacher has already been very effective in supporting those pupils who are at risk of being excluded or for whom full-time school education is no longer relevant. Liaison with outside agencies and support for parents of these pupils has resulted in some pupils being successfully re-integrated into school life. The pastoral support teacher is also working to further reduce the school's level of unauthorised absence. There is good use of meetings of relevant staff to establish agreed support and to ensure effective liaison, where necessary, with outside agencies. The school makes good use of its links with the school nursing service, counsellors and the police. Pupils and students receive good support and advice on careers and further education through the careers library staff and when working through the careers education elements of the personal and social education curriculum.
- 67 The school has good procedures for monitoring and promoting pupils' personal development, having re-evaluated these since the last inspection. Where pupils are identified as giving cause for concern, appropriate guidance is given either in terms of personal or academic support. There has also been evaluation of the award of commendations and certificates to ensure that these are given increased importance within school and with parents. Personal, social and religious education lessons provide very good guidance on dealing with revision and examination stress. The school's participation in the Healthy Schools' Initiative is helping pupils to lead healthy and safe lives both at school and in the community. Records of achievement are used satisfactorily to record examination results, achievements and participation in extra-curricular and community activities.
- 68 Since the last inspection, the school has developed a good whole-school system for recording pupils' attainment from the time that they enter the school in Year 9 through to the end of their education after GCSE examinations or in the sixth form. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 8 and data on attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 are used as a starting point for recording pupils' attainment. Test results at the end of Year 9, teachers' predicted grades in Years 10 and 11 with actual results at GCSE and in the sixth form are added to this record. However, there has not been enough moderation of end of Year 8 teachers' assessments with the middle schools to develop confidence in the data that is used in Year 9.
- 69 All assessment data has recently been made accessible to departments through the school's computer network. However, not all departments make full use of this data.

Although most subject departments, apart from information and communication technology and music, have assessment systems in place, there is no overall co-ordination of practice to ensure that assessment is used well in all departments to actively involve all pupils in their own improvement. Although there are sound assessment systems in geography and modern foreign languages, some subjects do not make enough use of National Curriculum criteria and levels and estimated grades to set targets for individual pupils. The school uses the data available from assessment to highlight groups of pupils who are in need of additional support or who are at risk of under-achieving in specific subjects. Insufficient use is made of the data overall to ensure that all pupils are making the most progress possible.

- 70 The progress of pupils with special educational needs in reading and spelling is monitored carefully. Termly reviews of the individual education plans for pupils on Stage 3 or above of the special educational needs register are done on the basis of evidence collected from all their teachers. A similar process operates to support the annual reviews of pupils with statements. Because teachers know pupils well and the special educational needs team and the pastoral team have good communications with colleagues, pupils' personal development is monitored well and information communicated effectively.
- 71 Teachers discuss academic progress informally with pupils in separate subjects. Their tutors provide educational and personal support and guidance. Daily tutor periods are very short and are often used for registration and some organisational activities. During the inspection, two Year 11 groups in a tutorial period attended a workshop on learning styles to support their revision. Although the content was very good, there was too little time for it to be discussed and for it to be helpful to the pupils. Annual one-to-one interviews between pupils and tutors enable pupils to refocus their learning and try to make improvements in the following year. The interviews are usually of a general nature and focus more on personal and social development rather than improving their attainment. There are too few opportunities for pupils to meet regularly with their tutors to discuss their overall academic progress and to review their targets for improving the standard of their work.
- 72 While pupils are encouraged to complete self-assessments in some subjects to identify what they have done well and to target areas for improvement, the effectiveness of this process depends greatly upon whether subject specific targets have been set. The lack of targets and identified levels of attainment in pupils' reports means that pupils and parents are not always clear about what pupils need to do to improve.

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

- 73 Since the last inspection, the school has maintained its good partnership with parents. The links with parents are effective and result in parents giving good support to the work of the school and to their children's learning at school and at home.
- 74 In the questionnaires and at the pre-inspection meeting, parents expressed very positive views about the school. They are pleased with what the school provides and how well their children achieve at all levels. Nearly all parents feel that teaching is good, that their children make good progress and that the school has high expectations for their children's work and behaviour. At the meeting parents said that the school treats them well and listens to their points of view. However, in the questionnaires, some parents felt that the school did not work closely with them.

They think that there are good written and oral communications, monthly newsletters and good arrangements for meetings. Twenty per cent of parents who responded to the questionnaire think that they are not well informed about their children's academic progress. Some parents are critical about reports that have more information about areas such as behaviour and homework than they do about academic progress and areas for development.

- 75 The school works continuously to maintain good relationships with parents and to encourage parental involvement in their children's education. There are regular communications through the attractively presented and detailed monthly newsletter and staff are always available when parents have concerns. The prospectus and separate booklets for GCSE options and sixth form studies are comprehensive and well produced, although the prospectus does not give parents the current attendance figures for the school. The governing body's annual report to parents is also helpful and informative. However, there is no indication of when there will next be an election for parent governors.
- 76 Parents are pleased with the support and guidance offered to their children. Some parents report that tutors know their children well and make good contact with them when there are problems. Parents of pupils who are new to the school in Year 9 receive a very helpful booklet that makes clear how the curriculum is organised, what pupils need to bring to school and requirements for homework. This booklet is a useful addition to the information that parents receive on induction visits to the school. Parents say that meetings held for induction, to discuss GCSE options and sixth form choices are good and are well attended. The school has a very good website that keeps parents well informed about the school's organisation, activities and developments.
- 77 Nearly all parents report that they are comfortable approaching the school if they have any questions or problems. Although most parents feel that they are well informed about their child's progress, particularly at consultation meetings and in individual discussions with teachers, some are critical of the quality of pupils' annual reports. The school has reviewed its reporting and is phasing out the use of computerised statements. However, reports now focus largely on tick boxes, which assess areas of pupils' personal development such as behaviour and attitudes, and the written commentary on a pupil's strengths and weaknesses in each subject is brief. While some comments are made about areas for improvement in some subjects, parents are given insufficient information overall about pupils' actual levels of attainment, based on the assessment data available. In addition, there are no clearly identified targets in each subject that would inform parents about what their child needs to do to improve and to help them support this improvement at home. Inspectors agree with those parents who feel that they are not receiving sufficient written information about their child's progress in their interim and annual reports. This is in contrast to the previous report where it was said that a survey of parents had revealed a high satisfaction rate with the content of reports.
- 78 Parents make good contributions to their children's learning at home and school and this is actively encouraged in the home-school agreement. Homework arrangements promote parents' participation in their children's education. Each pupil has a handbook which clearly sets out expectations for homework and which many parents regularly sign, indicating that they are monitoring their children's work. The school offers parents many opportunities to support school events such as concerts, work displays and sports matches. It has set up a parent register to encourage parents to give their expertise in events such as 'mock' career interviews and talks, extra-curricular sports activities and induction events for Year 9. The school gains



considerable financial benefit from fundraising and social events organised by The Cedars School Association and past pupils from the Old Cedarians group. The school is keen to involve parents in its development and seeks their views when making changes to policy – such as the behaviour policy – or when introducing new practice such as the home-school agreement.

## **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

- 79 The governors, the headteacher and the senior team provide very good strategic leadership and vision. There is a good match of teachers and support staff to the needs of the curriculum, and this is a key feature in the successful teaching and learning within the school. The standard of accommodation is very good and provides a very pleasant learning environment. There has been improvement in this aspect since the previous inspection.
- 80 The headteacher has a very clear vision for the way that he wants the school to develop. A capable and hard working team of senior managers ably supports him. There is a concern for academic achievement, but not at the expense of other aspects of personal development. The school's explicit aims include the promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, promotion of respect and valuing of each other and enjoyment of learning as well as ensuring the maximum educational achievement for all. These are all evident in the way both teachers and pupils and students work with each other. Of particular note is the school's approach to providing education after the age of 16 years. All students, including those with below average results in their GCSEs or who have medical problems, are welcome in the sixth form and the school does all it can to ensure that courses are provided that meet their needs. Students who might not necessarily achieve good grades are encouraged and supported to complete the course and then to find work or a further appropriate higher education course.
- 81 The work of the governing body is very good. They are appropriately involved at a strategic level and take matters such as looking at performance data and setting targets very seriously. They are keen to take on board a wide range of views. Their approach to bidding for technology college status as a language college involved a wide-ranging consultation and debate, leading to a bid that is supported by the learning community in the town. Governors are well aware of the strength of the school. However, without rigour in the internal processes of monitoring and evaluation there will be aspects of the work of which they are unaware. Examples of this are the need to improve aspects of the foundation studies programme and the need for a whole-school literacy policy.
- 82 There is a strong commitment from the headteacher to ensuring that the school's approach to monitoring and evaluation is one that will sustain longer-term school improvement. Heads of department are encouraged to assess their department against criteria developed from research into school improvement. Departments are provided with self-evaluation criteria to enable them to judge aspects of their work. They are expected to formally review the progress of their department development plan. They are presented with a whole range of data on pupils' and students' performance. However, there are not enough links between senior and middle managers to ensure that all departments systematically use these activities and others, such as lesson observation, to develop an informed judgement about their work. Without such links there is not enough support to help middle managers to develop their skills in monitoring and evaluation. The work on school improvement is also not sufficiently rooted in the monitoring and evaluation of key aspects of practice. For example, the difference between results in Key Stage 3 and in Key

Stage 4 or the provision for pupils with special educational needs as numbers increase.

- 83 Over the last five years the school has moved from a very hierarchical management structure to one where leadership is shared amongst a larger group of senior managers. Within this group there is good delegation for the development of both policies and strategies to support the development of the policies into practice. The dimension of the delegation that is missing is the accountability for ensuring that the policies and strategies are implemented.
- 84 Leadership and management of departments are generally good and are very good in science. Leadership of the sixth form is excellent because the head of the sixth form is responsible for all aspects of the sixth form; the curriculum, student monitoring and the provision for students' personal development. The leadership of special educational needs now embraces a whole range of strategies to support learning. Whilst this is appropriate, responsibilities within the special educational needs team for aspects of the work are not clear. All departments, with more direct and focused support from senior managers, have the capacity and the commitment to improve.
- 85 The school's approach to planning at a strategic level is good and the three-year strategic plan is reviewed annually by the senior management team and governors. Departments are required to incorporate whole-school priorities and their own priorities into their plans. The quality of these plans are variable mainly because there is a lack of clarity about what is required under each section and particularly in terms of identifying success criteria and evaluation strategies.
- 86 Financial planning at both a whole-school level and particularly at a department level is very good. At a whole-school level the school is successfully managing an overspend whilst maintaining its developments. Exemplary financial monitoring greatly helps this process because governors have accurate and up-to-date financial information on which to base decisions. The school has wisely abandoned the idea of an annual allowance to departments based on a percentage increase on the previous year or on a formula. This means that departments can plan and, within an identified limit, negotiate for financial resources to meet their needs. Anything not spent at the end of a year returns to the whole-school budget to be part of the next year's overall allocations.
- 87 The school has a well-qualified teaching staff, with sufficient subject expertise to provide high quality teaching in most areas of the curriculum and to contribute to high standards of attainment. There are weaknesses in only three areas: one member of the modern foreign languages department is not yet fully qualified, and several teachers do not yet have the expertise or confidence to apply information and communication technology effectively within their subject areas. There are enough teachers in the special educational needs department but none of them have specific qualifications in this area. Although learning support assistants provide effective support for a substantial number of pupils, the department does not have sufficient expertise to develop the provision for the increasing number of pupils with learning difficulties.
- 88 Teachers have good opportunities to further their professional development. This assists their teaching and the learning of pupils and students, and some members of staff also have opportunities to study for higher educational qualifications. Procedures are in place to implement effective performance management as an aid to professional development.

- 89 The school also has a sufficient number of support staff who provide a valuable level of support and, like the teaching staff, they receive opportunities for appropriate professional development. The library in particular benefits from the expert input of librarians who play an important part in teaching pupils and students how to utilise the library as an important centre for research and personal study.
- 90 There are good induction procedures for new staff, including newly qualified teachers, to effectively integrate them into the life of the school. The school also offers a valuable experience for students in initial teacher training.
- 91 The previous inspection report commended the effective deployment of specialist teachers and their contribution to good standards; the valuable contribution made by support staff; and the fact that most training needs were satisfactorily met. This is still the case and so there has been satisfactory progress since the previous inspection, with high-quality staffing continuing to be the most important factor in ensuring a high quality of education.
- 92 The overall quality of the school site, buildings and specialist accommodation is very good. The extensive building and refurbishment programme since the last inspection has benefited many areas of the curriculum, including art and design and design and technology. The excellent new library and resource centre and careers room are encouraging more independent learning. Internal and external social areas are well laid out and all accommodation is in a very good state of repair and maintenance. This is due to the vision, strategic planning and effectiveness of the site development team, and the monitoring of all aspects of the cleaning by the site manager and staff. The only shortfall in specialist accommodation is in music, where there are at present not enough practice rooms, and in modern foreign languages where some teaching areas are too small. The school provides a very pleasant, safe and welcoming environment for everyone.
- 93 The adequacy of resources in the form of books and materials to support teaching and learning within the subjects of the curriculum is good. The library, linked to the school network and the Internet, continues to provide high quality resources and very effective support for independent work and research by large numbers pupils. It is open to pupils and students from early in the morning to well after the end of school and is a popular place for pupils to work. The numbers of computers have increased since the previous inspection, but because of the high demand upon them some subjects find access difficult. The school also makes good use of the wider community as a resource.
- 94 The governors and the senior management team have a very good understanding of best value principles and apply them in many areas of their work. Not only does the school compare its results with other schools it also compares its expenditure on such things as staffing. It uses competitive tendering for expenditure: a good example of this is the way the school worked with partner schools to secure the best grounds' maintenance contract at the best price. The school regularly seeks the views of parents through its newsletter and surveys, and of pupils and students through the school council. A governor did a survey of the work of learning support staff, which led to accredited training for these staff. The school competes in terms of its standards by trying to provide the best for its pupils and students. Over the last five years the challenge that the school has accepted has been to change the culture in what was already a successful school to one where there is shared accountability and a shared commitment to improvement.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- 95 In order to relate the very good strategic leadership and vision of the headteacher and senior team to day-to-day practice in classrooms the school should:-
- (1) Improve attainment in English in Key Stage 3 by: -
    - continuing to strengthen links with partner middle schools;
    - analysing statistical data more rigorously in order to identify pupils who are under-performing;
    - ensuring that schemes of work ensure provision for pupils of all abilities.(See paragraphs 2,6,56,97,100,106)
  - (2) Develop a whole school policy and strategy for the development of pupils' literacy skills that will: -
    - take into account existing practice in partner middle schools;
    - ensure that subject departments give priority to literacy in their schemes of work;
    - address the needs of those pupils whose literacy skills are weak.(See paragraphs 13,18,41,44,45,46,51,56,213)
  - (3) Make better use of the assessment data available on pupils by: -
    - monitoring the progress of all pupils and setting targets for them based on this information;
    - providing more specific information to parents about pupils' and students' attainment and progress and their targets for improvement.(See paragraphs 40,68,69,71,72,77,135,154,175,196,215)
  - (4) Improve the opportunities for pupils to use information and communication technology to support their learning by: -
    - clarifying the management of information and communication technology across the curriculum;
    - planning and monitoring the opportunities pupils have in Key Stage 4 to ensure coverage of the programme of study for all pupils;
    - developing more opportunities for the use of computers to support the development of basic skills for lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs.(See paragraphs 15,43,130,167,168,169,176,177,178,188,197)
  - (5) Ensure that the school's framework for improvement is more rigorously used by: -
    - supporting heads of department in developing activities that will enable them and their teams to monitor and evaluate the work of their department;
    - developing all teachers' skills in observing and evaluating teaching and learning.(See paragraphs 69,82,83,85,120,106,136,165,188,196)

In addition the school should:-

Continue to try and provide a daily act of collective worship.  
(See paragraph 57)

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	191
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	53

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
7	36	41	14	2	0	0

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

### Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	948	385
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	33	N/a

Special educational needs	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	21	3
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	200	21

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	18

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	10
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	27

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.1
National comparative data	7.9

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.2
National comparative data	1.1

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2000	157	159

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	70	125	119
	Girls	109	119	109
	Total	179	244	228
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	57 (74)	84 (75)	77 (70)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	17 (27)	60 (50)	38 (26)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	117	134	112
	Girls	141	136	119
	Total	258	270	231
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	82 (82)	87 (83)	83 (71)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	47 (54)	50 (52)	38 (33)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	151	153	304

GCSE results		5 or more grades A*-C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	91	157	163
	Girls	103	133	133
	Total	194	290	296
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	64 (66)	96 (96)	99 (98)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	48.4 (48.1)
	National	38.4 (36.8)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0	n/a
	National		n/a

### Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	111	98	209

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	18.0	16.7	17.4 (17.0)	2.0	1.9	1.9 (2.3)
National	17.7	18.6	18.2 (17.9)	2.6	2.9	2.7 (2.8)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	25	100
	National		76.5

### **Ethnic background of pupils**

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	3
Indian	1
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	5
White	1297
Any other minority ethnic group	22

### **Exclusions in the last school year**

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	35	3
Other minority ethnic groups	1	0

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

### **Teachers and classes**

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y9 – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	84.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.7

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

#### **Education support staff: Y9 – Y13**

Total number of education support staff	10
Total aggregate hours worked per week	212

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y9 – Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74%
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y9 – Y13**

Key Stage 3	23.5
Key Stage 4	22.1
Sixth Form	20.0

### **Financial information**

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	3,546,638
Total expenditure	3,600,820
Expenditure per pupil	2,765
Balance brought forward from previous year	-27,992
Balance carried forward to next year	-82,174



## **Results of the survey of parents and carers**

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out

1311

Number of questionnaires returned

273

### **Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	41	48	8	1	2
My child is making good progress in school.	45	48	3	1	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	32	61	1	0	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	24	60	12	2	2
The teaching is good.	32	62	2	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	22	53	14	5	6
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	48	43	5	0	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	60	37	1	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	23	56	12	2	7
The school is well led and managed.	46	46	3	0	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	38	53	5	0	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	32	47	8	2	11

### **Other issues raised by parents**

At the parents' meeting, attended by 29 parents, the general atmosphere was exceptionally supportive of the school. Within this very positive context some parents expressed concern about computerised reports and the lack of information about individual pupils' academic progress.

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

### **ENGLISH**

- 96 Attainment in English in the 2000 tests for pupils aged 14 was below the national average. This was true both for the percentage of pupils reaching the expected Level 5 and the higher levels of 6 and above. This is much worse than at the time of the previous inspection when test results were well above the national average. Compared with schools which take pupils from similar backgrounds the percentage of pupils reaching expected and higher levels was very low. Girls performed better than boys by a larger proportion than in most schools. The gap between the performances of boys and girls has narrowed over previous years but widened again in 2000. Results were well below those in mathematics and science. Results have been declining for the past four years.
- 97 There is too big a difference between teacher assessments and test results. This is an issue that can only be addressed with partner middle schools as a matter of urgency to ensure that the decline in English results at the end of Key Stage 3 is stopped.
- 98 Interestingly the percentage of pupils gaining grades A\*-C in English in GCSE in 2000 was well above the national average, despite these pupils having results in 1998 at the end of Key Stage 3 that were in line with the national average. All pupils who were entered achieved at least grade F. Girls performed better than boys, but the difference was less than in most schools. Results were above the average for schools that take pupils from a similar background. They were better than the school's results in mathematics and science. Results have shown good improvement over the last three years and are similar to those reported in the previous inspection. The percentage of pupils gaining grades A\*-C in GCSE English literature was in line with the national average. All those pupils who were entered achieved grades A\*-G. Girls performed better than boys by the same amount as in most schools. There was a significant fall in results from 1999.
- 99 GCE A-level results in 1999 in English literature were in line with national figures, both for pupils gaining the higher grades A to B and overall. In 2000, there was a slight drop in the figures overall but the percentage gaining the higher grades dropped significantly. However, overall results have improved since the previous inspection.
- 100 Work seen from 14-year-old pupils is of a higher standard than indicated by the below-average results of the national tests; it is in line with national expectations. The department has scrutinised the marked papers from this year's national tests and analysed pupils' strengths and weaknesses. The lessons learned from this analysis have been applied to the teaching and this is contributing towards higher standards this year. However, teachers do not take sufficient account in their planning of the wide range of pupils' abilities in Year 9 classes. Consequently, some pupils are still not reaching their full potential.
- 101 In contrast, the work of 16-year-olds seen during the inspection is very good and matches the GCSE results in English. Pupils benefit from the teachers' very good subject knowledge that is particularly evident in literature lessons. As a result the highest attainers analyse poetry skilfully and are quick to see the effect of imagery. They understand dramatic effects in Shakespeare, for example, the scene in which Lady Macbeth first sees Macbeth after his meeting with the witches. They are aware

of the subtle ways in which writers of different periods deal with human relationships. Even the lowest attainers recognise similes, metaphors and alliteration, although they do not fully appreciate why writers use them. More pupils are now producing top grade work than was the case in last year's GCSE English literature.

- 102 The standard of work in the sixth form is at the level expected of students following A- and AS-level courses. This is a good achievement as entry requirements are not as stringent as in many schools. Students benefit from the teachers' very good subject knowledge, but there are occasions when teachers need to make their lessons more interesting by varying their strategies, increasing the pace and allowing the students more opportunity to think for themselves. When this is done the students work very hard and make very good progress. Their best work occurs when they are intellectually challenged, as in a lesson where they produced interesting ideas such as a detailed comparison of Beckett's 'Endgame' with the endgame in chess. Their critical work is of a good standard, but in some cases they have a tendency to describe rather than analyse. In the new AS-level course in English language, Year 12 students are making good progress in learning the technical vocabulary and understanding how language is used in different social contexts. The English department is also responsible for the A-level film studies course. Examination results are good and in the one lesson observed teaching and learning were very good.
- 103 Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 3 and good progress at Key Stage 4. They are helped by the very effective support they receive from learning support assistants, where they are available, and from teachers' knowledge of the targets on their individual education plans. The learning support assistants often take an active part in lessons and are involved at the planning stage. This increases the value of their work. However, the special educational needs of pupils are not included in the department's schemes of work or in lesson plans.
- 104 Standards of literacy in the department are good overall. They are at their best in Key Stage 4, where they are very good. In Year 9, most pupils speak at reasonable length and with clarity when asking or answering questions. Their vocabulary is fairly wide. They read well enough to understand the characteristics of newspaper headlines. In one class pupils had read *The Twisted Window* with enough understanding to be able to role-play characters being interviewed. Most pupils write in complete sentences, using adjectives, adverbs, similes and metaphors when appropriate. Their punctuation is largely accurate. The highest attaining 16-year-olds speak very maturely and their writing is technically very accomplished. The lowest attainers speak more confidently when they are not too ambitious. They read quite competently, but hesitate over less usual words. Their writing contains many basic errors, but the reader can understand what is meant. In the sixth form, there are many students who argue their points with great skill both in speech and writing. One group, for example, marshalled their ideas on the value of studying literature most articulately in response to the inspector's challenge.
- 105 Teaching and learning are good at all stages. Planning is always effective and in some cases increases pupils' interest by being particularly imaginative. For example, the interest of Year 10 pupils was increased when the teacher brought in artefacts such as a heart-shaped mirror and an onion to illustrate a Carol Ann Duffy poem. However, planning does not provide sufficiently for the full range of pupils in mixed-ability groups. Teachers' expectations of pupils are high and in the best lessons they really challenge them to make maximum progress. The high standard of questioning by the teacher helped a Year 9 class make great strides in learning how to use

language to convey an atmosphere. In this lesson and others, pupils responded very well to the teacher's own sheer love of language. The management of pupils is one of the strengths of the department. Teachers are prepared to trust pupils, who respond by behaving very well. Relationships between teachers and pupils and between the pupils themselves are good. This helps the pupils to make good progress. The department, however, does not make enough use of information and communication technology. Day-to-day marking is very good. At the previous inspection teachers were over-zealous in their corrections of spelling in the books of less able pupils. There is now a more rational policy whereby teachers make comments that help pupils know what they have to do to improve. The regularly given homework builds on what pupils have learned in class.

- 106 The recently appointed head of department is effectively developing strategies to improve standards, but there is still some way to go. Action is being taken to improve the results in the national tests for 14-year-olds. As a result of the analysis of last year's answer papers the curriculum has been adjusted. Links with partner middle schools are much stronger than at the time of the previous inspection and are being further strengthened. It is intended that pupils' standards of work do not suffer at the time of transfer. However, the department has not yet made full use of assessment information in order to identify pupils who are under-performing or to set targets for all pupils. There is no system for monitoring teaching or pupils' work. The schemes of work are more detailed than at the previous inspection, but do not give sufficient prominence either to the need to provide for pupils of different abilities in mixed-ability groups or to the use of information and communication technology. The department now has more up-to-date non-fiction and fiction from other cultures than at the previous inspection. The library is a very good additional resource. The department's development plan rightly concentrates on improving standards. With its emphasis on teamwork the department has good capacity to succeed in this objective.

## **DRAMA**

- 107 The percentage of pupils gaining grades A\*-C in GCSE drama in 2000 was well above the national average. All pupils achieved at least grade E. Results have improved greatly over the last three years. The work of 16-year-olds is on line to match these results. Performance skills are good. Most pupils make good use of voice, gesture and body movement. They show good knowledge of drama. They understand the effects of using masks and other drama conventions. In their diaries they write very perceptive analyses of their own and others' performances. They have good knowledge of theatre history.
- 108 GCE A-level results in theatre studies in 2000 were below the national average. It should be noted, however, that the department demands no previous experience or qualification before allowing students on to the course. Results have improved over the last three years. The work of sixth form students seen during the inspection matches the A-level results although there are more students of higher calibre. They have wide experience of theatre. They have good understanding of technicalities such as lighting and write good analyses of productions they have seen. They know how to cut scenes to increase production pace. They have satisfactory ability in improvising scenes and in preparing group performances. Occasionally their work is imaginative. For example, one group was seen devising a scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to be set on a beach. When challenged they were able to give good reasons for this original idea. Performance skills are satisfactory.

- 109 Teaching at Key Stage 4 overall is good but varies between satisfactory and excellent. Teaching in the sixth form is good. In all lessons, relationships between teachers and students are very good. As a consequence the atmosphere in lessons is purposeful, productive and pleasant. There is a good standard of co-operation in group work. Students make most progress when teachers expect them to use their own initiative, for example in improvising or devising scenes. When teaching is at its very best, the fast pace helps pupils to maintain concentration. Also the focus is entirely on the objectives. In a lesson exploring tension states and involving the use of masks, there were a number of elements. The warm-up focused the class on what they were going to do; the teacher explained with the help of a diagram on the whiteboard what was expected and why; at the end of the lesson the class reviewed how far they had achieved the objectives.
- 110 The leadership of the department is good. The schemes of work are detailed and appropriate. The handbook is a very useful practical document. The subject is a major contributor to the personal development of students, who are all aware of its ability to help build confidence and understand the necessity for teamwork. The regular programme of productions of different kinds over many years highlights both the dedication of the teachers and the important part played by drama in the social and cultural life of the school. Since the previous inspection GCSE results have stayed at the same high level and GCE A-level results have improved. More pupils are choosing to take up both the GCSE and the GCE A-level courses.

## **MATHEMATICS**

- 111 Pupils and students benefit from a broad mathematics curriculum. They work very hard and make good progress to achieve good results at the age of 14 and very good results at the ages of 16 and 18 years.
- 112 In the national tests for 14-year-olds in 2000, pupils' attainment was well above average when compared to all maintained schools, both at the usually expected Level 5 and at the above average Level 6. When these results are compared with results in similar schools, at Level 5 they are in line with the average, and at Level 6 they are above average. These results are an improvement on the results for 1999. Results in these tests over several years have been stable.
- 113 In the GCSE examinations for 16-year-olds in 2000, pupils' attainment, both in the A\*-C grades comparison and in the A\*-G grades comparison, was well above the national average. The A\*-G grades comparison shows that almost all pupils succeed in gaining a grade, and the overall percentage of pupils in this category is above the national average. Whilst GCSE results are a little lower than those for 1999, they are still very good.
- 114 In the A-level examinations for 18-year-olds, students' attainment was above average both in 1999 and 2000, and the results for both 1999 and 2000 were very similar. The proportions of students gaining either an A or B grade were very high, and ahead of national averages. The school is very successful in recruiting above-average numbers of students to follow the advanced level course. Whilst the number of students taking the higher further mathematics examinations is small, the results are very good. For those students seeking a higher grade in GCSE than they gained in Year 11, the re-sit grades are good.
- 115 Pupils and students demonstrate good achievement at all levels of attainment. The lowest attaining pupils in Year 9 work competently on simple percentages of quantities and can draw statistical graphs. The most able pupils can use indices in

standard form, and produce scatter graphs so as to consider whether or not there is a correlation between sets of paired numbers. In Year 11, the least able pupils work well with litres and millilitres, as they apply them to commonplace contexts like bottles of lemonade or doses of medicine. The ablest pupils in Year 11 can predict the effect of changes to quadratic equations and also to changes in the equations of sine and cosine curves, having done very good preliminary work using a computer spreadsheet. In Year 13, students use Newton's Laws of motion to describe movement under acceleration and also find probabilities of combined events.

- 116 Standards of attainment are good in Key Stage 3 and very good in both Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Progress for most pupils and students is good. In most lessons, pupils learn new skills and extend their knowledge. Progress in mathematical understanding is less well developed, particularly among the least able pupils. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in the main school and very good progress in the sixth form. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. For the most part they work in small groups with a curriculum that whilst broadly similar to the one abler pupils follow, uses day-to-day contexts well.
- 117 Although the school does not have to have a numeracy policy and strategy it is developing work on numeracy to the benefit of its pupils and students. In almost all Year 9 and Year 10 lessons, the format of lessons advocated by the National Numeracy Strategy is being successfully followed. These lessons all start with a numerical warm-up activity, which for five or ten minutes rehearses old knowledge and seeks to extend understanding. All such sessions seen were successful and got each of those lessons off to a brisk start. In general, pupils and students with average or above average attainment have generally good numeracy skills and apply them in a range of subjects – for instance in geography in using scales on maps, or gathering and presenting statistical information. In the sixth form numeracy skills are successfully used across a wide range of subjects. Business studies and economics, for instance, have a relatively heavy use of numerical and statistical skills. The mathematics department is taking the initiative in developing numeracy in the college, although as yet there is no whole-school policy to underpin it. Standards in numeracy are generally good. As part of this development, there is also a strong emphasis on learning the technical vocabulary of mathematics, which supports the development of literacy skills.
- 118 The quality of teaching, which is good overall, is very good in the sixth form and also very good with the most able pupils in all year groups throughout the school. This exactly parallels the quality of learning. In terms of their backgrounds, the individual members of this department are well qualified mathematically and this strength supports the high level of challenge in all lessons. For example, a Year 9 class working on long division of whole numbers was challenged in such a way as to turn what might have been a dull plod through a set of rules into an investigation about different methods that might be more efficient. This was an excellent lesson and bubbled with ideas from all pupils throughout. In the previous inspection report, the range of methods observed was described as fairly narrow. A great deal of the teaching uses traditional methods throughout the school, but even in the sixth form there is some variety. Students were working on the different number of ways a given number of people might occupy a set of chairs, given certain restraints, and initially the students were the pieces in the puzzle. This was a very good lesson that led quickly to an understanding of the basic principles.
- 119 Relationships are very good, and teachers' pupil management skills are also very good. The behaviour of pupils was excellent in all lessons and they showed not only respect for their teacher, but also a strong interest in the subject. In a small number

of lessons with lower attaining pupils, one hour working on just one idea is too long and causes a fall-off in enthusiasm, concentration and work-rate. Books are generally marked up-to-date, but the marking lacks commentary and analysis and does not generally give pupils information on how well they are learning relative to the National Curriculum criteria. The record-keeping of individual pupils' and students' test and other scores is systematic and thorough.

- 120 This is a very good department that is well organised and managed. The head of department has a clear view of what she wants mathematics lessons to be like and the support for individual students is very good. The offer of support for pupils and students from staff during the lunch-hour on Thursdays is heavily subscribed and extremely well supported by the teachers. Some elements of monitoring performance, like tracking pupils and students progress are good, but in general the monitoring of all facets of the department's work needs more attention.
- 121 Since the last inspection, the resources for mathematics have been much improved through very careful planning and the curriculum has been brought up-to-date. Whilst the teaching is still mainly by chalk and talk methods, there is strong evidence in pupils' folders and in the display on the classroom walls of a widening of the methodology used. There is a strong and shared commitment amongst the staff in this department to develop the highest standards of which pupils and students may be capable.

## SCIENCE

- 122 Attainment was well above the national average in the 2000 tests for pupils aged 14; the number reaching the higher Levels 6 and 7 was above average. This represents significant improvement since the last inspection and from the previous year. Girls performed better than boys, with both well above the national average. Performance over four years has been above average, with recent indications that standards are rising. Compared with similar schools, performance was above average, but the number achieving the higher levels was below average.
- 123 The percentage of pupils achieving the higher grades A\*-C in GCSE examinations was well above average. The percentage gaining expected grades A-G was above average. Boys performed better than girls did, with both groups well above boys and girls nationally. Results have improved since the last inspection. Compared with similar schools, performance is generally in line with what would be expected. Pupils have improved their performance between Key Stage 3 and GCSE, improving on achievement 1999.
- 124 Work seen confirms the standards in examination results in Key Stage 4. Very good attainment at the end of Year 11 results from high calibre teachers who love their subject and inspire pupils. In Year 9, standards are already above average, although investigation skills are less well developed than knowledge and understanding. This is because the department finds it difficult to give time to problem-solving activities in the two terms before pupils take their Key Stage 3 tests. Pupils test food groups accurately, but do not think about what they have learned earlier or make predictions about what will happen. Because they do not readily use an investigative approach progress is not as great as it could be in some lessons. Year 11 pupils reach very good standards in chemistry, where higher-attaining pupils understand molecular structures and give very good reasons for the features of metals. Average pupils contribute opinions confidently. Lower-attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, receive good support and make good progress, even though the work is very challenging.

- 125 Most sixth form students meet standards required in A-level science subjects, with particularly good results in physics and electronics. The percentage reaching the highest grades A and B was well above the 1999 average for physics and electronics, but below for chemistry and biology. Few girls take physics and boys perform better than girls. In chemistry, boys do better than girls, but in biology girls do better than girls do nationally. In lessons, standards are good overall because of some very good teaching. Year 13 students are very interested in the topic of infectious disease, captivated by its history because the teacher has very good skills in bringing to life research that illustrates biological reasons for disease. Sixth form achievement is very good in physics and electronics and good in biology. Achievement in chemistry has been less successful, but the department has changed the syllabus to ensure the course is more relevant to the needs of students.
- 126 Standards of literacy are good because teachers expect pupils to write detailed notes and reports. Lower-attaining pupils are usually supported well by writing frames and work at a good pace, but in Year 9 teachers do not all know pupils well enough to match work to particular groups, particularly those with lower reading skills. In a lesson where pupils read aloud, they made very good progress. A very good lesson on cell structure results in pupils improving their command of scientific vocabulary. Work on display shows that teachers emphasise key words in Key Stage 4. Such good practice is not consistent throughout the department. Writing is above average, but could improve in areas of analysis and in presenting reasoned arguments for why things happen. The presentation of written work is generally of a good standard. Standards of numeracy are good; higher-attaining pupils reach very good standards in using graphs and mathematical formulae. Pupils reach satisfactory standards in the use of information and communication technology in Year 10 to measure temperature change using sensors, but do not have sufficient opportunities overall, particularly in Key Stage 3.
- 127 The department has sustained the good teaching and learning since the last inspection. Teachers manage pupils very well; a number of Year 9 pupils found a lesson difficult, but learnt to distinguish between breathing and respiration because the teacher was patient and offered them excellent questions that engaged them in high quality discussion. Teachers are energetic and hard working, fostering positive attitudes and enjoyment of science. As a result, relationships are good. At best, pupils are lively and courteous, valuing the interchange of ideas. Teachers show respect for them and they grow in maturity. Pupils in Year 11 improve standards because teachers foster study skills, encouraging them in examination preparation. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because teachers spend time to work with them individually, praising their success. Good resource preparation by teachers and technicians makes the most of pupils' time.
- 128 The teaching of investigations lacks sufficient focus in Year 9 and pupils tend to lack powers of analysis in written work. They have good practical experience, learning to be more independent. Pupils in Year 10 showed initiative in setting up a physics experiment because they were supported by very good printed lesson notes. They learn to be better scientists in testing food for chemical content, but they do not work quickly enough. The writing of sixth form pupils demonstrates good research skills. A new physics syllabus fosters key skills, promoting a good presentation to the class by a Year 12 student who talks confidently of his research into the structure of concrete, with interesting examples of its use historically and in present times.
- 129 Good assessments occur regularly and teachers talk with individual pupils about how they can improve; homework is set regularly. Teachers monitor the progress of



pupils whilst they are working, making for marked improvement of skills and knowledge. In Key Stage 3, communication with pupils about their progress against National Curriculum criteria is not established practice. There is currently no system for assessing pupil progress in the use of information and communication technology.

- 130 The department reflects the aims of the school in its work to raise standards and in doing the best for pupils of all abilities. Good analysis of test and examination performance results in effective change. Recent national changes have been adopted and have enriched learning opportunities for the sixth form. Information and communication technology is not fully integrated into the routines of teaching because good quality resources are not readily to hand. The development of problem-solving requires further whole team efforts. Good systems for monitoring pupils' progress over time are in place and the staff is now in a good position to set new challenges for pupils to work towards targets. Those responsible for subjects need time to observe teaching and learning in order to monitor the work of the department as a whole. Concern for equal opportunities and careful monitoring of boys' and girls' performance is generally effective. New staff and newly qualified teachers are given good support.

## **ART**

- 131 The department has maintained its high standards since the last inspection. By the age of 14 pupils are attaining at least in line with national standards and some are attaining above. By the age of 16, attainment and the percentage of GCSE grades A\*-C are well above the national average and all pupils gain at least an A-G grade. GCE A-level results for grades A-E are above the national average. This represents a consistent upward trend since the last inspection, and results have exceeded the increase in the national averages.
- 132 At the beginning of Year 9, a significant number of pupils have a low skills and knowledge base in many aspects of art and design. The ongoing development of the scheme of work is beginning to address this and reflect the new Key Stage 3 art curriculum. Pupils make good progress in lessons and satisfactory progress over time. By the end of Year 9 pupils have an understanding of the many elements within art and design including its specialist language and terminology. They are using a comprehensive range of skills and techniques in a wide range of media including paint, a variety of coloured and graded pencils and three-dimensional work in papier mâché. Pupils demonstrate a good balance between imaginative responses and technical skills and work with increasing confidence in two and three dimensions. Pupils know about a wide range of artists and designers from different cultures and times, including European and African, and are beginning to use elements of their works as a starting point in much of their work.
- 133 During Years 10 and 11 pupils build upon experiences and skills gained in Year 9. They sustain and develop ideas. In Year 10, they prepare drawings and paintings in sketchbooks for a project on observational paintings and prepare initial designs for a ceramics project. In Year 11, they produce ideas for decorative containers. Pupils are able to carry ideas through to their conclusion with considerable skill and imagination and produce work of high quality. Pupils' understanding and knowledge of shape, line and texture and how these relate and are used by other artists, are well developed. Most are able to compare artists' styles and use of colour and use them in their own paintings. A-level students work with considerable purpose, intellectual and creative effort. They have well-developed styles and understanding, and are aware of how colour and tone can reflect moods and feelings. They draw with

considerable accuracy and their projects show in-depth development, competence and well-developed visual awareness.

- 134 The quality of teaching in Key Stage 3 is good. Teaching at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is good and in half the lessons observed is very good. This represents an improvement since the last inspection and is a strength of the department. Teaching is conducted with confidence, imagination and a background of very good subject knowledge. The friendly, supportive atmosphere and stimulating and challenging tasks have a very positive impact on pupils' and students' learning, attitudes and standards. Teachers emphasise quality and make good use of discussion and directed questions. Pupils are encouraged to discuss their work within groups. For example, a teacher-led discussion in Year 11 relating to still-life paintings in sketchbooks helped pupils to use composition and accurate colour representation. Planning caters for a wide range of abilities, evaluation is built into lessons especially at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, and the needs of the individual are given a high priority. Pupils with learning difficulties are very well supported and make good progress. All pupils and students are given encouragement and praise. In Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, pupils and students have the opportunity to develop as individuals within a structure of carefully planned themes, matched to syllabus requirements. Pupils and students respond to the high quality teaching. Relationships and levels of concentration are generally good and work proceeds at a good pace. GCSE pupils and A-level students think for themselves, organise their time and take a pride in their work and its presentation, in line with the high standards expected. As pupils progress they demonstrate increasing knowledge and understanding, initiative, perseverance and informed visual decision making.
- 135 The curriculum in Year 9 meets statutory requirements. However, the scheme of work does not yet fully identify a clear progression of skills progression or a consistent approach across the department. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, the courses and content are excellent and fully meet course requirements. This is reflected in the high standards of achievement and increased numbers taking GCSE and A-level courses. The use of computers across the department has improved. Pupils can go into the department to work on their projects and use computers at lunchtime and on two evenings per week. Good opportunities are provided for visits to museums, art galleries and residential courses in this country and abroad. Assessment and recording systems are in place, but at Key Stage 3 assessment information is not well used by teachers to help pupils improve. Pupils do not know what they need to do to improve, criteria are not shared and targets are not set. The department is beginning to use National Curriculum levels to assess pupils' work. The good practices at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form are not used yet in Key Stage 3.
- 136 The art department is very well managed with sensitivity and purpose. The head of department has a clear view of the way he wants the department to develop and of its contribution to the wider curriculum. He makes great efforts to take the subject forward and respond to new initiatives and is committed to a team approach in all aspects of the department's function. However, there is at present no systematic monitoring or evaluation of any aspects of teaching and learning, which could help teachers share their practice and develop greater consistency in approaches. Staff are well qualified and demonstrate imagination in their approach. The accommodation is extensive and well maintained and provides a stimulating environment that supports visual investigation. The excellent displays value achievement and contribute greatly to the ethos of the department and the school.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

- 137 Throughout the school pupils enjoy and benefit from the wide range of creative opportunities afforded to them in developing and making their own designs in wood, metal, plastic, food and fabrics. Well-planned teaching programmes ensure that the skills that pupils learned in their middle school are developed and built on. Stimulating teaching helps to sustain their interest and motivation.
- 138 In 2000, pupils' attainment at age 14, as judged by their teachers, was well above the national average for the proportion of pupils reaching the expected Level 5, but below the average for those reaching the higher Level 6. In 1999, the results were above average at Level 5 and Level 6. The department attributes this drop in results to a more rigorous application of the criteria associated with the levels in the 2000 assessments. By the age of 14, their work indicates that their attainment is above the national average. They have a good knowledge of the design process and can specify a design brief, conduct basic research and develop and make simple products. All pupils engage in the same projects but respond at different levels with the work of the highest attainers more detailed and their products having a high quality finish.
- 139 At the age of 16 pupils are entered for a wide range of examinations including various GCSE subjects and a pre-vocational programme. In the 2000 examinations, pupils generally did well. The results in almost all subjects were above the national average in terms of the proportion of pupils attaining grades A\*-C and the proportion of pupils attaining A\*-G. In food technology, the results were well above the national average. However, in systems and control the results were well below the national average for pupils attaining grades A\*-C. The results for the 1999 and 1998 examinations were similar to those for 2000. A consistent feature of these examination results is that girls attain more highly than boys do. The differences in the performance of the two are greater than that found nationally. The food and textiles teachers have begun to develop some strategies to try and overcome these differences, but this is not yet the case in other subjects.
- 140 Pupils' work in the projects that they are preparing for the GCSE examinations shows that their attainment is above average in all subjects except for systems and control. In food technology and in textiles, attainment is well above average. In all aspects, with the exception of systems and control, attainment is good or better. This is largely because of very good teaching that motivates and interests them. Pupils respond well to the high expectations of their teachers and work with good application. In systems and control, methods used in the teaching fail to stimulate pupils effectively and many of them lose interest and perform badly in the subject. Several are behind with their project work and, as yet, have not been able to develop appropriate systems to include in their designs. Generally, however, pupils have good levels of development in the skills associated with the materials they have chosen to work in. They are able to create objects in wood, metal or plastic or items of clothing or a food product. They are able to support their work with a portfolio of drawings and writing that demonstrates the processes that they have followed in arriving at their final design. As was the case in Year 9, all pupils engage in the same projects but they respond at different levels. As expected, the work of lower-attaining pupils is of a lesser quality and they do not explain the development of their project clearly. Pupils studying for the Institute of Carpenters certificate have good practical skills. Those following the child development programme have a sound and often good understanding of the early stages of a child's life.

- 141 In the sixth form, students can choose to study from three subjects at A-level, graphics, food technology and textiles. Over the last three years the results have been broadly similar. They have included a full spread of grades, all of the students have passed and a fifth have attained A or B grades. The numbers in groups are small and thus is it meaningless to attempt to make a comparison with national averages. Students' work seen is in line with the course requirements for all three subjects. In graphics, students are able to produce complex portfolios of drawings that demonstrate important aspects of design and construction. Their teacher demonstrates high expectations through a process of individual tuition in which each student's drawings are discussed in turn. In textiles, teachers encourage students to understand the properties of different fabrics. In food, the teacher skilfully encourages students to reach high standards in conducting their own research. For example, by ensuring that they each volunteer to be responsible for an aspect of the work and to prepare a presentation and a set of notes for the whole group.
- 142 Teaching is mostly very good, at times is excellent but also at times, in a small proportion of lessons, it is unsatisfactory. Teachers all have good subject knowledge and, as a result, they provide good demonstrations of skills and help pupils gain appropriate expertise in practising them. Lessons are almost always well planned so that pupils make good gains in their knowledge. For example, in a Year 9 lesson, the pupils had planned the making of a Christmas plait in the previous lesson and in the homework they had been set. They arrived at the lesson ready to work with their ingredients part prepared. The teacher exercised excellent classroom management and kept them hard at work all lesson. They worked with great enthusiasm and they all took home at the end of the day a well-cooked plait that they could be proud of. In a small number of lessons the planning is not as good. Thus in a Year 10 lesson the teacher demonstrated the making of printed circuit boards. The process was long, pupils had to wait as each stage developed and they began to lose interest. The lack of clear planning led to a lack of clarity about the learning objectives, the wasting of valuable time and a failure to motivate and interest pupils in an inherently exciting topic. Teachers have a good knowledge of the learning difficulties of pupils with special educational needs. These pupils are well integrated into lessons, are supported well and make good progress.
- 143 Teachers' very good classroom control, their very good use of time and well-deployed resources ensure that lessons are productive. Pupils work at a good pace with generally high levels of interest and concentration, making good intellectual and creative efforts. As a result, their attitudes and their behaviour are almost always very good. They work with good levels of independence as they move through the school.
- 144 The subject is well managed. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school and at the start of Year 10 is used to monitor their performance as they move through the different stages of their education. Practice in assessment in Years 10 and 11 is particularly good. Pupils receive their work back with a hand-written sheet stapled to it. This contains the teacher's detailed evaluation of its content and comments about how it could be improved. Resources in the department are good and the accommodation is very good and these factors have a beneficial effect on standards.
- 145 Standards remain broadly as they were reported at the time of the last inspection. The last report drew attention to four concerns that the department has worked hard to improve. Lessons were said to be too dominated by the teacher and this is clearly no longer the case. The programme for pupils in Year 9 was said not to incorporate sufficient opportunities for systems and control. These are now built into the teaching

scheme. Assessment information was said not to be used effectively to monitor pupils' attainment. This is now done well. Pupils were said not to be involved in self-assessment and this is now built in to the evaluations they conduct when they finish their projects.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

- 146 This is a good department which offers pupils a broad curriculum and a high quality of teaching. Pupils achieve high standards.
- 147 By the age of 14 the attainment of pupils is above that found nationally. The 2000 teacher assessments showed 74 per cent of pupils gained Level 5 and above, with little significant difference between boys and girls. Pupils show a working geographical vocabulary and knowledge of where places are located. In their work on Japan, they show a good knowledge and understanding of geographical patterns and processes. Effective use is made of case studies to help pupils develop their understanding of how people live in particular places. Pupils are developing their understanding of geographical issues, such as the advantages and disadvantages of building nuclear power stations. Their workbooks show well-developed geographical skills, particularly in their map-work, diagrams and graphs. Most pupils are able to extract information from textbooks and there is much evidence of fluent extended writing. Although there are opportunities for pupils to research and investigate, they have fewer opportunities to engage in increasingly independent and sequenced enquiry work or fieldwork. Whilst pupils can use computers for word processing, this needs to be extended to include work on databases and the Internet. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, are making good progress.
- 148 By the age of 16 pupils are achieving standards that are well above those seen nationally. This judgement is supported by recent GCSE results that were well above the national average with 66 per cent gaining A\*-C in 1999 and 67 per cent in 2000. The percentage of pupils gaining the highest grades A\*/A is currently above the national average. There are no significant gender differences in attainment.
- 149 Pupils show a good knowledge and understanding of both human and physical ideas, patterns and processes. General models of urban land use are well tested, using rich case studies drawn from London. The geographical language and ideas developed in work on rivers is used to good effect when studying geographical issues, such as flooding in the Mississippi valley. Pupils are well able to make notes from a variety of books and they write fluently and in depth as they describe and explain a range of physical features. Course work that tests hypotheses formed from on a field visit to local streams, shows detailed data collection, good analysis and attractive presentation using a variety of skills. There is less evidence of the use of computers to present classwork, homework and course work. In studying issues, there is sometimes less than satisfactory analysis of the social and political positions adopted by different groups. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress.
- 150 The attainment of students in the sixth form is in line with that found nationally. Examination results have been slightly below national averages in recent years. Key strengths are the full and detailed notes written in their own words, the use of correlation and other statistical methods and the high quality of individual studies produced.
- 151 There was an atmosphere of learning in all the classes seen. Pupils show much interest in the work. Although they listen well to the teacher and show high levels of

concentration, they have fewer opportunities to speak in groups and few speak in an extended way in class questioning. Older pupils have more opportunities to show initiative in investigative work than pupils in Year 9.

- 152 The teaching of geography across the school is good and in nearly half the lessons seen it was very good and excellent. All the lessons were well planned, organised and managed. Specialist teachers show a high level of subject knowledge and a good understanding of how pupils learn. In a Year 9 lesson on Japan's nuclear power stations, the teacher used an innovative learning strategy. After watching a video extract the pupils assessed the advantages and disadvantages of building nuclear power stations. The teacher then asked all pupils to close their eyes and rest their heads as he built up a picture of a Chernobyl type disaster and the difficulties authorities would face in evacuating people. Because the teacher used an imaginative approach pupils reached good personal as well as social understanding. In a sixth form lesson the teacher asked two groups of students to gather evidence and then debate whether an ageing population in a country like the UK was a burden or benefit to the economy.
- 153 Knowledgeable teachers teach physical geography to a good standard. They both encourage, for example, Year 11 pupils to think about alternative ways a glacial lake could have been formed, and use traditionally effective methods whereby pupils gather textbook information to compare the form and origin of a ria and a fjord. There is much effective teaching, but not all teachers in the main school sufficiently encourage learning through group discussion. Teachers of mixed-ability groups, particularly in Year 9, do not consistently require higher prior attainers to think, to use higher order skills and to develop ideas through challenging questioning and enquiry activities. Teachers do not offer enough support to the lower prior attainers in mixed-ability groups.
- 154 The subject is well managed by an experienced head of department. Teachers' work is underpinned by good documentation. There is a working assessment system in place, but too little feedback is given to pupils about how their work has been marked or the level they have reached, which means that pupils are not in a position to know what to do to improve. The department rigorously analyses its external examination results and there is a sound development plan for change. There is no classroom observation and monitoring of teachers' work as part of a strategy for improvement.
- 155 Since the last inspection the department has maintained its high standards of attainment in Key Stages 3 and 4, although sixth form results are slightly lower. The quality of teaching has been maintained at the same high level.

## **HISTORY**

- 156 Teacher assessments in history for 2000 and 1999 showed that the percentage of pupils, both boys and girls, achieving Level 5 or above was well above the national average. The percentage of pupils, both boys and girls, achieving grades A\*-C in the 2000 GCSE examination was, at over 70 per cent, well above the national average, continuing the trend of 1998 and 1999. The percentage of pupils achieving grades A\*-G in these examinations was close to the national average. The percentage of students achieving A-B grades in the 2000 A-level examination was, at 28 per cent, close to the course average nationally; as was the percentage of 89 per cent achieving grades A-E. These percentages at A-level represented a slight decline on the 1999 figures, but a slight increase on the 1998 ones.

- 157 Standards overall in history are good in the key areas of knowledge and understanding, the skills of analysing and evaluating evidence, and the ability to communicate historical information. By the age of 14, standards of work are above the expectations of similarly aged pupils nationally. Pupils can effectively evaluate the differences between aspects of life 'then' and 'now' in areas such as education and economic organisation and practice. A good level of empathetic understanding of the past is achieved through imaginative exercises such as 'newspaper stories' about inventions. Pupils can convincingly argue 'for' and 'against' developments in areas like transport, and can appreciate the historical significance of individuals. Higher-achieving students show a mature appreciation of complex moral issues and difficult political concepts such as those underpinning the history of the British electoral system. Most pupils by the age of 14 achieve well in relation to their abilities. Pupils with special educational needs mostly make satisfactory rather than good progress in lessons when not receiving specialist support. This is because they have difficulty with some of the technical aspects of writing such as spelling and need more help.
- 158 By the age of 16, standards of knowledge and understanding and command of historical skills are above the national average. Those pupils following the course in social and economic history show an increasingly detailed understanding of developments in areas such as transport, factory organisation, education and discontent in nineteenth century Britain. Pupils following the modern world history course have a good knowledge and understanding of some major twentieth century developments such as the Russian Revolution, the rise of the Nazis and the Cold War. On both courses, pupils show a good level of skill in comparing and evaluating historical source material. Pupils achieve well in relation to their abilities, although most pupils with special educational needs make only satisfactory progress in developing their communication skills.
- 159 Standards achieved by students following A-level courses are in line with what is expected on such courses, particularly in the areas of knowledge, understanding, the skills of source analysis and evaluation, and the appreciation of key historical concepts such as change, continuity, causation and consequence. They show a sound appreciation of the causes and consequences of major developments such as the unification of Germany and Italy. Students' essays show an increasing ability to present analysis rather than mere description, and a sound facility in handling evidence. Higher-attaining students achieve well by the age of 18, others achieve at a satisfactory level, whilst a minority achieve less than what would have been predicted on the basis of their GCSE results. This is because they adapt less well to the demands of higher levels of study and are less skilful in writing succinct essays of the high conceptual level needed.
- 160 The quality of teaching overall in history is good, with some very good features. At Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 the teaching is always good or very good. In the sixth form, teaching is always at least satisfactory, and it is good or very good in half the lessons. Where teaching is good or better it has various qualities that are evident in all year groups. Teachers set out the objectives clearly at the start of lessons and review progress towards meeting the objectives before the end of lessons. This gives pupils and students a sense of achievement in their learning. In a Year 9 lesson in which pupils had been studying the impact of the 1834 Poor Law, the teacher effectively pulled together the threads at the end of the lesson, helping pupils place their investigations in a wider context. A strong feature of the teaching is the good subject knowledge displayed by teachers. This is evident in the good explanations and skilful questioning, which teachers use both to reinforce and extend pupils' and students' understanding.

- 161 Teachers make good use of audio-visual resources and texts to maintain pupils' and students' interest. The accompanying teaching is frequently lively, authoritative and briskly paced, whilst good relationships with pupils and students also motivate them to give of their best. Examples of the effective use of resources include the use of Nazi propaganda film to help Year 13 students understand the appeal of Hitler and the Nazis; and the use of local workhouse statistics to help Year 9 pupils understand the impact of the Poor Law.
- 162 Teachers give good feedback to pupils and students on their progress, both verbally and through their marking. This feedback helps to highlight pupils' and students' strengths and weaknesses and areas for development. Teachers also give an appropriate emphasis to extending the key historical vocabulary of pupils and students in all years.
- 163 In the best lessons, teachers create a structure which encourages pupils and students to debate challenging topics or learn collaboratively. The marked feature of these lessons is the purposeful atmosphere, which teachers create from the beginning of the lesson, which enables pupils and students to make very good progress, not only in developing their historical expertise but also in developing their confidence, independence and social skills. In a Year 13 lesson, students vigorously debated the respective merits of Asquith and Lloyd George as war leaders. The presentations in this instance also made a valuable contribution to the development of students' key communications skills, and provoked questioning which helped to reinforce students' understanding.
- 164 In some sixth form lessons which are sound overall, there is too much teacher direction and the resulting learning is largely passive. In a small number of lessons, the initial input by the teacher is too long, restricting student initiative, and the pace is sometimes undemanding, restricting the progress of which higher-achievers in particular are capable. Although the department does have a structured programme for developing study skills there is not sufficient emphasis in some lessons on reinforcing these skills, particularly those of efficient note taking. This restricts the progress of some students in teasing out key ideas, which they find unduly time-consuming.
- 165 Leadership and management of the history department are good. History is a popular subject in the school, attracting large numbers into its examination courses. The head of department provides clear educational direction, evident, for example, in the useful evaluation that the department makes of its activities and its priorities. The curriculum links established with feeder schools help to ensure that the continuity in history is maintained from Year 8 to Year 9. Targets for improvement are set for pupils and students as an effective method of helping them make progress in their learning. Although the department have observed each other teaching in the sixth form, these observations need to be extended so that all teachers can learn from each other and further develop their range of approaches. The application of information and communication technology in history is also underdeveloped, although the department has recognised this and plans are in hand to allow for more whole-class use of computers, particularly when access to computing facilities is made easier. By considering complex moral and social issues raised in a study of twentieth century dictatorships and wars, for example, the history department makes good provision for the further development of pupils' and students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. A particularly good example of this is the department's work on the Holocaust.



- 166 The previous inspection report found that GCSE and A-level results in history were well above the national average. This is still the case at GCSE, but not at A-level. The previous report praised the sound levels achieved in pupils' and students' knowledge and understanding, confident and articulate pupils and students, good curriculum planning, consistency in teaching, clear leadership and high expectations. These qualities still pertain and have been built upon. However, the few issues identified in the previous report remain to be tackled. The department has adapted well to the demands of the new sixth form curriculum and has maintained a high profile in the school and its high standards.

## **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

- 167 Standards in the application and use of information and communication technology are variable across the school, although there have been some improvements since the previous inspection in what is taught in Year 9 and the sixth form. At Key Stage 4 there has been little progress towards meeting statutory requirements, an issue at the time of the previous inspection. Although pupils who opt for information technology GCSE or business related courses make regular use of computers and achieve appropriately, for the majority of pupils there are not sufficient or regular opportunities to develop and apply their skills.
- 168 Teacher assessments for pupils aged 14 in 1999 and 2000 indicate that standards are above the national expectation with an above average number of pupils achieving Level 5 and above. Pupils spend the first two years of Key Stage 3 in middle schools and arrive at the start of Year 9 with varying levels of competence and experience. Pupils receive one information and communication technology lesson per week so that they all have a common range of experiences and opportunities to develop and apply their skills. For example, they use the Internet to research natural disasters to support their work in geography. Attainment in the current Year 9 is in line with national expectations with many pupils having well developed skills as a result of using computers at home. Progress is best when teachers supplement computer-based learning activities with demonstrations and class discussion of ideas. There is no assessment framework that provides pupils with sufficient information about their achievements and what they can do to improve their progress. Opportunities for pupils to use information and communication technology to support their learning in other subjects and develop skills beyond the taught course are infrequent and this limits progress.
- 169 In Key Stage 4, less than half the pupils follow a course leading to some form of examination. In the 2000 GCSE examination, the results for boys improved considerably with 60 per cent gaining the higher A\*-C grades, which is very good in comparison to the national picture. Of the very small number of girls none gained the higher grades in 2000. This is a big difference from 1999 when the very small number of girls outperformed the boys and was well above the national average. The overall pass rate of 100 per cent for both boys and girls achieved in 1999 was maintained in 2000. In addition, a further 23 students achieved either a merit or distinction in the information and communications technology certificate of achievement. In Years 10 and 11, almost half the pupils study business related courses in which they can develop skills using information and communication technology at appropriate levels to support their learning. For the remaining pupils, however, there are no specific information and communication technology lessons and very few opportunities to use computers in other subjects of the curriculum. Many pupils can develop some skills independently, particularly in word-processing and the use of e-mail, because they have computers at home, but attainment and progress overall are below expectations.

- 170 In GCSE information and communication technology lessons, pupils are making good progress with their learning as a result of well-structured units of work and very effective support from the teacher. The criteria by which examination work is judged are made clear and this, along with informative marking, help pupils, particularly those with special educational needs, to understand what and how to improve. In computer literacy lessons, very good support by teachers helps pupils. In some lessons, the absence of texts and other support materials limits progress as pupils are dependent upon the teacher for information.
- 171 In the sixth form, students can follow an examination course in computing. Many students opt for this course and standards are high. In the 2000 examination, boys' results improved on 1999 with 57 per cent gaining the higher grades and a 100 per cent pass rate overall. The results for the small number of girls who took the examination improved dramatically with 60 per cent gaining A or B grades. The overall trend has been one of improvement.
- 172 In the current sixth form groups, standards are very good with students showing good understanding of the structure of computer networks and how computers can be applied to a range of problems. They can discuss the moral and social implications associated with the use of computer systems and learn to design, develop and test their own computer programs. Their general levels of knowledge and understanding and use of specialist vocabulary show good progress from Year 11 and enable them to engage in productive discussion of topics. Teachers provide an excellent range of support materials accessible to students on the school network that enable them to develop independence and make good progress with their coursework. The criteria for examination work are very clearly explained, which helps pupils understand how to achieve high standards.
- 173 There is a well-structured key skills programme for all students in the sixth form that provides opportunities for students to develop their information and communication technology skills. The library resource area makes a significant contribution to the development of independent learning by pupils through the provision of computers and well-qualified support staff available throughout the day.
- 174 Attitudes to learning are very good at all key stages and are particularly good in the sixth form where independent and mature attitudes to learning are very evident amongst students completing coursework assignments. Pupils and students show respect for each other and treat equipment and resources with care and this all contributes positively to learning both in and out of lessons. Many pupils spend time at lunchtimes and before and after school to develop their work and make very good use of the school's computer resources. Lessons are characterised by good behaviour and a desire to work, all of which contributes to good standards.
- 175 Teaching of information and communication technology is good overall and is very good in the computer course in the sixth form. Teaching in Year 9 is by a team of teachers not all of whom are specialists, but are all confident in using computers to a level at which they are able to support pupils effectively. The teacher in charge has provided a clear framework and outline scheme of work as guidance for the team of teachers. The computer-based learning materials are new to most staff and there have been some instances of difficulties with equipment that staff overcome with good support from the technicians. There is scope for greater teacher involvement to develop the learning within units of work and raise expectations and challenge all pupils. Pupils are not sufficiently aware of their learning at times because

assessment does not yet provide them with enough information on what and how to improve. The school recognises that this is an area for further development.

- 176 Pupils studying the GCSE information technology have very good guidance and regular marking and assessment information that helps them make good progress. This is also the case in the sixth form where there is a strong focus upon the requirements of the examination that enables students to make sure their work is of the required standard. Teachers at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form make effective use of the school network by providing tutorial resources that pupils can use to help them with their work. Across the subjects of the curriculum, however, teachers provide very few opportunities for pupils to make use of computers on a regular basis to support their learning. This has a significant impact upon those pupils who do not study a course in which information and communication technology is used, as they are unable to develop their skills appropriately. There is not enough use of computers to support the development of numeracy and literacy skills. Good opportunities exist in design and technology and mathematics and less frequently in other subjects but, as at the time of the last inspection, this is an area for development to meet statutory requirements at Key Stage 4 and the expectations of the new National Curriculum.
- 177 The management of the information and communication technology that is specifically taught has changed since the last inspection and is shared amongst several members of staff. Whilst each member of staff has a clear vision of their role with regard to the taught courses, the collective planning and management of information and communication technology across the curriculum remain unresolved since the last inspection. The school does, however, have a detailed action plan for how this will be improved.
- 178 The school has made, and is continuing to make, considerable investment in new resources to support the use of information and communication technology alongside the school building programme. A comprehensive network with the capacity for expansion is now in place and is well managed by a system manager and supported by technicians. However, pupils do not receive their curriculum entitlement at Key Stage 4 and make limited progress because the school has not organised a clear formal framework to plan and monitor their experiences and to ensure that statutory requirements are met. The large numbers of examination courses make demands upon computer resources, which at times limits opportunities for other subjects.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

- 179 Pupils arrive at the school in Year 9 having studied French in their middle school. Experiences of learning French vary according to the middle school they attended. They begin to study either Spanish or German in addition to French. In Year 10, they have the choice of which language to continue to study to GCSE level. Pupils benefit from this arrangement. Many welcome the opportunity for a new start in a different language when they have not done as well as they might have in French.
- 180 Teachers only assess pupils' attainment in French at the end of Year 9. In 2000, these assessments show attainment to be above the national average in terms of pupils gaining Level 4, the nationally expected level for modern languages, and well above average for Level 5. This is an improvement on 1999's results and an improvement since the previous inspection. The department has recently rewritten its teaching programmes and introduced a thorough scheme of assessment. Both of these areas were criticised in the previous inspection report. These changes have led to higher standards.

- 181 In pupils' work and in lessons during the inspection, standards seen in French were generally well above average. The teaching scheme ensures that pupils of all levels of prior attainment are learning to speak and write in the past tense, which is the key to gaining Level 5. There are examples of very good and excellent teaching which fully involves pupils in well planned, interesting activities and leads to very effective learning. In German, where pupils have begun the language in September, they have generally made a sound start in learning basic vocabulary and structures. The teaching scheme is well designed to cater for the different needs of all pupils. Standards are lower in Spanish, where the teaching scheme does not cater so carefully for the needs of different pupils. In addition, there is some unsatisfactory teaching of lower-attaining pupils. Pupils with special educational needs study only one language in Year 9. They make progress in line with other pupils in their class.
- 182 Results in French in GCSE in 2000 were well above the national average for pupils attaining both A\*-C and A\*-G grades and were an improvement on those in 1999. Eighty six per cent of pupils gained grades A\*-C against a national average of 50 per cent. Boys did particularly well: 83 per cent of them gained grades A\*-C compared with the national average of 4 per cent. This is an improvement since the time of the previous inspection. In 2000, when more pupils were entered for the examination, results in German were below average and were not as good as results in 1999, although boys' results were in line with the average. This can be explained by the fact that pupils only study German for three years. Fewer pupils chose to study Spanish to GCSE level in 2000 than in 1999, and the results fell from below average to well below average, although boys' results were better than girls' and were above average. In addition to pupils only having studied the language for three years, there have been some staffing difficulties in Spanish, which account for this difference to some extent. Some teaching in Spanish does not extend higher-attaining pupils. Pupils who finish their work waste time and, on occasions, pupils talk when the teacher is talking.
- 183 Pupils in the current Year 11 are attaining well above average standards in French. The highest attainers have a very good grasp of grammar and can write fluently about events in the past. Most average and lower-attaining pupils are able to undertake the tasks necessary to gain a grade C. This is in part due to the high standards established in Year 9, but also to some good and at times very good teaching. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' work and pupils respond to this challenge. Teachers use French naturally as the normal means of communication in lessons, and this gives pupils a good model for their own speaking and very good opportunities to practise understanding the language spoken. Lessons are well planned with a good range of interesting activities that motivate pupils and maintain their concentration.
- 184 Standards in German are generally above average. Here, too, there is very good teaching that ensures that pupils work hard and enjoy the lessons. They have made very good use of excellent materials prepared in the department to help them to devise individual presentations as part of their speaking examination. Some higher-attaining pupils in Spanish are working at well above average standards, but average and lower-attaining pupils have problems with accuracy when writing. Pupils are given good materials to help them with revision, but generally the teaching programme is not as structured as in French and German.
- 185 The department has recently introduced the Certificate of Achievement in languages for pupils with special educational needs. Pupils following this course are very motivated and are making very good progress. This is partly because they are

assessed regularly as part of their normal work in class, but also because the teaching is matched to their needs.

- 186 At A-level, results in all three languages have varied from year to year. This is usual where the numbers involved are small and students who gained grades B or C at GCSE have been allowed to continue their study to A-level. Results have all been in line with the national average in terms of the percentage of pupils gaining grades A-E. In 1999, the percentage gaining A and B grades in all three languages was above average, but in 2000 it was lower. The numbers studying French at A-level have grown as performance in GCSE has improved. In the present Year 13, students are generally achieving in line with the requirements of the course. In French and German, standards in speaking and listening are boosted by the teachers' consistent use of the language in lessons. Students are willing to speak the language freely, although, at times, accuracy is a problem. Students are less confident in Spanish. Lesson planning does not take sufficient account of students' different levels of prior attainment. The teacher expects students to approach their work with a high level of independence. This proves difficult for average and lower-attaining students.
- 187 Teaching was at least satisfactory in almost all lessons and was very good in nearly half of the lessons seen. Teaching was better in French and German than in Spanish, and better with older pupils and students than in Year 9. All teachers are fluent speakers of the languages they teach. Pupils are used to teachers using the languages as the normal means of communication and in the sixth form, especially in French, students use the language when talking amongst themselves. In almost all lessons, teachers use resources that gain and maintain pupils' interest and thus result in good learning. There is a brisk pace through a range of different activities, which are well planned to ensure that pupils hear, see and use the words they are learning and work hard, almost without realising they are doing so. For example, in a lesson where lower-attaining Year 10 pupils were revising the weather, the teacher presented a series of attractive pictures showing the different kinds of weather the pupils needed to know. After some initial practice, they were told to repeat what the teacher said about each picture only if it was correct. This was made into a game of the teacher versus the pupils. The pupils repeated the words many times without becoming bored and knew them very well before the end of the lesson. In some lessons, which were otherwise satisfactory, there was an insufficient range of activities and time was not used as well as it might have been. Where teaching was unsatisfactory, the activities were inappropriate for the pupils and did not engage their interest and instructions were unclear. This resulted in unsatisfactory learning.
- 188 The department is well led and managed and the head of department undertakes some monitoring of results. However, at present there is no formal observation of teaching to share good practice, to highlight weaker aspects of some teaching and to provide intensive support for the unqualified member of the department. Accommodation has improved since the time of the last inspection and is now satisfactory overall, but some rooms are still too small for some activities and have insufficient storage space. The department does not use computers enough because of difficulties in gaining access to them.
- 189 Large numbers of pupils take part in exchange visits to France, Germany and Spain. In addition, some students studying A-level French do two weeks of work experience in France. These visits considerably enhance pupils' attainment in the languages they are studying and their understanding of the countries, as well as their self-reliance.

## MUSIC

- 190 In 2000, the proportion of pupils achieving the higher grades A\*-C at GCSE was well above the national average. This is an improvement on 1999 results with all pupils achieving grade D or above and a higher proportion of pupils achieving A\* and A grades. GCSE results have been consistently well above national averages for the last four years. Girls have tended to achieve more A\* and A grades but the number of boys achieving these grades increased in 2000. All students achieved appropriate grades at A-level in 2000, but because of the small number national comparisons are statistically unreliable.
- 191 By the age of 14 pupils' attainment in music is broadly in line with national expectations. Teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to develop their listening and performing skills. In a Year 9 lesson, pupils were able to relate rhythm patterns played earlier in the lesson to *Mars* which they listened to later. However, composing skills are underdeveloped because the work set is insufficiently challenging and is not planned for the different levels of attainment within the class. Pupils make good progress with their keyboard skills because the work is matched to the pupils' different levels of attainment and there are clear targets displayed around the room that the pupils understand. Pupils' appraising skills are less well developed because teachers do not include sufficient opportunities in lessons for pupils to evaluate their compositions or performances. This was also commented on in the previous report and has yet to be addressed. No significant difference was observed between the attainment of boys and girls. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in lessons.
- 192 By the age of 16 pupils' attainment is above national expectations. In Year 11, pupils have good performing skills, which many have developed as a result of instrumental or singing tuition. Teachers plan activities that enable pupils to apply their knowledge of music notation, used when they play music, to their composing and listening work. In a Year 11 lesson, pupils were taking it in turns to perform rhythm patterns which the rest had to notate while listening. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of musical elements and technical vocabulary are not yet secure enough to enable them to answer questions on the listening paper with confidence. Pupils can compose successful pieces that are well structured and harmonically sound. A few pupils have used music sequencing software effectively on their computers at home to compose and notate their compositions. The department has only recently acquired new computers and software that will enhance composing opportunities for pupils at school.
- 193 Attainment in the sixth form is good. This is because teaching is very effective, students are well motivated and make good gains in their learning. In a Year 13 lesson, students working together in groups used technical language very confidently. They shared their good knowledge and understanding of Tchaikovsky's music and made appropriate links to the work of other composers. They learnt from each other and from the effective questioning of the teacher and were able to plan an essay to write for homework.
- 194 Pupils show good attitudes to learning and their behaviour is very good. They work in groups and pairs and listen with interest to performances by other members of the class. Pupils are courteous and use instruments with care. Relationships between pupils and between pupils and teachers are very good.
- 195 The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and understanding of examination requirements that are used effectively to help pupils'

learning and to prepare them for their examinations. Good management of pupils results in pupils sustaining concentration and staying on task. Lessons are well planned and integrate performing, composing and listening activities so that pupils' skills in these areas are regularly practised and developed. Assessment is used very effectively in lessons to help pupils overcome difficulties in following a musical score and to make progress with their keyboard playing or composing tasks. Challenging and well focused questioning results in pupils and students increasing their knowledge and understanding of the features of a particular musical style or period. However, pupils in Year 9 do not use the vocabulary of music when talking or writing because teachers do not often use this vocabulary. Worksheets for listening activities are not sufficiently adapted to pupils' different levels of attainment and opportunities to give pupils immediate feedback and reinforce learning are often missed. Consequently, pupils do not always make sufficient gains in their listening skills.

- 196 Units of work for Year 9 show the clear development and progression of keyboard, guitar and composing skills. However, they do not show the development of singing and appraising skills and they do not yet include opportunities for pupils to use information and communication technology to enhance their learning. Also the department does not have effective arrangements for assessing the attainment and progress of pupils in Year 9. However, the department is developing very good links with the music co-ordinators of the middle schools and the other upper school with a view to agreeing a music curriculum and procedures for assessment across Key Stage 3. Year 10 pupils receive a very good assessment of all areas of their work at the end of the year with clear targets for improvement. As yet, there are no arrangements in place for effectively monitoring and observing teaching and learning in order to improve further the quality of teaching and pupils' attainment.
- 197 Since the last inspection more guitars and keyboards have been purchased. However, the department does not have enough resources to meet the National Curriculum requirements for information and communication technology at Key Stage 3, or to meet the needs of GCSE and A-level candidates. There are two new computers, but none of the keyboards have onboard sequencers for developing composing skills. Accommodation is satisfactory overall but the keyboard room is cramped and restricts movement and there are not enough small practice rooms available for group work when instrumental teachers are teaching.
- 198 Extra-curricular provision is very good and is a strength of the school. Instrumental tuition provides opportunities for pupils to learn to sing or to play a wide range of instruments. The department is a hive of activity at lunchtimes with pupils taking part in a wide range of activities such as the brass ensemble, saxophone ensemble, choir and concert band, which perform to a very high standard. Pupils and students also have opportunities to take part in the many events planned for the year such as the Choral Concert, Battle of the Bands, Carol Service, tour abroad and this year's musical production *Guys and Dolls*. A large number of pupils receive instrumental or singing lessons and take part in extra-curricular activities. This has a very positive effect on developing pupils' performing skills and on their personal development. This is shown particularly in the very good examination results at GCSE and the high standard of performing in concerts due to very effective instrumental teaching and expertise of the directors of the various ensembles.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

- 199 In July 2000, the proportion of students gaining A\*-C grade passes in the GCSE examination in physical education was well above average. Although there were

more boys than girls taking the examination there was no significant difference in their attainment. Results have been consistently good since the examination was introduced four years ago and compare very favourably with results achieved by the same students in their other subjects. The number of students taking the examination in the subject is impressive.

- 200 By the age of 14, attainment is in line with national expectations, with a significant number doing even better. This judgement confirms the assessments made by teachers. In games activities, pupils have a growing knowledge of the rules and conventions of a variety of sports and are developing appropriate skills to enable them to compete successfully. Some pupils arrive at the school unable to swim 25 metres, an attainment target that should be achieved by the age of 11 years. By the end of Year 9 only a very small number of pupils still cannot swim. Most pupils are confident in the water and are proficient in a number of swimming strokes. They also have experience of personal survival and life saving. In gymnastics, pupils are able to demonstrate a range of movements both on apparatus and on the floor, with many creating complex sequences, performed with fluency and control. Pupils understand the need to warm up and have a good understanding of the safety aspects of the various activities and apply them appropriately.
- 201 The overall attainment by the age of 16 is also in line with national expectations, with some pupils, particularly those in the examination groups, achieving even higher standards. Good levels of skills are clearly evident in a wide range of activities. Pupils have a good understanding of tactics and strategies and are able to use the skills they have practised in full games. Pupils are introduced to rock climbing techniques on the school's indoor climbing wall and many achieve a competency in this sport that is rarely witnessed in secondary schools. Pupils in the examination groups have a good understanding of the syllabus requirements and are able to effectively link theoretical and practical concepts. They have been accessing the Internet and using information and communication technology to produce some interesting project work.
- 202 The standards of work of students studying for A-level examinations are in line with course expectations and they are making good progress. They are confident in the use of technical language in their written work and contribute to a lively informed debate in lessons.
- 203 Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated, are given much support and encouragement by both teachers and fellow pupils and students, and reach a very satisfactory level of performance. Teaching is sensitive and there is no evidence of students with special educational needs being disadvantaged.
- 204 Many school teams take part in a large number of inter-school competitions and sporting events and gain much success. Many students have represented Bedfordshire and some have gone on to gain East Midlands and national honours.
- 205 The quality of teaching is good and in some lessons it is very good. It is never less than satisfactory. All lessons begin and end in an orderly manner and objectives are clearly stated and understood by pupils and students. Lessons are well organised and are conducted at a brisk, demanding pace, achieving an appropriate balance of activities and offering pupils and students a range of appropriate challenges. The subject planning is well structured with a choice of tasks that promotes a high level of interest and effort. Pupils and students are expected to work hard and to behave well and generally they do. Teachers show a care and concern for pupils and students, whilst encouraging the best in fair play, co-operation and competitive



experiences. Most pupils and students respond very positively to this good quality teaching. They are enthusiastic, behave very well and are prepared to work hard. The quality of relationships amongst pupils and students and between them and their teachers is good. The quality of the teaching has a very positive impact on attainment and on pupils' and students' enjoyment of the subject.

- 206 The curriculum has been revised since the last inspection and has been adapted to meet the demands of the new National Curriculum. Pupils and students can now take public examinations at GCSE and A-level. Pupils in years 10 and 11 also have the opportunity to take part in the well-organised Junior Sports Leaders Award course. The procedures for assessing and recording attainment have been revised and very comprehensive records of pupil attainment are kept. This information is used to influence curriculum planning and to help teachers set personal targets for students. Many staff give very freely of their time to provide both a wide range of lunchtime and after-school activities, which are very well supported. Pupils have the opportunity to attend a residential outdoor pursuits course at the authority's centre in North Wales. Here they experience rock climbing, canoeing, abseiling and lightweight camping. Many join trips to national sporting events, which are organised by the department, and take part in skiing trips to France.
- 207 Strong leadership and a positive ethos characterise the management of the subject. The department's development plan identifies a range of appropriate priorities. The high quality documentation covers all aspects of the department's work, and helps the delivery of the subject. The staff who teach physical education work well together, support each other, and show a very strong commitment to the students. Accommodation for the subject is of high quality with the on-site facilities being supplemented by some excellent accommodation at the local leisure centre.
- 208 Since the last inspection the department has continued to provide a good quality physical education programme. The system for the assessment, recording and reporting of students' work has been reviewed, and is now more effective. The curriculum has been revised and pupils and students can take public examinations in the subject.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

- 209 Since the previous inspection a short course has been introduced in this subject at GCSE and results have been very high over the past three years with more than 70 per cent of pupils achieving A\*-C grades each year and almost all pupils achieving grades A\*-G. In 1999, 280 pupils were entered for the short course examination and 40 per cent achieved an A\* or A grade. This was a notable achievement.
- 210 By the age of 14 pupils are achieving standards in line with the level of expectations linked to the locally agreed syllabus. They show good understanding of the basic tenets of Buddhism and can use their knowledge of religious terminology to explain and discuss the meanings of symbols in relation to key Buddhist beliefs. Discussion is good at this stage and pupils are keen to talk about spiritual issues and do so with confidence. In a Year 9 lesson on Buddhism, pupils used the concept of enlightenment to discuss key moments in their own lives.
- 211 Although pupils in Key Stage 3 are achieving standards in line with expectations, the time allowed for religious education within the personal, social and religious education programme is very limited. This has a negative effect on progress in terms of developing some subject skills, such as a deeper knowledge and understanding of

spiritual issues. In Years 10 and 11, the arrangements for the new short courses have had a positive effect on attainment, and, by the time they reach the age of 16, most pupils are achieving high or very high standards, as is borne out by the GCSE results in recent years. The increased time allocation at this stage allows pupils to develop their ideas on spiritual and moral issues in depth. In this context, some very good extended writing was seen from Year 10 pupils on Christian perspectives, such as Quakerism, and from Year 11 pupils on abortion and euthanasia. It is clear that the department has addressed the issue arising from the previous report concerning lack of motivation at this key stage. In the sixth form, the time allocated for religious education within the general studies programme is still limited but it now meets statutory requirements. A new AS/A-level course has been introduced recently and students are already exhibiting high standards with some very well structured essays on the miracles of Jesus and the teachings that accompanied them.

- 212 The quality of teaching in religious education is always good or very good. It is sometimes excellent. Teachers are very enthusiastic about their practice and have high expectations of all pupils. This, in turn, encourages pupils to enjoy their lessons and to become active learners. Lessons are conducted with purpose and rigour and this gives pupils confidence in their learning. The previous report noted inconsistencies in planning and organisation, but this is no longer the case. Teachers use their knowledge and expertise to challenge and motivate pupils. A wide variety of techniques is used to support learning, including video, group work, paired work and class discussions. This was shown to very good effect in a Year 11 lesson during which pupils showed considerable maturity and understanding in a discussion on the nature of evil and suffering with particular reference to famine in Africa.
- 213 In most lessons, aims and objectives are set clearly at the outset and pupils are provided with opportunities to reflect on their progress at the end of sessions. A more consistent approach to this good practice would benefit all pupils. There is a strong emphasis on the development of literacy skills throughout the curriculum, particularly in terms of speaking and listening. Higher-attaining pupils are given ample scope to develop their writing skills in depth. Lower-attaining pupils, and those with special educational needs, make satisfactory progress, but are sometimes struggling with the written material provided, and this remains an issue for the department to address.
- 214 Pupils show positive attitudes to the subject and the passive response of some pupils noted in the previous report no longer applies. Indeed, pupils are eager and willing to participate in lessons and show very mature attitudes towards their teachers and each other. They are also encouraged to become independent learners and respond well to teacher expectations. This was demonstrated in an excellent Year 12 lesson in which students showed considerable maturity and academic resolve in discussing different gospel interpretations on the incarnation.
- 215 The department has undergone a number of changes since the previous inspection and the subject is now located within the broader personal, social and religious education programme. This is managed well with a strong and experienced teaching team to support pupils' learning. Schemes of work are developed well in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus and the requirements of the various examination boards. The department makes a very strong contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and students in all lessons. In particular, emphasis is placed on multi-cultural and multi-faith issues. Self-evaluation techniques are used effectively to monitor pupils' progress, but assessment techniques in general need a sharper focus in terms of target setting. There is a

plentiful supply of good resources, both in classrooms and in the library. Information and communications technology is used increasingly by pupils and students to enrich their knowledge and understanding of the subject, but this area of the department's work is not being consistently developed.

- 216 Overall, good progress has been made since the previous inspection, particularly with the introduction of the new short courses at GCSE and with the development of a popular A-level course in the sixth form. The previous report concluded that a more coherent view of the direction and status of religious education was needed. This has been achieved and the subject is now popular and successful within the school.

### **Vocational and business education**

- 217 GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualifications) courses are a major strength of the sixth form and are popular, attracting students of all abilities and offering them a pathway to further and higher education and preparing them effectively for employment. The GCSE courses in business studies and business technology and the A-level courses in economics and business studies have a vocational emphasis. In the sixth form, the new vocational advanced courses (AVCE) were introduced in 2000.
- 218 By the age of 17 students' attainment on the intermediate engineering course is well above national expectations, maintaining the high grades since the course began five years ago. The performance of intermediate health and social care students is in line with expectations based on their attainment on entry.
- 219 Attainment in GNVQ business at advanced level is well above average expectations. In A-level business studies, results are in line with the national average for the highest grades. Numbers entered for A-level economics were small but the percentage reaching the highest grades A and B in 2000 was well above national and school averages. The overall quality of students' work in A-level and GNVQ courses has improved since the last inspection and grades in GNVQs have increased, helped by very good teaching and regular monitoring of coursework. Attainment by current students on GNVQ advanced courses in business and art is in line with national expectation. The majority of Year 13 students taking GNVQ advanced business have passed all external tests, at levels well above national expectations at this stage.
- 220 The percentage of pupils in Year 11 achieving the higher grades A-C and the expected grades A-G in GCSE in 2000 was well above the national average in business studies and business technology. This shows a rising trend since the last inspection. Pupils' results are well above those they obtain in most other school subjects.
- 221 All GNVQ students attain the key skills of communications, information technology and number, either within their subjects or in separate lessons. Students make good use of computers, using word-processing for reports, desktop publishing for brochures and descriptions of diagrams, and combining text and graphics. The use of spreadsheets for financial forecasting is impressive in advanced GNVQ business. There is less evidence of consistent use of word-processing, desktop publishing or spreadsheets in health and social care.
- 222 Work seen during the inspection confirms the good examination results. In Year 10 GCSE business technology lessons, pupils, both girls and boys, combine text and graphics effectively to produce an induction booklet. They import graphs into their

reports on accidents in the work place. Year 11 GCSE business studies pupils use spreadsheets well to show the monthly running costs of a business. Year 12 intermediate students on the health and social care course make good use of their weekly work placements to plan and run activities for children in local playgroups. Year 12 engineering students ably combine production engineering with electronics. Advanced GNVQ art students design and make attractive sculptures for a local community forest project. Advanced business and economics students, on both GNVQ and GCE courses, have a very good understanding of business and economic concepts, applying them well in projects in local businesses. Students use the Internet confidently to research company reports and statistics.

- 223 Standards of literacy for all students, including those with special educational needs, are good. This is because teachers encourage students to improve the key skills of communication through individual and group presentations. Pupils and students can summarise documents and draft memoranda, letters and reports. On intermediate courses, students are encouraged to focus on key terms and develop their basic writing and graphic skills, although some students do not label their graphs properly.
- 224 Standards of numeracy for all students are good in the sixth form, where GNVQ and business and economics GCE A-level students show a good understanding of statistics and apply them to business problems. Standards are also good in GCSE business courses. Health and social care students show insufficient evidence of number skills and information and communication technology in their work.
- 225 In all lessons, pupils and students approach their work with interest and are well motivated. They enjoy working on computers, concentrating fully on their work. They make good use of case studies in their coursework assignments and demonstrate good research skills. Students spend considerable time out of school researching information and completing project work according to deadlines set. In most lessons, students were able to organise their own learning responsibly, making good use of the Internet and material in the school library. Most develop good team-working skills through activities and problem-solving tasks in groups. The very good behaviour and attitudes shown are the result of very good teaching, which consistently results in very good learning on all courses.
- 226 The quality of teaching and learning is very good in over three-quarters of lessons. This represents an improvement in consistency from the last inspection and leads to very good achievement by students. Teachers are enthusiastic and very knowledgeable and have become more familiar with the extensive assessment required on GNVQ courses. Teachers' relationships with students are very supportive and students are clear about the structure of their courses and where these courses might lead. They are well organised and have high expectations of students. The best lessons begin with objectives shared with students and lead on from previous lessons. At the end of the lesson learning is reviewed through brisk questioning. Most lessons have a practical focus based on a good range of topical case studies, textbooks, worksheets, newspaper articles and computer software. Students attain good examination results because tasks are clear and allow them to take small steps at a time and build on them. Students are challenged and motivated through the enthusiastic way teachers use their subject expertise to stimulate discussion and set problems for them to research and present in class. Regular feedback from teachers keeps students interested. Teachers assess students' class and homework in a thorough and constructive way, giving students targets so they know exactly what to do to improve work to meet examining board requirements.

- 227 The leadership of GNVQ and business courses is very good. Teachers have considerable experience of GNVQ assessment procedures, and marking is checked regularly both within the school and by the examining board. Teachers work hard and meet frequently to monitor and review student progress. The new National Curriculum in 2000 has allowed the school to introduce a flexible range of new courses to effectively meet students' varying needs.
- 228 Very few students drop out of courses early as teachers ensure that they are on the right courses. Lesson time for intermediate and advanced levels is sufficient, with time allocated for additional GNVQ units and key skills for all advanced students. Tutor time and additional lessons are efficiently used to support the development of key skills.
- 229 Since the last inspection the school has improved the quality of courses by reducing less popular options and re-introducing A-level economics. Staff have prepared for the new sixth form curriculum enthusiastically, despite the late arrival of some syllabuses from the examining boards. Accommodation, computer equipment, library textbooks and access to the Internet are good, and significantly improved, so that students can maintain a fast pace of learning. Teachers use good links with business and the local community to organise speakers and work placements. Improvement since the last inspection has been good and the school is well placed to move forward to meet new challenges in the changing post-16 curriculum.